

END OF PSALM 91

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 91

God is to be praised for his wondrous works.

1. It is good to give praise to the Lord; and to sing to thy name, O Most High.
2. To show forth thy mercy in the morning, and thy truth in the night.
3. Upon an instrument of ten strings, upon the psaltery; with a canticle upon the harp.
4. For thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in thy doings: and in the works of thy hand I shall rejoice.
5. O Lord, how Great are thy works! Thy thoughts are exceeding deep.
6. The senseless man shall not know: nor will the fool understand these things.
7. When the wicked shall spring up as grass: and all the workers of iniquity shall appear, that they may perish for ever and ever.
8. But now, O Lord, art Most High forevermore.
9. For behold, thy enemies, O Lord, for behold, thy enemies shall perish: and all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.
10. But my horn shall be exalted like that of the unicorn: and my old age in plentiful mercy.
11. My eye also hath looked down upon my enemies: and my ear shall hear of the downfall of the malignant that rise up against me.

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12. The just shall flourish like the palm tree he shall grow up like the cedar of Lebanon.
13. They that are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts in the house of our God.
14. They shall still increase in a fruitful old-age; and shall be well treated.
15. That they may show, that the Lord our God is righteous, and there is no iniquity in him.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 91

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "it is good to give praise to the Lord; and to sing to thy name, O Most High." An exhortation to praise God with instrumental and vocal music. He says it is right, useful, delightful, and honorable to give God his need of praise; right, because it is due to him; useful, because we save ourselves by it; delightful, for the lover always delights in praising the beloved; and honorable, because the office belongs to the celestial spirits;" and to sing to thy name, O Lord." It is good to praise you, not only with our hearts and lips, but also to use musical instruments, such as the psaltery, whereon to make your praises resound, O Most High God.
2. "To shed forth thy mercy in the morning, and thy truth in the night." Such must be the subject of our praise, to announce and proclaim to all the mercy in which you created the world, and the truth or the justice with which you rule it. And, as the work of mercy appears to everyone, let it be announced in the day; for who is there that does not know that the heavens and the earth, and all things in them were created by God, through his goodness and mercy, and not from necessity or compulsion. And, as the works of justice are occult; for, through God's secret designs, the just are often afflicted, and the wicked exalted; let such works be announced at night, in the darkness of faith, and not in the light of knowledge. In like manner, let mercy be announced in the morning, and justice at night, that men may, in the light of their prosperity, return thanks to God for his mercy, and in the darkness of tribulation for his justice; for, as St. Augustine observes on this passage, the father loves his children no less when he threatens than when he caresses them; nor should we be less grateful to God when he chastises us in the time of trouble, than when he heaps favors on us in our prosperity. We should imitate the Prophet, who says, in another Psalm, "I will bless the Lord at all times to me; his praise shall ever be in my mouth."

14. "They shall still increase in a fruitful old-age; and shall be well treated." What the Prophet previously promised himself, viz., "that his old-age should be in plentiful mercy," he now promises to all the other just; that they will prosper, not only in the youth and vigor, but that they will have a long and happy old age. "They shall still increase in a fruitful old-age;" enjoying the blessings of this life, and hoping for the next.

15. "That they may show, that the Lord our God is righteous, and there is no iniquity in him." All this will turn up, that the just may show and make known to all by word or by example, "that the Lord our God is righteous;" for, though he suffers the wicked to prosper for a while, he will, in his own time, exercise the judgments of his justice, by rewarding the good, and punishing the wicked.

3. "Upon an instrument of ten strings, upon the psaltery; with a canticle upon the harp." As well as he explained the subject of his praise, when he said, "it is good to give praise to the Lord," he now explains the second part of the same verse; "and the sing to thy name;" for he says he is to sing with the harp and psaltery, but not without the sweet sounds of a human voice.

4. "For thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in thy doings: and in the works of thy hands I shall rejoice." He now opens on the work of creation, one of God's mercies. I have been studying the beauty, variety, excellence, strength, and the uses of your works of the heavens, the earth, the waters, the stars, animals, and plants: I have been delighted beyond measure with them; but it was not your works that delighted me, for I did not dwell upon them, but it was in yourself I delighted; for your works led me to reflect on your own infinite beauty; and, carried away by the love of such extraordinary beauty, I was delighted and lost in admiration; and will, therefore, daily exult and praise thee "in the works of thy hands."

5. "O Lord, how great are thy works! Thy thoughts exceeding deep." Having said that he was delighted so much with the works of God, for fear he should be supposed to have comprehended them thoroughly, or to have an intimate knowledge of the excellence of all God's works, he now adds, that the works of the Lord are too great, and his wisdom in producing them too profound for anyone in this life to comprehend. "How great are thy works!" I am lost in admiration at the greatness and the excellence of your works; I cannot comprehend the magnitude of them, for truly did Ecclesiasticus say, "who hath numbered the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of the world? Who hath measured the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth, and the depth of the abyss?" Yet however great they may be, greater beyond comparison is the wisdom that created them; of which the same inspired writer immediately adds, "who hath searched out the wisdom of God, that goeth before all things;" and David here adds, "thy thoughts are exceeding deep;" that is to say, those thoughts of yours so full of wisdom, through which you have devised so many wonderful things, and so perfect that nothing can be added to or taken from them, are so occult as to surpass all human understanding. To give an instance of it in most trifling and common things: who can comprehend how in one small seed is contained an enormous tree with large and numerous branches, verdant foliage, beautiful blossoms, and its own seed for its own propagation? Who can comprehend by what art God contrived to infuse life, sense, and motion into the minutest insects, and with it endowing the ant with such prudence, the spider with such cunning, and the gnats and the fleas with such a power of incision with so poor an instrument?

