Psalms

Volume 3
Psalms 90–150

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Series Preface

At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, a wise father warns his son concerning the multiplication of books: "Furthermore, of these, my son, be warned. There is no end to the making of many books!" (12:12). The Targum to this biblical book characteristically expands the thought and takes it in a different, even contradictory, direction: "My son, take care to make many books of wisdom without end."

When applied to commentaries, both statements are true. The past twenty years have seen a significant increase in the number of commentaries available on each book of the Bible. On the other hand, for those interested in grappling seriously with the meaning of the text, such proliferation should be seen as a blessing rather than a curse. No single commentary can do it all. In the first place, commentaries reflect different theological and methodological perspectives. We can learn from others who have a different understanding of the origin and nature of the Bible, but we also want commentaries that share our fundamental beliefs about the biblical text. Second, commentaries are written with different audiences in mind. Some are addressed primarily to laypeople, others to clergy, and still others to fellow scholars. A third consideration, related to the previous two, is the subdisciplines the commentator chooses to draw from to shed light on the biblical text. The possibilities are numerous, including philology, textual criticism, genre/form criticism, redaction criticism, ancient Near Eastern background, literary conventions, and more. Finally, commentaries differ in how extensively they interact with secondary literature, that is, with what others have said about a given passage.

The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms has a definite audience in mind. We believe the primary users of commentaries

are scholars, ministers, seminary students, and Bible study leaders. Of these groups, we have most in mind clergy and future clergy, namely, seminary students. We have tried to make the commentary accessible to nonscholars by putting most of the technical discussion and interaction with secondary literature in the footnotes. We do not mean to suggest that such information is unimportant. We simply concede that, given the present state of the church, it is the rare layperson who will read such technical material with interest and profit. We hope we are wrong in this assessment, and if we are not, that the future will see a reverse in this trend. A healthy church is a church that nourishes itself with constant attention to God's words in Scripture, in all their glorious detail.

Since not all commentaries are alike, what are the features that characterize this series? The message of the biblical book is the primary focus of each commentary, and the commentators have labored to expose God's message for his people in the book they discuss. This series also distinguishes itself by restricting its coverage to one major portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, the Psalms and Wisdom books (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs). These biblical books provide a distinctive contribution to the canon. Although we can no longer claim that they are neglected, their unique content makes them harder to fit into the development of redemptive history and requires more effort to hear their distinctive message.

The book of Psalms is the literary sanctuary. Like the physical sanctuary structures of the Old Testament, it offers a textual holy place where humans share their joys and struggles with brutal honesty in God's presence. The book of Proverbs describes wisdom, which on one level is skill for living, the ability to navigate life's actual and potential pitfalls; but on another level, this wisdom presents a pervasive and deeply theological message: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). Proverbs also raises a disturbing issue: the sages often motivate wise behavior by linking it to reward, but in reality, bad things happen to good people, the wise are not always rewarded as they expect. This raises the question of the justice of God. Both Job and Ecclesiastes struggle with the apparent disconnect between God's justice and our actual life experience. Finally, the Song of Songs is a passionate, sensuous love poem that reminds us that God is interested in more than just our brains and our spirits; he wants us to enjoy our bodies. It reminds us that we are not merely a soul encased in a body but whole persons made in God's image.

Limiting the series to the Psalms and Wisdom books has allowed us to tailor our work to the distinctive nature of this portion of the canon. With some few exceptions in Job and Ecclesiastes, for instance, the material in these biblical books is poetic and highly literary, and so

the commentators have highlighted the significant poetic conventions employed in each book. After an introduction discussing important issues that affect the interpretation of the book (title, authorship, date, language, style, text, ancient Near Eastern background, genre, canonicity, theological message, connection to the New Testament, and structure), each commentary proceeds section by section through the biblical text. The authors provide their own translation, with explanatory notes when necessary, followed by a substantial interpretive section (titled "Interpretation") and concluding with a section titled "Theological Implications." In the interpretation section, the emphasis is on the meaning of the text in its original historical setting. In the theological implications section, connections with other parts of the canon, both Old and New Testament, are sketched out along with the continuing relevance of each passage for us today. The latter section is motivated by the recognition that, while it is important to understand the individual contribution and emphasis of each book, these books now find their place in a larger collection of writings, the canon as a whole, and it is within this broader context that the books must ultimately be interpreted.

No two commentators in this series see things in exactly the same way, though we all share similar convictions about the Bible as God's Word and the belief that it must be appreciated not only as ancient literature but also as God's Word for today. It is our hope and prayer that these volumes will inform readers and, more importantly, stimulate reflection on and passion for these valuable books.

It has long been observed that the book of Psalms is a "microcosm" of the message of the Old Testament. Athanasius, the fourth-century theologian, called the Psalms "an epitome of the whole Scriptures." Basil, bishop of Caesarea in the same time period, regarded the Psalms as a "compendium of all theology." Martin Luther said the book is "a little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament." The book of Psalms is theologically rich, so the readers of this commentary are privileged to be guided by John Goldingay, one of the foremost experts on biblical theology today. Our prayer is that as you read the Psalms with this commentary, you will grow in your knowledge of the God who reveals himself through the prayers of his ancient people.

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Author's Preface

This last volume of commentary covers Books IV and V of the Psalter. The Psalter's division into books seems somewhat arbitrary, like the arrangement of the Psalter as a whole. The latter, Augustine admits, "which seems to me to contain the secret of a mighty mystery, hath not yet been revealed unto me." Of the Psalter's fivefold structure, he adds, "When I endeavoured to make out the principle of this division, I was not able."[1]

In the preface to volume 2, I noted that Psalms scholarship at the end of the twentieth century came to focus on seeking to solve Augustine's mystery; it has applied itself with more confidence to that task with regard to Books IV and V. And in some sequences these psalms contain commonality of theme (notably, Yhwh as King in Pss. 93–100) or of use (notably, the Songs of the Ascents, Pss. 120–34). Further, there are more concrete pointers to a postexilic date in many of the psalms in these last two books. Some pointers are linguistic: for instance, a number have distinctive features such as the use of the relative *š-* as a variant for *ʾăšer*, and the connective suffix *î*. It is a plausible view that many are handling the issues raised by the experience of the exile and of the disappointments as well as joys of the postexilic period. But Psalms study that focuses attention on the arrangement of the Psalter still seems to me to involve too much imagination in connecting too few dots. I remain of the view that the main focus of Psalms study needs to be the individual psalm.[2]

An opposite subject of study to that of the Psalter's arrangement is the redactional history of individual psalms, which looks behind the text as we have it. I also find this speculative and prefer to focus on the psalms

1. *Psalms*, 681.

