THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

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Commentaries On The Psalms 67 - 92

John Calvin

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John Calvin - A Biography

By William Barry

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology, was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic,

we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths; the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Noyon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place au Blé (Cornmarket). Noyon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too well-known Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his

canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Eveque in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of

which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etaples (Stapulensis), celebrated for his translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collèege de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumergue considers the first Protestant book emanating from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians. remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's education was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of

which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Noyon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le

Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and Calvin accompanied by du Tillet, escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist, who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto "Omnia ad Dei gloriam", and in

allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July, 1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared

nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and

"the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May, 1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the "articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinquents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism, which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime; Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause

by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors, doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was

imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the penalties inflicted on Bolsec — moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron yoke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at

Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inquisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted,

would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see" Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue, "Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native land

accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The town on Lake Leman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaean hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle, almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he bequeathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year

1900 a monument of expiation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

COMMENTARIES ON THE PSALMS67 - 92

PSALM 67

The following psalm contains a prayer for a blessing upon the Church, that besides being preserved in a state of safety in Judea, it might be enlarged to a new and unprecedented extent. It touches shortly upon the kingdom of God, which was to be erected in the world upon the coming of Christ. fc1

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm or song.

Psalm 67:1-7

- 1. God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah. fc2 2. That they may know thy way upon the earth, thy salvation among all nations. 3. Let the people praise thee, O God! let all the people praise thee. 4. Let the nations be glad, and shout for joy; for he shall judge the people righteously, and thou shalt govern the nations upon earth. Selah. 5. Let the people praise thee, O God: let all the people praise thee. 6. The earth has given its increase; and God, even our own God!, will bless us. 7. God shall bless us, fc3 and all ends of the earth shall fear him.
- **1.** God be merciful unto us, and bless us. The psalm contains a prediction of Christ's kingdom, under which the whole world was to be adopted into a privileged relationship with God; but the Psalmist begins by praying

for the Divine blessing, particularly upon the Jews. They were the first-born, (Exodus 4:22,) and the blessing was to terminate upon them first, and then go out to all the surrounding nations. I have used the imperative mood throughout the psalm, as other translators have done, although the future tense, which is that employed in the Hebrew, would suit sufficiently well, and the passage might be understood as encouraging the minds of the Lord's people to trust in the continuance and increase of the Divine favor. The words, however, are generally construed in the form of a prayer, and I merely threw out this as a suggestion. Speaking, as the Psalmist does, of those who belonged to the Church of God, and not of those who were without, it is noticeable that yet he traces all the blessings they received to God's free favor; and from this we may learn, that so long as we are here, we owe our happiness, our success, and prosperity, entirely to the same cause. This being the case, how shall any think to anticipate his goodness by merits of their own? The light of God's countenance may refer either to the sense of his love shed abroad in our hearts, or to the actual manifestation of it without, as, on the other hand, his face may be said to be clouded, when he strikes terrors into our conscience on account of our sins, or withdraws the outward marks of his favor.

2. That they may know thy way upon the earth. Here we have a clear prophecy of that extension of the grace of God by which the Gentiles were united into one body with the posterity of Abraham. The Psalmist prays for some conspicuous proof of favor to be shown his chosen people, which might attract the Gentiles to seek participation in the same blessed hope. fc4 By the way of God is meant his covenant, which is the source or spring of salvation, and by which he discovered himself in the character of a Father to

his ancient people, and afterwards more clearly under the Gospel, when the Spirit of adoption was shed abroad in greater abundance. fc5 Accordingly, we find Christ himself saying,

"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God,"

(John 17:3)

