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A Prayer by Moses, the man of God.

PSALM 90: 1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place for all generations.

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The eternity of God, Psa 90:1, Psa 90:2; the frailty of the state of man, Psa 90:3-9; the general limits of human life, Psa 90:10; the danger of displeasing God, Psa 90:11; the necessity of considering the shortness of life, and of regaining the favor of the Almighty, Psa 90:12; earnest prayer for the restoration of Israel, Psa 90:13-17.

The title of this Psalm is, A Prayer of Moses the man of God. The Chaldee has, "A prayer which Moses the prophet of the Lord prayed when the people of Israel had sinned in the wilderness." All the Versions ascribe it to Moses; but that it could not be of Moses the lawgiver is evident from this consideration, that the age of man was not then seventy or eighty years, which is here stated to be its almost universal limit, for Joshua lived one hundred and ten years, and Moses himself one hundred and twenty; Miriam his sister, one hundred and thirty; Aaron his brother, one hundred and twenty-three; Caleb, four-score and five years; and their contemporaries lived in the same proportion. See the note on Psa 90:4 (note). Therefore the Psalm cannot at all refer to such ancient times. If the title be at all authentic, it must refer to some other person of that name; and indeed **יש אלהים** ish Elohim, a man of God, a divinely inspired man, agrees to the times of the prophets, who were thus denominated. The Psalm was doubtless composed during or after the captivity; and most probably on their return, when they were engaged in rebuilding the temple; and this, as Dr. Kennicott conjectures, may be the work of their hands, which they pray God to bless and prosper.

Verse 1

Lord, thou hast been our dwellingplace - **מַעוֹן** maon; but instead of this several MSS. have **מַעוֹז** maoz, "place of defense," or "refuge," which is the reading of the Vulgate, Septuagint, Arabic, and Anglo-Saxon. Ever since thy covenant with Abraham thou hast been the Resting-place, Refuge, and Defence of thy people Israel. Thy mercy has been lengthened out from generation to generation.

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PSALM 90: 2 Before the mountains were born, before you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

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Verse 2

Before the mountains were brought forth - The mountains and hills appear to have been everlasting; but as they were brought forth out of the womb of eternity, there was a time when they were not: but Thou hast been ab aeternitate a parte ante, ad aeternitatem a parte post; fram the eternity that is past, before time began; to the eternity that is after, when time shall have an end. This is the highest description of the eternity of God to which human language can reach.

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PSALM 90: 3 You turn man to destruction, saying, "Return, you children of men."

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## Verse 3

Thou turnest man to destruction - Literally, Thou shalt turn dying man, **שׂוֹן אֲנוֹשׁ** enosh, to the small dust, **אֶדְמָה** dacca but thou wilt say, Return, ye children of Adam. This appears to be a clear and strong promise of the resurrection of the human body, after it has long slept, mingled with the dust of the earth.

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PSALM 90: 4 For a thousand years in your sight are just like yesterday when it is past, like a watch in the night.

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## Verse 4

For a thousand years in thy sight - As if he had said, Though the resurrection of the body may be a thousand (or any indefinite number of) years distant; yet, when these are past, they are but as yesterday, or a single thatch of the night. They pass through the mind in a moment, and appear no longer in their duration than the time required by the mind to reflect them by thought. But, short as they appear to the eye of the mind, they are nothing when compared with the eternity of God! The author probably has in view also that economy of Divine justice and providence by which the life of man has been shortened from one thousand years to threescore years and ten, or fourscore.

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PSALM 90: 5 You sweep them away as they sleep. In the morning they sprout like new grass.

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## Verse 5

Thou carriest them away as with a flood - Life is compared to a stream, ever gliding away; but sometimes it is as a mighty torrent, when by reason of plague, famine, or war, thousands are swept away daily. In particular cases it is a rapid stream, when the young are suddenly carried off by consumptions, fevers, etc.; this is the flower that flourisheth in the morning, and in the evening is cut down and withered. The whole of life is like a sleep or as a dream. The eternal world is real; all here is either shadowy or representative. On the whole, life is represented as a stream; youth, as morning; decline of life, or old age, as evening, death, as sleep; and the resurrection as the return of the flowers in spring. All these images appear in these curious and striking verses, Psa 90:3-6.

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PSALM 90: 6 In the morning it sprouts and springs up. By evening, it is withered and dry.

PSALM 90: 7 For we are consumed in your anger. We are troubled in your wrath.

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## Verse 7

We are consumed by thine anger - Death had not entered into the world, if men had not fallen from God.

By thy wrath are we troubled - Pain, disease, and sickness are so many proofs of our defection from original rectitude. The anger and wrath of God are moved against all sinners. Even in protracted life

we consume away, and only seem to live in order to die. "Our wasting lives grow shorter still, As days and months increase;

And every beating pulse we tell Leaves but the number less."