2. Cf. Gerstenberger, e.g., *Psalms,* 2:441. For theories regarding the structure of Book V, see Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985); Reinhard G. Kratz, "Die Tora Davids," *ZTK* 93 (1996): 1–34; Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 77–102; Patrick D. Miller, "The End of the Psalter," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 103–10.

as we have them. For these two forms of study, the canonical and the redactional, readers will have to look elsewhere.

My starting point for the commentary is the Masoretic Text as it appears in the Leningrad Codex published in NJPS and BHS. I have assumed that this is a broadly reliable guide to a textual tradition going back into the pre-Christian period. In the translation I have also included some alternative renderings based on the LXX or other versions, where these may reflect different Hebrew traditions (though I have assumed that much versional variation over matters such as suffixes cannot be assumed to indicate a different Hebrew tradition). The variants in 11QPs[a], the largest of the Qumran Psalms manuscripts, including part of Ps. 93 and much of Pss. 101–50, have an important place in this discussion, though this manuscript is a Psalter with its own redactional perspective.[3] I assume that variants in post-MT Hebrew manuscripts constitute post-MT errors or "corrections" rather than preserving pre-MT readings. I have noted some modern proposals for emending the text, though rarely followed them, and also rarely followed proposals for understanding Hebrew words in light of Arabic or Ugaritic.

In translating the Psalms, I have often let the Hebrew's gendered language stand where (for instance) using a gender-inclusive plural would obscure the poetry's dynamic, and in other respects I have aimed at a translation staying close to the dynamics of the Hebrew even if this sometimes means one not as elegant as a translation for reading in church. All Bible translations are my own except where otherwise noted. References are to the versification in English Bibles; where the printed Hebrew Bible differs, its references follow in square brackets (e.g., "Ps. 51:1 [3]"), except that I omit these in the case of cross-references to other verses within the psalm I am commentating on. References to parts of verses such as "v. 1a" and "v. 1b" generally denote the verses as subdivided by MT, but where verses comprise more than two cola (or where I differ from MT in understanding verse divisions), I have often used references that correspond to the subdivisions in my translation. Thus I have referred (for instance) to "v. 1c" and "v. 1d" rather than to "v. 1bα" and "v. 1bβ." I draw the reader's attention to the glossary, which comments on important words asterisked in the body of the book.

I am grateful to my research assistant, Micah Haney, to Wells Turner at Baker Academic, and to Tremper Longman as editor of this series, for saving me from many mistakes and saving you from some of my unclarities, in this and the previous two volumes; and to Damon Cha and Joel Hamme for their work on the indexes.

3. See, e.g., Flint, *Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls*, 172–227. I have referred to García Martínez et al., *Qumran Cave 11*, but for many readings I have relied on Flint.

Psalm 90
Yhwh and Time

Translation

Plea. Moses's, God's man.

[1]My Lord, you were a shelter;[1]
you were ours, generation after generation.[2]
[2]Before mountains were birthed[3]
and you brought forth earth and world,
From age to age,
you were there, God.[4]
[3]You would turn mortals to crushing;
you said, "Turn, you people!"

1. *Māʿôn* usually denotes either an animal's lair or Yhwh's abode. LXX *kataphygē* might imply *māʿôz,* "refuge" (so some late Hebrew MSS), but the meaning of the two words overlaps.

2. MT implies "you yourself were a refuge for us, generation after generation," but this requires an implausible division of the line. I follow Briggs, *Psalms,* 2:271–72.

3. The word order is odd, the subject preceding the verb, which might explain the odd use of the qatal after *bĕṭerem* (cf. GKC 107c), but it also means that after that prep. the line works *abbʿaʿ*.

4. EVV take v. 2 as a tricolon, but MT has the same disjunctive accent after "from age to age" as after "were birthed," and a tricolon here would be less likely. I thus understand v. 2 as two neat lines, 3-3 and 2-2. LXX reads the last word as *ʾal* rather than *ʾēl* and links with the next line, "Do not turn. . . ." Vg implies both *ʾal* and *ʾēl*; Jerome has neither.

[4]Because a thousand years
in your eyes were like a day,[5]
Yesterday when it passes,
or a watch in the night.
[5]You swept them away[6] in sleep,
though in the morning they could be like grass that can renew itself.[7]

[6]In the morning it can flourish and renew itself;
by evening it can wither and dry up.
[7]Because we are spent through your anger,
through your fury we have been overwhelmed.
[8]You put our wayward acts in front of you,
our youthful deeds in the light of your face.
[9]Because all our days have passed under your wrath,
we have spent our years as moaning.[8]
[10]The days of our years in themselves are seventy years,[9]
or, with strength, eighty years.
But their boisterousness[10] has been toil and trouble,
because it has passed quickly and we have flown.
[11]Who acknowledges the force of your anger
and in accordance with[11] reverence for you, your wrath?

5. MT links "in your eyes" with what precedes, which is odd, and takes "like a day [of] yesterday" as a construct expression, for which there is no parallel; separating these words makes for a more coherent understanding of the structure of the verse as a whole.

6. Th. Booij ("Psalm 90,5–6," *Bib* 68 [1987]: 393–96 [see 396]) renders "you pour sleep on them." For possible alternative understandings or emendations, see, e.g., N. H. Tur-Sinai, "Unverstandene Bibelworte i," *VT* 1 (1951): 307–9; D. Winton Thomas, "A Note on *zĕramtām šēnâ yihyû* in Psalm xc 5," *VT* 18 (1968): 267–68; Charles Whitley, "The Text of Psalm 90,5," *Bib* 63 (1982): 555–57; Hans-Peter Müller, "Sprachliche Beobachtungen zu Ps. xc 5f," *VT* 50 (2000): 394–400.

7. MT implies a 3-3 line, "you swept them away, they are in sleep, in the morning like grass that can renew itself"; but the 2-4 division in EVV makes better sense. I take the second colon as subordinate to the first. Elsewhere *ḥālap* qal means "pass away" (cf. LXX, Jerome), but the hiphil can also mean "renew itself," which fits better in this context, and with BDB I assume the qal can have the same double meaning. Tg has "pass away" here and "renew itself" in v. 6, Sym the reverse; either way, it seems implausible to give the word a different meaning in each colon.