3. Let the people praise thee, O God! Having spoken of all nations participating in the saving knowledge of God, he next tells us that they would proclaim his goodness, and exhorts them to the exercise of gratitude. The repetition used clearly shows of itself that he alludes to an event of a new and unprecedented kind. Had the allusion been to some such manifestation of his favor as he ordinarily made to the Jews, we would not have looked for the same vehemency of expression. First he says, Let the people praise thee; then he adds, Let all the people praise thee. Afterwards he repeats the exclamation once more. But he appropriately makes mention, between, of rejoicing, and the occasion there was for it, since it is impossible that we can praise God aright, unless our minds be tranquil and cheerful — unless, as persons reconciled to God, we are animated with the hope of salvation, and "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," reign in our hearts, (Philippians 4:7.) The cause assigned for joy plainly in itself points to the event of the calling of the Gentiles. The reference is not to that government of God which is general in its nature, but to that special and spiritual jurisdiction which he exercises over the Church, in which he cannot properly be said to govern any but such as he has gathered under his sway by the doctrine of his law. The word righteousness is inserted in commendation of his

government. Language almost identical is used by Isaiah and Micah when they speak of the times in which the word of salvation would be diffused throughout all the earth, (Isaiah 11:4; Micah 4:3.)

6. The earth has given its increase. Mention having been made of the principal act of the Divine favor, notice is next taken of the temporal blessings which he confers upon his children, that they may have everything necessary to complete their happiness. And here it is to be remembered, that every benefit which God bestowed upon his ancient people was, as it were, a light held out before the eyes of the world, to attract the attention of the nations to him. From this the Psalmist argues, that should God liberally supply the wants of his people, the consequence would be, to increase the fear of his name, since all ends of the earth would, by what they saw of his fatherly regard to his own, submit themselves with greater cheerfulness to his government.

PSALM 68

In this psalm it was David's design to celebrate the victories which, through the blessing of God, he had gained over his enemies; fc6 but, in the opening verses, he commends the power and goodness of God generally, as seen in the government of the world at large. From this he passes to the consideration of what God had done in redeeming his chosen people, and of the continued proofs of fatherly care which he had manifested to the posterity of Abraham. He then proceeds to the subject which he had more particularly in view, prosecuting it at length, and in terms of the most exalted description; praising the signal display of Divine power which he, and the whole nation with him, had experienced. Now that he had been made

king, he infers that the Church was brought to a settled condition, and that God, who seemed to have departed, would now at length erect his throne, as it were, in the midst of it, and reign. In this it would evidently appear, that he designed, typically, to represent the glory of God afterwards to be manifested in Christ.

To the chief musician. A psalm or song of David.

Psalm 68:1-6

- 1. God shall arise: his enemies shall be scattered; and they who hate him shall flee before him. 2. As smoke is driven away, thou shalt drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, the wicked shall perish from the presence of God. 3. But the righteous shall be glad; they shall rejoice before God, and leap for exultation. 4. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: exalt him that rideth upon the clouds in Jah fc7 his name, [or, in his name Jah,] and rejoice before him. 5. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in the habitation of his holiness. 6. God who setteth the solitary in families, who bringeth, out those who are bound with chains; fc8 but the rebellious shall dwell in a dry land.
- **1.** God shall arise: his enemies shall be scattered. In this verse the Psalmist intimates, as it were by way of preface, the subject which he proposed to treat in the psalm, and

which related to the truth that God, however long he may seem to connive at the audacity and cruelty of the enemies of his Church, will eventually arise to avenge it, and will prove himself able to protect it by the mere forth-putting of his hand. I agree with other interpreters in thinking that the sentiment is borrowed from Moses, (Numbers 10:35) fc9 There can be little doubt that in dictating the form of prayer there referred to, he had an eye to the instruction and comfort of all succeeding ages, and would teach the Lord's people confidently to rely for safety upon the ark of the covenant, which was the visible symbol of the Divine presence. We may notice this difference, however, that Moses addressed the words to God as a prayer, while David rather expresses his satisfaction and delight in what he saw daily fulfilling before his own eyes. Some indeed read, Let *God arise;* but they appear to misapprehend the scope of the Psalmist. He means to say that observation attested the truth which Moses had declared of God's needing only to rise up that all his enemies might be scattered before his irresistible power. Yet I see no objections to the other reading, provided the idea now mentioned be retained, and the words be considered as intimating that God needs no array of preparation in overthrowing his enemies, and can dissipate them with a breath. We are left to infer, that when his enemies at any time obtain an ascendancy, it is owing to an exercise of Divine forbearance, and that rage as they may, it is only with his permission; the time being not yet come for his rising. There is much comfort to be derived from the circumstance, that those who persecute the Church are here spoken of as *God's enemies*. When he undertakes our defense, he looks upon the injuries done to us as dishonors cast upon his Divine Majesty. The Psalmist adds a striking figure to illustrate how easily God can overthrow the machinations of our enemies, comparing them to smoke which vanishes when blown upon by the

