



Psalm 92 - Thanksgiving for Vindication

A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day.

Introduction

This is a hymn of thanks and praise to God, specifically celebrating the blessing of the Sabbath institution in Israel. The Sabbath was a day of rest and a day for gathered worship, and worship is the focus of the psalm. Besides the title, 'A song for the Sabbath', features that display this specific focus include the references to morning and evening worship, to the musical instruments used in worship, and to the temple.

It is the only psalm so titled, and was perhaps a song to be sung and meditation to be embraced upon the Sabbath. Charles Spurgeon commented, "The Jews have for a long while used this Psalm in the synagogue-worship on their Sabbath, and very suitable it is for the Sabbath-day; not so much in appearance, for there is little or no allusion to any Sabbatic rest in it, but because on that day above all others, our thoughts should be lifted up from all earthly things to God himself."

Psalm 92:1-5 - Weekly Sabbath Worship Is Good.

One of the most basic features of worship on the Sabbath day is celebrating God's greatness in presiding over his creation and his goodness toward his faithful. The words give thanks, sing praises, declare, and sing for joy all describe the significance of the songs sung in gathered worship, along with musical accompaniment using lute, harp, and lyre.

The songs honour God for what he has revealed about himself, recalling Exodus 34:5-7, where God explained his name, especially his benevolence toward his people, i.e. he is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. God's work and works are the great deeds he has done in creating the world and in caring for his people.

- 1 It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
- 2 to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
- 3 to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.

Psalm 92:1-3

It is good to give thanks to the Lord. This Sabbath psalm begins with a simple yet profound statement. It is a good thing to give thanks to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel and the Maker of heaven and earth.

To sing praises to your name, O Most High. Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism, repeating an idea with similar words. This is likely an example of this, with the second phrase repeating the essential idea of the first. Therefore, for the psalmist, to sing praises to God's name is very much like giving thanks to the Lord. Singing is a valid and wonderful expression of gratitude to God as David knew only too well: *<<I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High>>* (Psalm 9:2).

Charles Spurgeon observed, "It is good to give thanks in the form of vocal song. Nature itself teaches us thus to express our gratitude to God; do not the birds sing, and the brooks warble as they flow?" And again, "Our personal experience has confirmed us in the belief that it is good to sing unto the Lord; we have often felt like Luther when he said, 'Come, let us sing a Psalm, and drive away the devil.'"

To declare your steadfast love in the morning. Day and night proclaiming God's loving kindness (*hesed*, the great Hebrew word for God's loyal, covenant love) and faithfulness is another way to give thanks to the Lord. This declaration is not only to be made on the good days or nights, but every day and night and should accompany the complaints in at least equal measure: *<<Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice>>* (Psalm 55:17).

Charles Spurgeon commented, "Eagerly and promptly should we magnify the Lord; we leave unpleasant tasks as long as we can, but our hearts are so engrossed with the adoration of God that we would rise betimes to attend to it. There is a peculiar freshness and charm about early morning praises; the day is loveliest when it first opens its eyelids, and God himself seems then to make distribution of the day's manna, which tastes most sweetly if gathered ere the sun is hot." This kind of heartfelt praise gives honour to God as Spurgeon also

concluded, “We talk as if, really, we were to be pitied for living, as if we were little better off than toads under a hallow, or snails in a tub of salt. We whine as if our lives were martyrdoms, and every breath a woe. But it is not so. Such conduct slanders the good Lord.”

To the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. Worship and honour to God may also be expressed in music, and with a variety of instruments. However, it should be done with harmonious sound, meaning that those who dedicate their music to service of God and his people should endeavour to be harmonious and excellent in their presentation of the music: <<***Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with rejoicing, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres***>> (Nehemiah 12:27).

These first three verses of Psalm 92 show that worshipping and honouring God has many different aspects and expressions. The sense is that people should worship God in any available and honouring way:

- It may be thanksgiving, singing, or declaration.
- It may simply be because of who he is (the Lord, Most High) or because of what he has done (expressed in acts of loving kindness and faithfulness).
- It may be done at day or night.
- It may be done with singing and with instrumental music.

⁴ For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

Psalm 92:4

For you, O Lord. The emphasis is on God’s personal work. This is what he himself has done.