8. On LXX's "like a spider" see, e.g., Johannes Schnocks, *Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherrschaft* (Berlin: Philo, 2002), 88–90.

9. The construction is difficult; I follow Schnocks, *Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherrschaft*, 92–93. One might take the prep. on *bāhem* as *b* of identity (*beth essentiae*).

10. For the hapax *rōhab*, Vrs imply *rōḥab*, "breadth" (but it is doubtful whether this more common word makes better sense; the years are long rather than wide), or the much more common *rōb*, "abundance" (which looks even more like a simplification).

11. Mitchell Dahood ("Interrogative *kî* in Psalm 90,11; Isaiah 36,19 and Hosea 13,19," *Bib* 60 [1979]: 573–74) takes the prep. as actually *kî* with an interrogative sense.

12 In counting our days, so make us acknowledge it,[12]
in order that we may acquire[13] a wise mind.

13 Turn, Yhwh, how long?—
relent over your servants.
14 Fill us in the morning with your commitment,
so that we may resound and rejoice all our days.
15 Make us rejoice in accordance with the days you have afflicted us,
the years we have seen evil.
16 May your action be seen by your servants,
your majesty for their descendants.
17 May the delights of my Lord come,
our God, for us.[14]
Establish the work of our hands for us,
yes, the work of our hands—establish it.

Interpretation

The Church of England *Book of Common Prayer* specifies the use of Ps. 90 or Ps. 39 at a funeral service; this takes up the psalm's meditation on the transitory nature of human life. Already in pre-Christian times, Jubilees 23.12–15 picks up its language in commenting on the shortening of the human life span in Genesis,[15] and the theme of mortality has been the focus of much Christian study of it.[16] But modern liturgical revision shortens the psalm so as to omit some or all the references to God's wrath and some or all of the plea in the last section,[17] and this reflects the fact that such use of the psalm, while appropriate and helpful, does

12. EVV have "so make us know how to number our days," but the word order works against that, as does the fact that *yāda'* is more often followed by a bare inf., whereas here *mĕnôt* is preceded by *l*.

13. Lit. "bring" (*bô'* hiphil), like the harvest (Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, 552).

14. MT takes v. 17a–b as one colon and thus v. 17 as a tricolon, but the length of v. 17a–b suggests that it is itself more likely a bicolon. The issue parallels that in v. 1.

15. See J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, "Van tekst tot tekst," *NedTT* 47 (1993): 177–85; M. Eugene Boring, "Psalm 90," *Mid-Stream* 40.1–2 (2001): 111–28 (see 121–22).

16. See classically Luther, *Selected Psalms,* 2:73–141, on which see, e.g., Hans-Martin Barth, "Leben und sterben können," in *Ars moriendi*, ed. Harald Wagner (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 45–66; Bernhard Lohse, "Gesetz, Tod und Sünde in Luthers Auslegung des 90. Psalms," in *Leben angesichts des Todes* (Helmut Thielicke Festschrift; Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 138–55; Matthias Schlicht, *Luthers Vorlesung über Psalm 90* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994); also Gerhard von Rad, *God at Work in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 210–23; Harald-Martin Wahl, "Psalm 90,12," *ZAW* 106 (1994): 116–23; Hans-Peter Müller, "Der 90. Psalm," *ZTK* 87 (1984): 265–85.

17. See, e.g., the Episcopalian *Book of Common Prayer 1979*, and the comments in Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 125.

not correspond to the inherent meaning of the psalm as a whole.[18] Its last third comprises a lengthy plea, more substantial than is usual even in a prayer psalm; even Luther opens his comment by describing it as "the chief part of Moses's prayer,"[19] though he interprets it christologically. These last verses make explicit that the psalm is a prayer arising out of the people's misfortunes. This is also implicit in the lament or protest of the earlier part. Hardship has gone on year after year, perhaps decade after decade, century after century (though one should not be literalistic in interpreting the time references; trouble can seem to last an eternity when chronologically it lasts a relatively short time). The opening and closing "my Lord" may suggest that the community prayer is uttered by a person such as a king or governor, or by a minister. It parallels Ps. 85[20] and overlaps with the prayers in Ezra 9, Neh. 1 and 9, and Dan. 9.

It has a number of the regular features of a prayer psalm: after the opening invocation, it looks back on how things once were (vv. 1–5), contrasts that with how things are (vv. 6–12), then pleads with God to restore blessing (vv. 13–17).

Verses 1–5 belong together as a recollection of how things once were for *us* (vv. 1–2), which involved the way God dealt with *them* (vv. 3–5). The renewed reference to *us* running through vv. 6–12 marks the transition to a protest at the community's experience over a long period, which contrasts with the way things once were and instead compares with how things previously were for *them*. But the focus lies on how "you" have acted and how "we" have been experiencing these acts. Perhaps contemporary equivalents of the *them*, such as Persian overlords or other local communities, lie behind the psalm, but no enemies appear here and the trouble that the psalm presupposes may rather involve natural reversals such as failed harvests and epidemics. The language and thought of vv. 6–12 parallel those of wisdom, and they have thus encouraged the thesis that the psalm's focus lies on reflection. But the qatal verbs indicate that it is a lament at the community's historical experience in which wisdom motifs have been utilized to formulate a lament that leads into a plea. One might imagine it being used in a manner similar to Lamentations in contexts of communal prayer such as those presupposed in 1 Kings 8; Joel 2; Zech. 7–8. But its reflective nature and its lack of reference to enemies or disasters might suggest a background in personal devotion as a prayer composed for people praying "during hard times long endured."[21]

18. See Richard J. Clifford, "Psalm 90," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. Flint and Miller, 190–205.

19. *Selected Psalms,* 2:130.

20. Broyles, *Conflict of Faith and Experience*, 174.

21. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 439. Cf. Thomas Krüger, "Psalm 90 und die 'Vergänglichkeit des Menschen,'" *Bib* 75 (1994): 191–219.

It closes with a lengthy plea (vv. 13–17).[22] Here, too, there is no concrete description of the restoration the psalm seeks, though the closing reference to establishing "the work of our hands" might suggest prospering the people's work as farmers and/or the restoration work undertaken by Ezra and Nehemiah. The plea's language has many similarities with that of vv. 1–12, though also distinctives. If it is of separate origin from vv. 1–12,[23] it has been composed in light of those verses.[24]

The psalm continues the stance of Ps. 89, repeating the question "How long?"[25] It thus does not make an encouraging beginning to Book IV. It compares with the psalms that open Books II and III, and parallels Ps. 73 in being a psalm that brings together deep-felt need and theological reflection.