wind, or wax which melts before the fire. fc10 We consider it utterly incredible that such a formidable array of opposition should be made to disappear in a moment. But the Spirit takes this method of chiding the fearfulness of our carnal minds, and teaching us that there is no such strength in our enemies as we suppose, — that we allow the smoke of them to blind our eyes, and the solid mass of resistance which they present to deceive us into a forgetfulness of the truth, that the mountains themselves flow down at the presence of the Lord. fc11

3. But the righteous shall be glad. It is here intimated by David, that when God shows himself formidable to the wicked, this is with the design of securing the deliverance of his Church. He would seem indirectly to contrast the joy of which he now speaks with the depression and grief felt by well affected men under the reign of Saul — suggesting, that God succeeds a season of temporary trouble with returns of comfort, to prevent his people from being overwhelmed by despondency. He leaves us also to infer, that one reason of that joy which they experience is derived from knowing that God is propitious to them, and interests himself in their safety. The Hebrew words, ynpm, mipne, and ynpl, liphne, admit of the same meaning; but I think that the Psalmist intended to note a distinction. The wicked flee from the presence of God, as what inspires them with terror; the righteous again rejoice in it, because nothing delights them more than to think that God is near them. When commenting upon the passage, Psalm 18:26, we saw why the Divine presence terrifies some and comforts others; for "with the pure he will show himself pure, and with the froward he will show himself froward." One expression is heaped by the Psalmist upon another, to show how great the joy of the Lord's people is, and how entirely it possesses and occupies their affections.

4. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: exalt him $^{
m fc12}$ that rideth, etc. He now proceeds to call upon the Lord's people to praise God. And he begins by pointing out the grounds in general, as I have already hinted, which they have for this exercise, because he comprehends the whole world under his power and government, adding, that he condescends to take the poorest and the most wretched of our family under his protection. His infinite power is commended, when it is said that he rides upon the clouds, or the heavens, fc13 for this proves that he sits superior over all things. The Holy Spirit may signify by the expression, that we should exclude from our minds every thing gross and earthly in the conceptions we form of him; but he would, doubtless, impress us chiefly with an idea of his great power, to produce in us a due reverence, and make us feel how far short all our praises must come of his glory. We would attempt in vain to comprehend heaven and earth; but his glory is greater than both. As to the expression which follows, in Jah, his name, there has been some difference of opinion. The Hebrew preposition b, beth, may here, as sometimes it is, be a mere expletive, and we may read, Jah is his name. fc14 Others read, in Jah is his name; fc15 and I have no objection to this, though I prefer the translation which I have adopted. It is of less consequence how we construe the words, as the meaning of the Psalmist is obvious. The whole world was at that time filled with the vain idols of superstition, and he would assert the claim of God, and set them aside when he brought forward the God of Israel. But it is not enough that the Lord's people should bow before him with suppliant spirits. Even the wicked, while they fear and tremble before him, are forced to yield him reverence. David would have them draw near to him with cheerfulness and alacrity; and, accordingly, proceeds to insist upon his transcendent