6. "The senseless man shall not know: nor will the fool understand these things." He concludes this part of the Psalm that treats on creation, by asserting that it is only the wise, and not the senseless or the fool, that can know how great and inscrutable are the works of the Lord. For fools never look for anything in things created but the pleasure or the advantage they derive from them, just as the

brute beasts do, who have no understanding, and know not their own ignorance. But the wise, though they do not comprehend the greatness of God's work, still, they feel they are unequal to comprehending them, and are sensible of their ignorance therein; and the more they are sensible of it, the more they admire God's works, and come near true wisdom. "The senseless man shall not know" how wonderful are the works of the Lord: "nor will the fool understand" how profound are his thoughts; for a knowledge of one's own ignorance is only to be met with in the wise.

7. "When the wicked shall spring up as grass: and all the workers of iniquity shall appear, that they may perish forever and ever." He now passes to direction and the providence of God, in which his justice or his truth is most conspicuous, and especially so in the fact of the wicked being allowed to flourish for a time, that they made be condemned to eternal punishment; while the just, on the contrary, suffer here for a while, that they may be crowned hereafter. "When the wicked shall spring up as grass;" when they shall flourish and multiply as quickly as the grass grows and in as great abundance; "and all the workers of iniquity shall appear" most conspicuous, in high situations, and abounding in riches, "that they may perish forever and ever." All this prosperity of theirs will be suffered by God as a reward for some of their works, while they are sure to be punished with everlasting death for their crimes.

8. "But thou, O Lord, art Most High for evermore." Your position, O Lord, is quite different from that of the wicked, for their elevation is only temporary, but you are "Most High" forever and ever.

9. "For behold, thy enemies, O Lord, for behold, thy enemies shall perish: and all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered." He proves that the wicked will prosper for a time only, and that a short one. The word "behold," implies the suddenness of the change, as if he said: they that so thrived and flourished will perish all at once; and the repetition of the expression is with a view to express his execration of them; just as a similar repetition is used by him in Psalm 115, to express his devotion, "O Lord, for I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid." Worthy of all execration is he who fears not becoming an enemy to God, that he may be a friend to the world; for thus writes St. James, "whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God." What an amount of perversity to despise the friendship of the Creator for that of the creature. "And all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered." This is but a repetition and explanation of the first part of the verse. Those he called "enemies" there, he calls, "workers of iniquity" here; and those he said there "shall perish," he says here "shall be scattered;" from men become enemies to God by the fact of their contradicting his will that has been made known to us through his law; and they who "work iniquity," contradict his law, for the law of God is most direct and straight, and the rule of rectitude; but iniquity is nothing else than crookedness, and a departure from that rule. The wicked "shall be scattered" like the dry grass, to which he compared them; for as the dry grass is hurried away and scattered by the wind, and no trace of it found after; thus, the wicked, when they shall have prospered and flourished for a while, by God's will, are sure to be cut down and carried off, leaving not even a trace of their memory.

10. "But my horn shall be exalted like that of the unicorn: and my old age in plentiful mercy." He now contrasts the lot of the just with that of the wicked, and shows that they will one day be exalted by the divine providence and justice; and he speaks in his own person, piously hoping he will one day be numbered among them. "My horn;" that is, my power, happiness, and glory will rise aloft; not like the frail grass, but like the horn of the unicorn, an animal having only one horn, but that a large, straight, and powerful one; "and my old-age in plentiful mercy;" that is, not only will my power; happiness, and glory be great, but it will be continued and constant, following me to my old-age, for my "old-age will be in plentiful mercy" before God.

11. "My eye also hath looked down upon my enemies: and my ear shall hear of the downfall of the malignant that rise up against me." An addition to the just man's happiness will be that he will no longer have any fear of his enemies; he says, I have seen and despised them, for divine Providence rendered them incapable of doing me any harm. "And my ear shall hear of the malignant that rise up against me," and as regards my absent enemies who, in their malignity, would rise up against me, "my ear shall hear" of their downfall too.

12. "The just shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow up like the cedar of Libanus." The Prophet now applies to other just men what he had said of himself, gracefully comparing them to the palm and cedar trees, in contrast to the wicked he had compared to grass. Grass springs up in the morning, withers during the day, or is cut down by the mowers, is a thing of no permanence or endurance; whereas the palm tree lives a long time, and gives forth its fruit and its leaves for long time; so does the cedar, the highest and the longest lived among trees, and in great request for the ornamentation of royal palaces and ceilings. Thus the wicked thrive and prosper for a while, and are then thrown into the fire; but the just, like the palm tree, will flourish and hold verdant, and bear the sweetest fruits forever; nor will they sink under any burden but will overcome all difficulties, and, furthermore, "shall grow up, like the cedar of Libanus," to an enormous height, sending out its branches of good works and roots of perseverance, which will enable them to resist any storm, however great, of temptation, and in the end, like the cedars, will be an ornament in the heavenly palace of the new Jerusalem.

13. "That they are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of the house of our God." He assigns a reason for having compared the just to the palm and the cedar, because they will not be planted in the woods or the wild mountains, but will be planted in God's own house, and will flourish in God's own courts; that is to say, they will be planted in his Church by true faith, watered by his sacraments and his word, fixed and rooted in charity, they will not fail to give out in abundance the flowers of virtue and the fruit of good works. For, outside the Church, and without the foundation of faith, every plantation will be rooted up, inasmuch as it was not planted by the Heavenly Father.