Plea. Moses's, God's man.

Heading. See glossary. Moses appears only here in a psalm heading, though he appears elsewhere in Book IV (Pss. 90–106), which might even be called a "Moses-book."[26] The term "God's man" usually applies to prophets such as Elijah, as frightening characters who mediate supernatural power, but it occasionally applies more loosely to Moses to emphasize his status, not least in the "blessing" of Moses (Deut. 33:1), which is actually more a prayer for the clans and for the people as a whole. There Moses describes Yhwh as a "shelter" supporting the people with "age-long" power (Deut. 33:27).[27] Perhaps Deut. 33 was one passage that suggested the link with Ps. 90, which also has a number of verbal links with Deut. 32.[28] The link becomes ironic, as the psalm's burden is that for a long time the blessing of Deut. 33 has not been the people's experience, but in this context Moses is an appropriate person to be imagined

22. So it is hardly a psalm of trust (so, tentatively, Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, 55) or a hymn of (self-)consolation (so David Robertson, "Literary Criticism and the Bible," *Semeia* 8 [1977]: 35–50).

23. E.g., Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 397; Werner H. Schmidt, "'Der Du die Menschen lässest sterben,'" in *Was ist der Mensch . . . ?* ed. Frank Crüsemann et al. (H. W. Wolff Festschrift; Munich: Kaiser, 1992), 115–30.

24. See analyses of its structure by Pierre Auffret, "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 90," *Bib* 61 (1980): 262–76, building on Stefan Schreiner, "Erwägungen zur Struktur des 90. Psalms," *Bib* 59 (1978): 80–90; also Matitiahu Tsevat, "Psalm xc 5–6," *VT* 35 (1985): 115–17; Schnocks, *Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherrschaft*, 35–41, and generally.

25. In v. 13, *ʿad-mātāy*; in 89:46 [47], *ʿad-mâ*.

26. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, xxvi.

27. "Refuge" is *mĕʿônâ*; in Ps. 90:1 *māʿôn*.

28. E.g., the two verbs in v. 2 come in Deut. 32:18; the form *yĕmôt* (v. 15) comes otherwise only in Deut. 32:7, where also the phrase *dôr wādôr* appears (cf. v. 1). Oddly, Augustine (*Psalms*, 441) reckons that Moses did not write the psalm because it lacks distinctive expressions of his.

as uttering a *plea for Israel; he did that at Sinai, urging Yhwh to "turn" from "your anger" and "relent over" the people, and to think about "your servants" (Exod. 32:12–13; cf. vv. 7, 13). Tg expands substantially on the heading and on vv. 1–2, linking the psalm with Moses's praying for the people during the rebellions in the wilderness.[29]

While the heading might have been generated by the content of the psalm, alternatively the psalm might have been written to indicate how Moses might pray for the people in their present circumstances, in light of the material in Exod. 32 and Deut. 32–33.[30] "It is as if Moses . . . himself takes up the plea of Psalm 89."[31] This would correspond to the way those prayers themselves were written, and also to the later development of material put on the lips of scriptural characters such as Adam, Enoch, and Moses.[32] Here the people's situation in a time later than Moses's (e.g., after the exile) is reckoned to be similar to their situation in Moses's time.

90:1–5. The psalm begins with a recollection of Yhwh's past faithfulness, which contrasts with the experience of the present (cf. 44:1–3 [2–4]). The qatal verbs in vv. 1b and 2a suggest reference to the past, though vv. 3–5 mix qatals and yiqtols and EVV refer them to the present. I take the whole section as reflection on Yhwh's past way of relating to the people. Verse 1 summarizes the way things once were and how they should be. Verses 2–3 then pair in expanding on their assertion, and vv. 4–5 repeat their point.

> [1]My Lord, you were a shelter;
> you were ours, generation after generation.

The opening invocation "my *Lord" is unique in the Psalms but very appropriate to Ps. 90. By its nature it appeals to the commitment a master should show his servants; the plea will spell that out (cf. vv. 13, 16, 17). If we are right to take the suffix as suggesting "my," the invocation is especially appropriate as pointing both to Yhwh's sovereign power and to Yhwh's relationship with the suppliant; neither are being expressed as might have been expected. EVV "you have been a haven" implies that Yhwh still is that; actually the psalm's problem is that this was so in the past but it no longer

29. See further Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms through the Lens of Intertextuality* (New York: Lang, 2001), 85–107.

30. Cf. David Noel Freedman, "Who Asks (or Tells) God to Repent?" *Bible Review* 1/4 (1985): 56–59.

31. William J. Urbrock, "The Earth Song in Psalms 90–92," in *Earth Story*, ed. Habel, 65–83 (see 65–66); also Urbrock, "Psalm 90," *CurTM* 25 (1998): 26–29.

32. See, e.g., James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).

obtains. The psalm does not work with a dialectical tension between lament and trust,[33] except in the sense that any lament does; it protests the way trust is no longer possible. "Shelter" (*māʿôn*) is usually a term for an animal's lair, the secure abode it makes for itself. It is never used of human habitations, but it can refer to God's "lair" in the heavens, the place to which God retreats and which humanity cannot invade but from which God emerges to bless or deliver (68:5 [6]); Tg takes that to be the reference here. It can also refer to God's earthly "lair," the temple (26:8), to which Yhwh's people may come but which others cannot invade. Here the psalm moves from one metaphor ("Yhwh has a lair") to another, more profound one ("Yhwh *is* a lair"). Like an animal in danger from bigger animals, Israel could once run to this secure place and know it was safe. Particularly if carrying the nuance "dwelling," this declaration (the Midrash comments) indicates that the world is contained or placed in God, not God in the world. The world is second to God; God is not second to the world.[34] The affirmation that God has been the people's home is especially suggestive as one imagines it on Moses's lips, as in his day the people never had a secure home.[35] God is home for people who are or feel homeless. That was true "generation after generation," through centuries when Israel was often threatened but never overwhelmed (e.g., Pss. 46; 48).

> [2]Before mountains were birthed
> and you brought forth earth and world,
> From age to age,
> you were there, God.

