



PSALMS 90-150



Eric Lane





'A commentator of yesteryear once said that he never wrote a commentary on a Bible book before he had read the book through at least fifty times. Eric Lane shows the same extensive direct contact with the text and this gives his work an attractive and stimulating freshness. His views on the chronological order of the psalms are somewhat controversial but will likewise stimulate the reader.'

Dr Geoffrey Grogan





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The Lord reigns



Eric Lane

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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Foreword

This second volume covers Books IV and V of the Psalms, and begins with what is probably the earliest Psalm of all—Psalm 90, since it is attributed to Moses. Psalm 91 probably comes from the same author and refers to the same incident. These are followed by several psalms of praise and thanksgiving addressed to ‘the Lord as King’. The long psalms which close Book IV (104–106) give historical proof that ‘the Lord is King’, as they recall the great works of God in creation and providence and more particularly in the history of Israel. The first few psalms of Book V take up the theme of redemption suggested by the historical psalms at the end of Book IV. Then comes the mighty 119th psalm glorying in the law or word of God, the instrument through which he exercises his Kingship. This is followed by the ‘Songs of Ascent’ (120–134) the pilgrim songs composed for travellers to sing as they approached Jerusalem to celebrate one of its festivals. Praise and thanksgiving are mingled with prayer and heart-searching in the psalms which follow, but from 144 praise completely takes over and mounts to a glorious climax in the final psalm. In the Appendix you will find a suggested possible chronological order for the composition of the Psalms, which will enable you, if you so desire, to link them with events in the Old Testament. For further introductory matters please refer to the beginning of my Focus on the Bible Commentary on Psalms 1–89.

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Notes

Abbreviations:

f	the following verse
cf	compare
MT	Masoretic Text, i.e. the Hebrew text of the Old Testament
LXX	Septuagint, i.e. the Greek translation of the Old Testament, from the 3rd century BC
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
Mg	Margin, i.e. the notes at the bottom of the page in the NIV
KJV	The King James Version of 1611
NKJV	The New King James Version of 1982
GNB	The Good News Bible of 1971
ESV	The English Standard Version of 2001

Books consulted:

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Allan Harman: *The Psalms – a Mentor Commentary* (Mentor/Christian Focus)
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F. D. Kidner: *The Psalms* (IVP)
H. C. Leupold: *Exposition of the Psalms* (Evangelical Press)
C. S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms* (Collins Fontana)
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Psalm 90

Consumed by God's Anger

The subtitle *a prayer of Moses the man of God* makes this the earliest psalm in the Psalter. It was not the only poem or song to come from his hand. The triumphal ode recorded in Exodus 15 is called 'The Song of Moses'. He wrote a further song to accompany the housing of the book of the Law in the ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:30–32:44). His blessing of the tribes of Israel before his death (Deut. 33) is also in verse. There are other poetical fragments: the song they sang as they left their camp carrying the ark (Num. 10:35-16), the ode to the well at Beer (Num. 21:17-18), and the curse on Heshbon and Moab (Num. 21:26-30). Even parts of the Law itself take on a verse form (Deut. 27:14-26; 28:3-6, 16-19).

The psalm is entitled *a prayer* because it is all addressed to God. While many psalms are songs of praise, many are prayers. It was composed at a time when numbers of the people were being struck dead as a judgment on their sin (vv. 5-8). Occasions when this happened include the people's complaint about their diet of manna (Num. 11:33) and their discouragement over the report of the spies (Num. 14:26-45). The one that fits best however, is Numbers 21:4-7, when further murmuring over food provoked a plague of venomous snakes from God.

In Numbers 21:7 the people request Moses to pray for them, which he does. Psalm 90 is probably the prayer he



prayed. Verses 3 and 5 refer to sudden death overtaking them; verse 7 indicates this was a visitation on the whole nation, and verse 8 speaks of (literally) *secret lustings*, referring to their discontent with the manna and longing for the food of Egypt (Num. 21:4-5).

It may be objected that the average life span of 70 to 80 years mentioned in verse 10 was not in force at that time. But the longevity of such as Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua was exceptional and no doubt due to the nation's need of these great leaders for a long time, not to speak of it as a reward for the outstanding godliness of some of them (cf. Ps. 91:16). Most of the people must have lived less than 100 years. The probable meaning is that this average life span was brought in during the desert period and soon became universal. Later leaders such as Samuel, David and Solomon lived only 60 to 70 years.

Verses 1-2: The eternal God (v. 2) as the dwelling place of his people

Verse 1 anticipates Moses' words at the end of the plague: 'If you make the Most High your dwelling' (91:9) and his blessing at the end of his life: 'The eternal God is your refuge' (Deut. 33:27). It shows how God's people in all ages should face calamity, even when it is deserved and from God:

- (1) We should turn our thoughts to God who is *everlasting* (v. 2), not limited like us to a few short years, and above and beyond all change. In this way we will feel our dependence upon him and, as we know from our 'parenting' lessons, nothing 'bonds' a child to a parent more closely than a sense of dependence. In this way disaster, instead of distancing us from God, can draw us closer to him.
- (2) We should look on this God, not as some far-off Being, but as our home, now and hereafter (v. 1). For the fact that God is eternal and we are temporal, that he is holy and we are sinful, does not mean he is not open to receive us. The sense of dependence, which actually comprises faith and repentance, is not merely a comfort but a means of access

to his heart. *We* should know this better than Moses, for the promise of Christ is that through his ministry and the coming of the Holy Spirit, not only does he become our *dwelling place*, but we actually become his (John 14:20, 23)! At the same time he is preparing us a home in which to dwell with him for ever (John 14:1).

Verses 3-6 : Human frailty and helplessness

Realising this increases our sense of dependence. We are subject to death (v. 3; Gen. 3:19; Eccles. 12:7), whereas God is totally unaffected by the passage of time (v. 4). *Death* can overtake us suddenly and without warning (vv. 5-6). This shows that contemplating God's eternal being and dwelling in him (vv. 1-2) does not reduce the realities of life and the starkness of death, but it does show us how to face them – by finding a permanent home, not in our body or the world, but in God.

Verses 7-11: God's sentence on sinful beings

Death is not part of a natural process but is a divine judgment. We need to accept this, for it produces that repentance and faith which will lead us home to God. But not all see it that way (v. 11a) and must be taught how to do so. The right response (v. 11b) is to let our *fear* of God (that is, our acquiescence in his right to judge and destroy) correspond to the reality of *his wrath* (his righteous anger that sends such judgments). In other words, God's righteous judgment should be an overpowering reality to us – enough to cause us to repent of our sin and then fly to him for salvation. Disasters do not naturally affect us like this (Rev. 9:20) – they need his special grace.

Verses 12-17: Calling on God

These verses form the specific request of the prayer, yet occupy only about a third of the psalm. This is a lesson in itself: preparation for prayer is as important as prayer itself. What Moses prays for is also instructive:

- **Verse 12:** that we take seriously the fact that our *days* are *numbered* so that we make wiser use of them. If



disaster and death teach us this they have some value (cf. Luke 13:1-5).

- **Verses 13-15:** that God will curtail his judgment (v. 13) and restore us to his favour (v. 14a) so that we may recover our *joy* (vv. 14b-15).
- **Verses 16-17:** that God will *work* in us and also show his glory to the rising generation (v. 16), and bring this about by blessing us and our *work* for him (v. 17).

Questions:

(1) What is our 'work' for God as Christians? How does it relate to God as 'everlasting'? (See Rom. 16:25-26.)

(2) Turn to John 3:14-16 and consider how Jesus used the incident of the brazen serpent to portray his Gospel.