goodness shown in condescending to the *orphans* and widows. The incomprehensible glory of God does not induce him to remove himself to a distance from us, or prevent him from stooping to us in our lowest depths of wretchedness. There can be no doubt that orphans and widows are named to indicate in general all such as the world are disposed to overlook as unworthy of their regard. Generally we distribute our attentions where we expect some return. We give the preference to rank and splendor, and despise or neglect the poor. When it is said, God is in the habitation of his holiness, this may refer either to heaven or to the temple, for either sense will suit the connection. God does not dwell in heaven to indulge his own ease, but heaven is, as it were, his throne, from which he judges the world. On the other hand, the fact of his having chosen to take up his residence with men, and inviting them familiarly to himself there, is one well fitted to encourage the poor, who are cheered to think that he is not far off from them. In the next verse, other instances of the Divine goodness are mentioned — that he gives the bereaved and solitary a numerous offspring, and releases the bonds of the captive. In the last clause of the verse, he denounces the judgment of God against those who impiously despise him, and this that he might show the Lord's people the folly of envying their lot as well as strike terror into their minds. The sense of the words is, That we ought to comfort ourselves under the worst afflictions, by reflecting that we are in God's hand, who can mitigate all our griefs and remove all our burdens. The wicked, on the other hand, may congratulate themselves for a time upon their prosperity, but eventually it will fare ill with them. By dwelling in a dry land, is meant being banished, as it were, to a wilderness, and deprived of the benefits of that fatherly kindness which they had so criminally abused.

Psalm 68:7-10

- 7. O God! when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: **8**. The earth was moved, the heavens also dropped at the presence of this God: Sinai at the presence of God, the God of Israel. fc16 **9**. Thou, O God! shalt make a liberal fc17 rain to fall upon thine inheritance, and thou refreshest it when it is weary. **10**. Thy congregation fc18 shall dwell therein; thou, O God! wilt prepare in thy goodness for the poor.
- 7. O God! when thou wentest forth before thy people, etc. The Psalmist now proceeds to show that the Divine goodness is principally displayed in the Church, which God has selected as the great theater where his fatherly care may be manifested. What follows is evidently added with the view of leading the posterity of Abraham, as the Lord's chosen people, to apply the observations which had been just made to themselves. The deliverance from Egypt having been the chief and lasting pledge of the Divine favor, which practically ratified their adoption under the patriarch, he briefly adverts to that event. He would intimate that in that remarkable exodus, proof had been given to all succeeding ages of the love which God entertained for his Church. Why were so many miracles wrought? why were heaven and earth put into commotion? why were the mountains made to tremble? but that all might recognize the power of God as allied with the deliverance of his people. He represents God as having been their leader in conducting them forth. And this not

merely in reference to their passage of the Red Sea, but their journeys so long as they wandered in the wilderness. When he speaks of the earth being moved, he would not seem to allude entirely to what occurred upon the promulgation of the law, but to the fact that, throughout all their progress, the course of nature was repeatedly altered, as if the very elements had trembled at the presence of the Lord. It was upon Mount Sinai, however, that God issued the chief displays of his awful power; it was there that thunders were heard in heaven, and the air was filled with lightnings; and, accordingly, it is mentioned here by name as having presented the most glorious spectacle of the Divine majesty which was ever beheld. Some read, This Sinai, etc., connecting the pronoun hz, zeh, with the mountain here named; but it is much more emphatical to join it with the preceding clause, and to read, the heavens dropped at the presence of This God; David meaning to commend the excellency of the God of Israel. The expression is one frequently used by the prophets to denote that the God worshipped by the posterity of Abraham was the true God, and the religion delivered in his law no delusion, as in Isaiah 25:9, "This, this is our God, and he will save us." To establish the Lord's people in their faith, David leads them, as it were, into the very presence of God; indicates that they were left to no such vague uncertainties as the heathen; and indirectly censures the folly of the world in forsaking the knowledge of the true God, and fashioning imaginary deities of its own, of wood and stone, of gold and silver.

9. Thou, O God! shalt make a liberal rain to fall fc19 upon thine inheritance. Mention is made here of the continued course of favor which had been extended to the people from the time when they first entered the promised land. It is called *the inheritance of God*, as having been assigned