Yhwh has been able so to protect the people "generation after generation" because Yhwh's being runs through every generation and goes back even before there were generations. Yhwh's deity antedates not merely all generations but the world's very existence. The complementarity of passive and active in v. 2a–b means the first colon raises the question "Who birthed the mountains?" and the second then gives the inevitable but striking answer, "Yhwh did." The vivid verb *ḥûl* refers to a woman's twisting, turning, and struggling as she gives birth. The answer is unexpected, as well as inevitable, because the OT does not usually speak of Yhwh's creation as birthing.[36] But the idea that the mountains were

33. So Norbert Greinacher, "Psalm 90," in *Die Freude an Gott—unsere Kraft*, ed. Johannes Joachim Degenhardt (O. B. Knoch Festschrift; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 366–77 (see 366).

34. *Midrash on Psalms*, 2:93.

35. E.g., Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 4:61.

36. Thus Vrs. have "and the world and the earth brought [them] forth," which might imply polal *wattĕḥôlal* "and . . . were brought forth" for MT's polel *wattĕḥôlēl* (Syr has a double reading).

birthed from somewhere else, perhaps from the earth's own "creative potency" or "power to give birth,"[37] might seem in more radical tension with regular OT faith. Job 38:8–11 does speak of the seas gushing forth from an anonymous womb but then of Yhwh's sovereign action. If one is to distinguish between the earth and the world, the former will denote the material cosmos, the latter the inhabited world, which will be the focus in v. 3.

But the first line is incomplete; it is merely a pair of subordinate clauses. Initially the second line simply continues these with another temporal expression, further extending the tension: what is the point in all these temporal phrases? Indeed, this third expression raises that tension, going beyond merely looking back to the distant age when Yhwh birthed the world and extending the time reference, "from age to age"; the phrase parallels "generation after generation" (v. 1). The last colon then reveals the point of the two lines. EVV have "you are God," but the preceding lines suggest another past reference. This fits the general point of vv. 1–5: Yhwh has always been there as God (though Yhwh is not behaving like God now). Similarly, in other contexts "from age to age" could suggest Yhwh's omnipresence through time, but here it refers to the times that preceded the community's recent negative experience.

> [3]You would turn mortals to crushing;
> you said, "Turn, you people!"

NRSV renders "you turn us," assuming that v. 3 makes a statement about the way Yhwh treats Israel, but v. 3 marks a move from talking in the first person about "us" to talk in third-person terms, which continues through vv. 3–6. The way Yhwh has been a shelter for "us" is by treating "them," other people, in the way v. 3a describes. "They" have turned out to be *ʾĕnôš*, humanity in its frailty. EVV read the line as a generalization about human transience, such as would be at home in a wisdom context, and translate *dakkāʾ* as dust (something crushed). This facilitates a link with Gen. 3:19. But there is no parallel for this meaning of *dakkāʾ* (Gen. 3 uses other words to describe the raw material from which humanity was made).[38] "Crushing" usually refers to putting people down in some connection (e.g., 72:4; 89:10 [11]; 94:5; 143:3); this fits here (v. 5 will explicate how this manifested itself). Yhwh has demonstrated the capacity to put down the people from whom the community needed to find shelter.

37. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 215. See further Keel, *Symbolism*, 203–4.

38. Cf. Wolfram von Soden, "Zum Psalm 90,3: Statt *dakkā* lies *dukkā*!" *UF* 15 (1983): 307–8.

Thus instead of letting the tense of the line be determined by the yiqtol in v. 3a, understood as present, in the context I let the tense of the line be determined by the qatal in v. 3b and take the yiqtol as equivalent to a temporal imperfect.

There is, however, some irony in v. 3a. Elsewhere "turn to" (*šûb ʿad*) nearly always has God as object.[39] The line might have implied that God was turning people to crushing in the sense of contrition, an inner and not merely an outward humbling (so Sym, Jerome), and urging them to turn to God. Actually they were beyond that point; God was doing away with them.

> [4]Because a thousand years
> in your eyes were like a day,
> Yesterday when it passes,
> or a watch in the night.

The "because" introduces an explanation or restatement of the point in vv. 2–3, first with another general statement about God. EVV have "*are* like a day," but the context suggests a statement about the principle underlying God's past activity.

"Mortals" (v. 3) such as the Egyptians, Canaanites, or Assyrians could last a century or two, which was as good as lasting forever. Every empire reckons it will do that; the Spanish, British, and American empires have all been characterized as the "empire on which the sun never sets." But even a millennium does not impress Yhwh (if people such as Adam and Methuselah lived nearly a millennium, so what?).[40] It does not hold Yhwh back from action, any more than a day does. A day may seem to last a long time, and a watch in the night may seem interminable, but they seem like nothing when the day has passed and become yesterday or the watch has passed uneventfully (the *k*, "like," applies to the third and fourth colon as well as the second, and the verb applies to the fourth

39. Cf. Walter Harrelson, "A Meditation on the Wrath of God," in *Scripture in History and Theology*, ed. Arthur L. Merrill and Thomas W. Overholt (J. C. Rylaarsdam Festschrift; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977), 181–91 (see 186). Verse 3b has also been taken as a summons back to life after the turning of v. 3a (e.g., Luther, *Selected Psalms*, 2:97–99).

40. Cf. Jerome, *Homilies*, 1:148. Jubilees 4.30 takes up this line to explain how on human reckoning Adam lived for nearly a thousand years despite the warning that he would die on the day he ate of the tree, and then 2 Pet. 3:8 does so to respond to people who chafe at the delay of Christ's coming (see Wolfgang Schrage, "'Ein Tag ist beim Herrn wie tausand Jahre, und tausand Jahre sind wie ein Tag," in *Glaube und Eschatologie*, ed. Erich Grässer and Otto Merk [W. G. Kümmel Festschrift; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985], 267–75). Augustine warns against using it as a basis for trying to calculate the chronology of world history as lasting 6,000 years and to calculate the date of that coming (*Psalms*, 442), though he later provides the outline that designates the time beginning with John the Baptist as Day Six (*Psalms*, 457).

colon as well as the third). A millennium is like that to Yhwh. So Yhwh can easily crush an empire.

> [5]You swept them away in sleep,
> though in the morning they could be like grass that can renew
> itself.