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PSALM 90: 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

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Verse 8

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee - Every one of our transgressions is set before thee; noted and minuted down in thy awful register!

Our secret sins - Those committed in darkness and privacy are easily discovered by thee, being shown by the splendours of thy face shining upon them. Thus we light a candle, and bring it into a dark place to discover its contents. O, what can be hidden from the allseeing eye of God? Darkness is no darkness to him; wherever he comes there is a profusion of light - for God is light!

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PSALM 90: 9 For all our days have passed away in your wrath. We bring our years to an end as a sigh.

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Verse 9

We spend our years as a tale - The Vulgate has: *Anni nostri sicut aranea meditabuntur*; "Our years pass away like those of the spider." Our plans and operations are like the spider's web; life is as frail, and the thread of it as brittle, as one of those that constitute the well-wrought and curious, but fragile, habitation of that insect. All the Versions have the word spider; but it neither appears in the Hebrew, nor in any of its MSS. which have been collated.

My old Psalter has a curious paraphrase here: "Als the iran (spider) makes vayne webs for to take flese (flies) with gile, swa our yeres ere ockupide in ydel and swikel castes about ertly thynges; and passes with outen frute of gude werks, and waste in ydel thynkyns." This is too true a picture of most lives.

But the Hebrew is different from all the Versions. "We consume our years (כמו הגה kemo hegeh) like a groan." We live a dying, whining, complaining life, and at last a groan is its termination! How amazingly expressive!

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PSALM 90: 10 The days of our years are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty years; yet their pride is but labour and sorrow, for it passes quickly, and we fly away.

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Verse 10

Threescore years and ten - See the note on the title of this Psalm 90 (note). This Psalm could not have been written by Moses, because the term of human life was much more extended when he flourished than eighty years at the most. Even in David's time many lived one hundred years, and the

author of Ecclesiasticus, who lived after the captivity, fixed this term at one hundred years at the most (Sirach 18:9); but this was merely a general average, for even in our country we have many who exceed a hundred years.

Yet is their strength labor and sorrow - This refers to the infirmities of old age, which, to those well advanced in life, produce labor and sorrow.

It is soon cut of - It - the body, is soon cut off.

And we fly away - The immortal spirit wings its way into the eternal world.

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PSALM 90: 11 Who knows the power of your anger, your wrath according to the fear that is due to you?

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Verse 11

Who knoweth the power of thine angers - The afflictions of this life are not to be compared to the miseries which await them who live and die without being reconciled to God, and saved from their sins.

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PSALM 90: 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

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Verse 12

So teach us to number our days - Let us deeply consider our own frailty, and the shortness and uncertainty of life, that we may live for eternity, acquaint ourselves with thee and be at peace; that we may die in thy favor and live and reign with thee eternally.

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PSALM 90: 13 Relent, LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants!

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Verse 13

Return, O Lord, how long? - Wilt thou continue angry with us for ever?

Let it repent thee - הִנָּחֵם hinnachem, be comforted, rejoice over them to do them good. Be glorified rather in our salvation than in our destruction.

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PSALM 90: 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your loving kindness, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

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Verse 14

O satisfy us early - Let us have thy mercy soon, (literally, in the morning). Let it now shine upon us, and it shall seem as the morning of our days, and we shall exult in thee all the days of our life.

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PSALM 90: 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen evil.

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Verse 15

Make us glad according to the days - Let thy people have as many years of prosperity as they have had of adversity. We have now suffered seventy years of a most distressful captivity.

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PSALM 90: 16 Let your work appear to your servants; your glory to their children.

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Verse 16

Let thy work appear unto thy servants - That thou art working for us we know; but O, let thy work appear! Let us now see, in our deliverance, that thy thoughts towards us were mercy and love.

And thy Glory - Thy pure worship be established among our children for ever.

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PSALM 90: 17 Let the favour of the Lord our God be on us; establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.

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Verse 17

And let the beauty of the Lord - Let us have thy presence, blessing, and approbation, as our fathers had.

Establish thou the work of our hands - This is supposed, we have already seen, to relate to their rebuilding the temple, which the surrounding heathens and Samaritans wished to hinder. We have begun, do not let them demolish our work; let the top-stone be brought on with shouting, Grace, grace unto it.

Yea, the work of our hands - This repetition is wanting in three of Kennicott's MSS., in the Targum, in the Septuagint, and in the Ethiopic. If the repetition be genuine, it may be considered as marking great earnestness; and this earnestness was to get the temple of God rebuilt, and his pure worship restored. The pious Jews had this more at heart than their own restoration; it was their highest grief that the temple was destroyed and God's ordinances suspended; that his enemies insulted them, and blasphemed the worthy name by which they were called. Every truly pious man feels more for God's glory than his own temporal felicity, and rejoices more in the prosperity of God's work than in the increase of his own worldly goods.