Have made me glad by your work. Sometimes God’s servants grumble about his works and ways. The way of the psalmist is far better, to be made glad through the work of God: <<***The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy***>> (Psalm 111:7).

At the works of your hands I sing for joy. The focus is entirely toward God, and not toward self. The triumph is found not in what people do for God, but on what God has done with his own hands.

⁵ How great are your works, O Lord!
Your thoughts are very deep!

Psalm 92:5

How great are your works, O Lord! Having brought up the idea of God's works in the previous lines, the psalmist then declared how great those works were: <<*Remember to extol his work, of which mortals have sung*>> (Job 36:24), <<*And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!'*>> (Revelation 15:3).

Your thoughts are very deep! First among God's works, the psalmist spoke of the great intelligence of God. God's knowledge is not only broad, touching absolutely everything; it is also very deep, knowing all things about everything: <<*This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom*>> (Isaiah 28:29), and: <<*O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!*>> (Romans 11:33).

Psalm 92:6-11 - Contrasts: The Godless Will Perish, but I Will Only See Them Perish.

The next section draws a contrast between the members of the people who are unfaithful to the covenant - called stupid, fool, wicked, God's enemies, and evildoers (vv.6-9) and those who hold fast to God in love and trust - the 'I' singing the psalm; 'my' and 'me' in vv.10-11. The unfaithful are unable to grasp that no matter how they might flourish for the moment, God's will alone prevails in the end; God will bring judgement upon those who despise him, especially those among his people.

God, who is on high forever, openly displays those who are faithful to him, exalting or making high their horn, a symbol of power and strength derived from the image of the horns of an animal; refer to the comment made on Psalm 75:4. The terms 'my eyes have seen' and 'my ears have heard' indicate that the destruction of the wicked, who seemed so prosperous and dangerous, vindicates the way the faithful kept their loyalty to God in the face of the seductive temptation to give in to the unfaithful.

- ⁶ The dullard cannot know,
the stupid cannot understand this:
- ⁷ though the wicked sprout like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction for ever,
- ⁸ but you, O Lord, are on high for ever.

9 For your enemies, O Lord,
for your enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered.

Psalm 92:6-9

The dullard cannot know, the stupid cannot understand this. The senseless and the fool do not understand this about God: <<*I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast towards you*>> (Psalm 73:22). They do not realise that he is finitely smarter and greater than they are. It is very hard for some people to accept that God knows more than they do, and it can be even more difficult to really live as if that is true. The senseless man does not understand the greatness of God as described in v.5. Nor does he understand the coming judgement despite present prosperity as described in v.7.

Again Spurgeon commented, “A man must either be a saint or a brute, he has no other choice; his type must be the adoring seraph, or the ungrateful swine. So far from paying respect to great thinkers who will not own the glory or the being of God, we ought to regard them as comparable to the beasts which perish, only vastly lower than mere brutes, because their degrading condition is of their own choosing.”

Though the wicked sprout like grass. The psalmist saw many times when the wicked seemed to prosper. They grew quickly like grass and seemed to flourish. Yet he also knew that their prosperity was only the prelude to their destruction; it is that they may be doomed to destruction for ever.

But you, O Lord, are on high for ever. In contrast to the wicked who have only temporary prosperity, God is set on high forever. His enemies shall perish and all the wicked shall be scattered.

For your enemies, O Lord, for your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered. The three lines of v.9 build up to a peak, each adding something to the previous line, similar to v.3 in the next psalm: <<*The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring*>> (Psalm 93:3). For your enemies is repeated for emphasis. Those enemies of the Lord will be destroyed, and God’s people are called upon to behold this as another of God’s great works.

Perish, scattered. Like ‘destruction’ in v.7, these terms describe the judgement on the wicked as if it is a defeat in battle. Judgement extends, when necessary, into the afterlife; refer to the comment made on Psalm 49:13-20. A Ugaritic text from the Second Millennium BC has a structure very similar to v.9, although it praises Baal rather than Yahweh: “Now your enemies, O Baal; now your enemies you will smite; now you will vanquish your foes.” The biblical poets used the

literary forms of their culture but always were clear that it was Yahweh who deserved their praise for there were and are no other gods.

¹⁰ But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;
you have poured over me fresh oil.