EVV take the qatal verb as a gnomic qatal, but the more usual past reference of the qatal fits. Yhwh did sweep away (lit. flood away) Israel's overlords or foes in the past. Their sleep might be the sleep of death (e.g., Job 14:12) or the sleep of torpor that made them a pushover (e.g., Ps. 76:5 [6]), or v. 5b may indicate that it points to how Yhwh sweeps people away overnight. Whichever is right, the speedy fall contrasts with the flourishing vividly remembered. Grass has endless capacity to grow anew; it does not need to be reseeded. Similarly, an empire can seem to have endless capacity to reinvent itself, but this impression has turned out to be false.

90:6–12. For the rest of the psalm "they" disappear and "we" come into sharp focus, though the transition from the first section to the second is indistinct. The "because" in v. 7 makes it hard to see the transition happening there. Rather, the repetition in v. 6 is the clue to it (cf. Isa. 40:6–8, where v. 8 is a response to vv. 6b–7).

There has been little regular parallelism in vv. 1–5; there now follow four neatly parallel lines. The movement in the psalm parallels that between Ps. 44:1–8 [2–9] and 9–16 [10–17]. Here, too, the psalm moves from recollecting a positive involvement with Israel, which included the sweeping away of its enemies, to protesting the way Yhwh has more recently been relating to Israel, which is now itself withering.

> [6]In the morning it can flourish and renew itself;
> by evening it can wither and dry up.

Verse 6a, then, virtually repeats v. 5b, in order to take its point in a different direction. The grass image usually contrasts grass's capacity to grow quickly with its vulnerability to withering and drying up. So it was implicitly in v. 5, and explicitly here. A nation may flourish one moment but collapse the next.

> [7]Because we are spent through your anger,
> through your fury we have been overwhelmed.

The repetition in v. 6 began to declare that it is not just Israel's overlords and foes that illustrate that principle. In contrast to the declarations in vv.

1–5 and the comment about "them," "we" ourselves have been doing so. Instead of our foes withering like grass, we have done so (cf. Isa. 40:6–8). Instead of our foes running for their lives, overwhelmed by panic (Pss. 48:5 [6]; 83:15, 17 [16, 18]), we have done so. Instead of Yhwh's angry fury being turned on our foes, it is turned on us.

> [8]You put our wayward acts in front of you,
> our youthful deeds in the light of your face.

In Pss. 44 and 74 a declaration such as v. 7 presupposes that Israel has not deserved its trouble. This psalm presupposes a time when it cannot make that claim. Israel has been guilty of *wayward acts. And instead of turning a blind eye to these and postponing anger (e.g., 103:8), Yhwh has made a point of keeping the record of them on display and looking at it, and therefore doing something about it.

Wayward acts[41] is given precision by *ʿălumēnû*, "our youthful deeds." The word follows neatly on 89:45 [46] but now refers to the deeds of Israel's youth or of the younger years of the present generation; cf. Tg. EVV take the word to mean "hidden deeds"; the reference is then to private prayer to other deities, in people's homes.[42] Even if such acts belong in the distant past or take place in darkness, they have not escaped recording, and to Yhwh it is as if they had been done in the present or out in the open, in the light of the sun (cf. 44:21 [22]). More precisely, it is as if Yhwh the FBI officer has investigated the people's entire past or come into the people's homes and by virtue of the divine presence shone a bright light on what was going on there.

> [9]Because all our days have passed under your wrath,
> we have spent our years as moaning.

The "because" introduces five lines that take the point further, developing the comment on the long period that Yhwh's wrath has hung over the people because of their waywardness. "All our days" might denote the people's entire history (though the psalm's opening verse perhaps excludes that) or this generation's entire life (cf. v. 10); one could imagine (for instance) people who experienced the fall of Jerusalem and have been in a miserable state for decades. "Our years" then underlines the length of time. "Spent" picks up from v. 7, while "wrath" adds to the "anger" and "fury" of v. 7, further underlining its awfulness. Saying that the years

41. Readers might note a paronomasia with v. 1: *ʿāwôn* stands before the *māʿôn* (cf. S. D. Goitein, "'Ma'on'—a Reminder of Sin," *JSS* 10 [1965]: 52–53).

42. That is, EVV derive from *ʿālam* I, Tg from *ʿālam* II, which fits the context with its stress on time. LXX assumes *ʿôlām*, which came in v. 2 and also fits this context.

have been spent "as moaning"[43] achieves the same effect. Whereas Ps. 44 (for example) relates to a particular calamity that does not link with a particular act of rebellion, Ps. 90 relates to an ongoing experience of God's wrath, which it links with an awareness of waywardness in the community's history that justifies this. At the same time, its language suggests a sense of having come to a point of crisis. The community's days have passed; its years are spent (cf. v. 10).

The psalm is not implying that all humanity stands under God's wrath.[44] In the OT God's wrath is something that operates in particular contexts for particular reasons (though it can see the whole world as under God's curse). Here the problem is that it has been operating against God's people for such a long time to such debilitating effect.

> [10]The days of our years in themselves are seventy years,
> or, with strength, eighty years:
> But their boisterousness has been toil and trouble,
> because it has passed quickly and we have flown.

In Western thinking, seventy years has traditionally suggested a normal life span, but the OT refers to seventy years in this connection only when speaking of the period of time a calamity may last—especially the exile (e.g., Jer. 25:11–12; Zech. 1:12). Nor does the OT refer to eighty years as a long life (Isa. 65:20 implies that a hundred years counts as a long life; cf. Sirach 18:9 [8]). (In a traditional society, few people would live to seventy years or keep going for eighty.) Here, as usual, seventy years suggests the community's long period of trouble. The psalm then sardonically goes beyond this conventional trope in going on to refer to eighty years. It might seem that the "boisterousness," the energy or pride, to continue to enjoy life into one's seventies would be a great blessing. Except (says the psalm) it would not, because all it would mean is experiencing more years of toil and trouble. The comment is worthy of Ecclesiastes, which indeed loves speaking of "toil" (e.g., Eccles. 1:3), as does Job (e.g., 5:7).[45] "Trouble" often accompanies it, to underline its point (e.g., Job 4:8; 5:6). The "because" introduces a final colon, also recalling Ecclesiastes: life is toil and trouble because it comes to an end, apparently quickly, which raises a question about the meaningfulness of all the preceding years.

43. Not "like" a moan, implying short-lived (BDB); it need not be! TNIV has "we finish our years with a moan," but "with" is a doubtful meaning for *k*.

44. Cf. Calvin, *Psalms*, 3:469; against (e.g.) S. W. Sykes, "Death and Doctrine," *Churchman* 95 (1981): 306–12; Claus Westermann, "Der 90. Psalm," in Westermann, *Forschung am Alten Testament*, TBü 24 (Munich: Kaiser, 1964), 344–50 (see 347).

45. Gerhard von Rad sees the psalm's links with Ecclesiastes as making it a "stranger" in the OT (*God's Work in Israel* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1980], 218). Bruce Vawter ("Postexilic Prayer and Hope," *CBQ* 37 [1975]: 460–70) also compares it with Wisdom 9; 15:1–3.

Here, in contrast, the suppliants speak of the nature of people's human life in the particular time in which they live.

> [11]Who acknowledges the force of your anger,
> and in accordance with reverence for you, your wrath?
> [12]In counting our days, so make us acknowledge it,
> in order that we may acquire a wise mind.

Why should Yhwh impose such ongoing trouble on the people, apparently going beyond what mere justice requires? Seeking to make sense of the experience of affliction, the psalm sees a purpose in it. Whereas outside OT and Christian faith people might be afraid of God, within the faith the problem is the opposite. Knowing God's love and being invited to live in relationship with God enables Israelites and Christians to be confident about that relationship. There is no reason to live in fear of God. So we can end up seeing God as simply our buddy or lover. Within Israelite and Christian faith, who acknowledges the strength of Yhwh's wrathful anger in such a way as to relate to God with proper *reverence, with the proper attitude and the proper submission? (The parallelism between the lines suggests that *yir'â* denotes reverence, not fear; acknowledging and revering are both proper positive stances toward Yhwh.)

It is the counting of days in their toilsome and troubled nature that could push the community to this acknowledgment and submission. Without it, people can live in denial and simply continue enjoying their lives without a care or a thought for God. The way they experience life can make them face questions. The psalm asks that it may do that, and thus encourage them to apply a wise mind to their understanding of life and God. The psalm again takes up wisdom ways of thinking in connecting acknowledgment, reverence, and wisdom—and also discipline (e.g., Prov. 1:7). The community as well as the individual need to pay heed to these points of connection.

A "Who?" question of this kind is often a wish, and v. 11a may imply "If only we would acknowledge . . ." (cf. TNIV). Whereas Qoheleth uses "Who knows?" questions with gloomy implications (the answer is "No one"), the psalm leaves "an open door" to a positive answer.[46] "Anger" and "wrath" are picked up from vv. 7 and 9, but the addition of "force" gives them extra effect.

90:13–17. Verses 6–12 ended with a plea that related to motifs in that section and would have made a fine climax and end to a meditative reflection. But they are not the psalm's end, destination, or climax. It closes with a more extensive plea for divine action that corresponds to

46. James L. Crenshaw, "The Expression *mî yôdēaʿ* in the Hebrew Bible," *VT* 36 (1986): 274–88.

the regular nature of a protest psalm.[47] In the nature of such an appeal, but with distinctive passion,[48] it throws caution to the wind and asks for fullness of blessing that implicitly contrasts with the extremes of wrath that the community has been experiencing.

> [13]Turn, Yhwh, how long?—
> relent over your servants.

The abrupt transition to urgent, insistent, and assertive plea makes for a contrast with the stance in vv. 11–12. One response to that experience of toil and trouble is to ask Yhwh to make it religiously and morally fruitful in people's lives, but another is to ask Yhwh simply to bring it to an end. "Turn" (*šûbâ*; cf., e.g., 6:4 [5]) does not presuppose that Yhwh is looking away and ignoring the people's plight and needs to turn toward them, but rather that Yhwh is set on one stance and one form of action (the expression of wrath) and needs to turn to another stance. There is some irony (or poignancy)[49] in the appeal, given the earlier references to Yhwh's bidding to turn (v. 3). "How long?" is an even more familiar plea. The question's incomplete nature (again cf. 6:3 [4]) underlines how it is not really a question, requesting information; it is indeed a plea.

"Turn" is thus a familiar bidding, but also a bold one. It often implies "repent," give up doing something you should not be doing. Verse 13b encourages us to hear this resonance with its use of *nāḥam* (niphal). This verb often denotes Yhwh's relenting of tough action; both verbs appear in Moses's plea in Exod. 32:12 (cf. also Joel 2:14; Jon. 3:9). The boldness continues as the suppliants describe themselves as Yhwh's servants. In effect, they have already acknowledged that they have not been behaving as obedient servants. Their boldness lies in the assumption that Yhwh must still be committed to treating them as servants. Their plea again parallels Moses's appeal for "your people" (Exod. 32:12), despite what this people has been doing. It also parallels his subsequent appeal to Yhwh to be mindful of "your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel"; they might also be in mind here.

> [14]Fill us in the morning with your commitment,
> so that we may resound and rejoice all our days.

47. On the distinction between the plea in v. 12 and the new beginning that follows, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 419.

48. Cf. William J. Urbrock, "Mortal and Miserable Man," *Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers* (Cambridge: SBL, 1974), 1:1–33 (see 15).

49. Cf. Urbrock, "Mortal and Miserable Man," 13.

The plea takes off into distinctive territory. First, it asks Yhwh not merely to *show* us some *commitment but to *fill* us with it. That will correspond to the way we have been filled with troubles (88:3 [4]; 123:3–4). We want to experience so much of Yhwh's commitment that we are sated and overwhelmed. The appeal about the morning picks up that phrase from vv. 5–6, where the flourishing of the morning gives a false promise about what will follow. Here, the psalm asks that the morning may rather be the beginning of a day of divine commitment, so that things no longer work out that way. Human commitment is inclined to wither when Yhwh's breath blows on it, but Yhwh's word allegedly does not do so but stands forever (Isa. 40:6–8). The psalm asks that this may prove true.[50] "All our days" have passed under Yhwh's wrath; the psalm asks that this may be reversed, though it jumps past that to the implication that therefore we may *resound with joy (the two verbs form a hendiadys) all our days. Prosaically put, may God fill us with the fruits of divine commitment at the beginning of the day and through every day, so that we may respond to that with joyful resounding each morning and through every day.

> **15**Make us rejoice in accordance with the days you have afflicted us,
> the years we have seen evil.

The psalm restates the point, once again taking up "days" and "rejoice," and also "years": the years that may be like a day for Yhwh, but not for us (v. 4), the years consumed by moaning (v. 9), the years spent in toil and trouble (v. 10)—in other words, characterized by *bad experience.[51]

> **16**May your action be seen by your servants,
> your majesty for their descendants.