¹¹ My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;
my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

Psalm 92:10-11

But you have exalted my horn. The horn was a symbol of strength and might. The wicked are destroyed (v.7), but the righteous have their strength exalted. Refer to the comment made on Psalm 75:4.

The wild ox is the aurochs, which is the ancestor of domestic cattle but is now extinct. The animal was known for its strength, and its horns were effective for goring: <<*A firstborn bull – majesty is his! His horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he gores the peoples, driving them to the ends of the earth; such are the myriads of Ephraim, such the thousands of Manasseh*>> (Deuteronomy 33:17), and: <<*Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me*>> (Psalm 22:21).



The aurochs (*Bos primigenius*)

Because the Greek translators used ‘one-horned’ (Greek *monokerōs*) to incorrectly translate the Hebrew term here, older English versions translated the word ‘unicorn’ and the Latin Vulgate used a word signifying either rhinoceros or unicorn.

You have poured over me fresh oil. The anointing with fresh oil brought refreshment and honour. It also had the idea of the blessing and power and the enabling of God poured out upon the one anointed. Spurgeon commented, “Sometimes, when we meet with believers who are full of grace, full of patience, full of courage, full of zeal, full of love, we say, ‘I can never get where they are.’ Yes, we can, for we shall be anointed with fresh oil, and if we obtain fresh grace there is no place of eminence we cannot reach.”

My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies. The psalmist had the additional blessing of seeing his triumph over his enemies. Victory is assured for the people of God: <<*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*>> (Romans 8:37), but sometimes it is only understood by faith and not seen with the natural eye.

Psalm 92:12-15 - The Everlasting Sabbath.

This section describes the permanent security enjoyed by the faithful: <<***So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God***>> (Hebrews 4:9). They flourish like the palm tree; the date palm, long-lived and stately, and they flourish in the courts of God, which indicates enduring residence in God's presence: <<***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long***>> (Psalm 23:6), as opposed to the temporary 'flourishing' of the evildoers (v.7), who 'are doomed to destruction.' In these courts, the faithful will declare with enjoyment God's perfect faithfulness and righteousness. This passage, with its aura of permanent vitality, enables the faithful to look forward to an eternity in God's presence, singing his praise; refer to the comment made on Psalm 23:5-6.

- 12 The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
- 13 They are planted in the house of the Lord;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
- 14 In old age they still produce fruit;
they are always green and full of sap,
- 15 showing that the Lord is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Psalm 92:12-15

The righteous flourish like the palm tree. The wicked have their season of flourishing (v.7), but the righteous shall flourish like the evergreen palm tree. The wicked should understand that this world provides the best they will ever experience, and the righteous should know that this world provides the worst they will experience. Spurgeon commented, "When we see a noble palm standing erect, sending all its strength upward in one bold column, and growing amid the dearth and drought of the desert, we have a fine picture of the godly man, who in his uprightness aims alone at the glory of God; and, independent of outward circumstances, is made by divine grace to live and thrive where all things else perish."

David uses the imagery of a tree to describe the righteous: <<***They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper***>> (Psalm 1:3).

And grow like a cedar in Lebanon. The cedar trees of Lebanon were known for their size, strength, durability, beauty, and usefulness. The blessings to come upon the righteous bring the same things.

They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. God's house, the place of his presence, is the place where the believer is both planted and where they continually live and flourish. One might say that it is in the presence of the Lord from beginning to end, and they still produce fruit in old age - even as Moses did: *<<Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated>>* (Deuteronomy 34:7).

Showing that the Lord is upright. This is why the people of God live in a blessed way that gives honour and attention to God; they produce fruit: *<<You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name>>* (John 15:16), and: *<<By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things>>* (Galatians 5:22-23). It is not to draw attention to themselves as wonderful people, but to shout out that the Lord is upright. Spurgeon's final comment on this psalm is, "That the Lord is upright.' Well, how does the fruit-bearing of an aged Christian show that? Why, it shows that God has kept his promise. He has promised that he will never leave them nor forsake them. There you see it. He has promised that when they are weak they shall be strong. There you see it. He has promised that if they seek him they shall not lack any good thing. There you see it."

He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. This was the confident, proven experience of the psalmist. He knew from both understanding and life experience that God could be trusted and did all things in goodness.