Commitment expresses itself in action that can be seen; once again a verb recurs, from the previous line (if it were not useful to make the recurrence clear, one might rather translate "be visible to"). This action will be an expression of Yhwh's majesty. "Your servants" also recurs, from v. 13. Are these simply the speakers, who are also concerned for their children? Or are "your servants" again Israel's ancestors, imagined

50. Thus there is no need to appeal to the possible notion that morning is the expected time for Yhwh to act to rescue us from trouble (cf. 30:5 [6]; 46:5 [6]; Joseph Ziegler, "Die Hilfe Gottes 'am Morgen,'" in *Alttestamentliche Studien*, ed. Hubert Junker and Johannes Botterweck [Friedrich Nötscher Festschrift; Bonn: Hanstein, 1950], 281–88).

51. Parallelism returns, with the verb applying to both cola so that the second colon has more space to describe the grimness of the past. Thus "years" pairs with "days" (the prep. also carrying over) and "we have seen evil" pairs with "you have afflicted us."

as seeing Yhwh's act of restoration, so that the present generation who experience it are themselves these descendants?

> 17May the delights of my Lord come,
> our God, for us.
> Establish the work of our hands for us,
> yes, the work of our hands—establish it.

The appeal to Yhwh as "my Lord" completes a frame around the psalm (cf. v. 1) and also pairs with the appeal regarding "your servants" (v. 16; cf. also v. 13).[52] Asking for "delights" (*nōʿam*; cf. NEB) further suggests the abundance of the psalmist's request, for something that in its splendor corresponds to the depth and length of the community's affliction.[53] It wants to see bounteous restoration and flourishing. Tg nicely glosses "the delightfulness of the Garden of Eden."

Compared with v. 17a–b, the closing plea in v. 17c–d is prosaic in its language and in its rhetoric, as the last colon repeats the penultimate one with only slight variation (perhaps it is a congregational response).[54] In communication with God, as with human beings, there is a place for high-flown images and a place for down-to-earth language. Just grant that all the hard work we do in sowing and plowing, in building and planting, pays off rather than being a waste of time, the community asks.

Theological Implications

The psalm relates Yhwh and time, and the Israelite community and time.[55] It begins from Yhwh's eternity, not in the sense of being outside time, but in the sense of having been present through all time, through all the generations of Israel's history. Thus in the past Yhwh has always been its shelter, the place where it found a home. Making this link draws attention to the fact that Israel lives in limited time. Yhwh's time goes back before the time when Israel's generations began, before the time when the world itself was brought into being. Yhwh

52. Cf. Hubert Irsigler, "Psalm 90," in Irsigler, *Vom Adamssohn zum Immanuel* (St. Ottilien: Eos, 1997), 49–69 (see 56).

53. "Delights" (*nōʿam*) is sg., but in English "the delight of my Lord" would give a misleading impression. Jon D. Levenson ("A Technical Meaning for *nʿm* in the Hebrew Bible," *VT* 35 [1985]: 61–67) suggests that the word denotes an affirmative "omen," but this requires a lot of inference.

54. Cf. Weiser, *Psalms*, 595. Extraposing the object serves to help the line and the psalm to round off (*TTH* 197).

55. See Klaus Seybold, "Zu den Zeitvorstellungen in Psalm 90," *TZ* 53 (1997): 99–108; Schnocks, *Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherrschaft*, 145–70.

was God before that, "from age to age," as far back as time goes, which implies forever.

In the span of Yhwh's life, then, the significance of time differs greatly from its significance for human beings. Human experience helps us imagine how this is so. For us, time can go quickly or slowly. For a child, a summer lasts forever. For an older person, a decade passes in a flash and we ask, "Where did the time go?" For Yhwh, a millennium is a tiny period of time in the context of Yhwh's total experience of time. Yhwh thus has no problem being present throughout Israel's generations. Any time a nation needs putting down, Yhwh can be there to put it down. If it seems impressive because it has lasted a century or two, that is only hours in Yhwh's time frame, and the nation ceases to be impressive. Indeed, its lifetime resembles that of grass that can spring up at the beginning of a day but withers in the sun by its end. Indeed, a century or two can be like a mere day.

That is an encouragement when we consider the fate of peoples who oppose God or when a little people considers a great power's fate. It is worrying for most readers of this commentary, who belong to a great power. And it does not necessarily feel encouraging to the little people. A millennium may be only a day to Yhwh, but seventy or eighty years is seventy or eighty years to us. Flourishing and withering within a day characterizes the experience of the little people as well as that of the empire, and implicitly for the same reason; the little people looks back over its life's time frame and recognizes that it has been characterized by waywardness and thus by God's wrath. So it lives with two time frames, in a variant on the facing of two sets of facts that characterizes (for instance) Ps. 22. The solution for the tension involved in its stance in relation to time is not that it should attempt to live in God's time rather than its own, or ask to be enabled to do that. This would be another form of denial or docetism. It needs to count its days, not deny their number, but to do so in such a way as to face the facts about why they have been what they have been.

Beyond that, the solution needs to lie in Yhwh's coming to live by the people's time. "How long?" the psalm asks. The question is a common one, but it gains extra resonance in the context of this psalm's preoccupation with time. Are not seventy or eighty years enough? And Yhwh's eternity (that is, Yhwh's living on through age after age) surely makes Yhwh able to intervene in its time and take action in it. Yhwh's being God from age to age does not just apply to the past. It continues into the present and the future. And Yhwh's living in time means Yhwh can "turn" and "relent." Yhwh is not stuck forever in a pattern of action (or inaction) that must last forever because Yhwh cannot change. A great thing about Yhwh is that Yhwh can change. A traditional Compline prayer asks that

"we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may rest upon your eternal changelessness."[56] The psalm does not seek to escape from the changing to the constant.[57] It seeks to escape from the constant, the pattern that has obtained for seventy or eighty years, to some change. It regrets Yhwh's constancy since changing from being a shelter to being wrathful and asks that Yhwh may change once more.

The psalm has in mind a new pattern for the day. Instead of it meaning that grass grows in the morning and withers by evening, it wants the day to overflow (again) with divine commitment and wants this to become a pattern for days. Future days will thus have a different character from past days.

56. See, e.g., *Celebrating Common Prayer,* compiled by David Stancliffe and Brother Tristam SSF, rev. ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 241.

57. So Mays, *Psalms,* 294.