force of the כן with the verb, see 1 Sam 23:17 (Gunkel, 401): "so make it known/[illegible] known" = "teach (us) so."

12.b. LXX links למנות (simple infinitive construct of מנה, "count/number") with v 11: "Who knows the power of your wrath, to number (our days) because of the fear of your wrath." V 12 [illegible] make known your right hand" (ימינך for MT's ימינו; i.e., "your right [hand]" for "our days"). [illegible] the merit of balanced colons in both verses, but probably represents an effort to understand [illegible]

12.c. The hiphil of בוא ("come/go") means to "bring in/gather," and thus "get/obtain" [illegible] essary changes are proposed by some commentators to alter the meaning to "bring wisdom [illegible] heart/mind" or "to bring the heart/mind to wisdom" (e.g., Gunkel, 401–2; Oesterley, [illegible] son, II, 654; *BHS*).

13.a. Reading the שובה as the simple imperative of שוב as in Exod 32:12; Job 6:29; Ps [illegible] in imperfect: Josh 7:26; Job 7:7; Isa 12:1; Jer 23:20. The meaning is that of "turn (aside)/[illegible] stay/relent." If Yahweh is thought of as having left his people and the prayer is for his return, [illegible] the traditional "Return!" is in order.

13.b. The niphal imperative of נחם is usually translated as "have pity/compassion," but when [illegible] is used with the preposition על it regularly means "to change one's mind about something [illegible] (Exod 32:12, 14; Jer 18:8, 10; Jonah 3:10; Job 42:6). Thus the meaning may be "relent/change [illegible] of action" (see D. Patrick, "The Translation of Job 42:6," *VT* 26 (1976) 369–71).

14.a. LXX indicates perfect (שבענו) rather than MT's imperative: "We have been satisfied [illegible]

14.b. Lit., "in the morning." The expression is equal to "at dawn" and in the context [illegible] morning."

14.c. The colon is heavy and perhaps ונשמחה ("and we will rejoice") should be omitted ([illegible] I have read the two words נרננה ונשמחה as a hendiadys: "joyfully rejoice/sing out" (Ps [illegible] Zech 2:14 [10]).

15.a. This form of "days" occurs elsewhere only in Deut 32:7; ימות rather than ימי. The [illegible] ("years") instead of שני appears for the first time in MT also in Deut 32:7. Both words are in [illegible] with the verbal expressions which follow them. In both cases, the unusual forms may be [illegible] assonance (see Dahood, II, 326).

16.a. MT's singular is probably collective as indicated by the plural ("your works/deeds") in [illegible] versions.

16.b. LXX indicates ראה, imperative: "And look upon your servants and upon your works."

16.c. The expression הדרך is usually taken as "your splendor/majesty," though the meaning "vision/revelation/apparition" is rather widely adopted. See Levenson, *VT* 35 (1985) 63–64; Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 152–53, n. 28; cf. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea*, 56–57. [illegible] tention is focused on the parallelism of הדרי with *hlm*, "dream/vision" in Ugaritic text *CTA* 14.3 [illegible] and the meaning of the expression בהדרת קדש in Ps 29:2; 96:9; 1 Chr 16:29 (possibly 2 Chr [illegible] which is more likely to mean "appearance in holiness" than refer to the "holy garments" of worship[illegible] ers, but is more likely still to mean "holy splendor" (see n. 96:9.a). The idea of "splendor/[illegible] surely remains with the word in its theophanic sense; hence, "majestic vision." The meaning in [illegible] does not necessarily result in the same meaning in 96:9, though glory and theophany are common [illegible] both texts.

17.a. The word נעם is usually understood in the sense of "pleasure/delight/favor," as well as "beauty" (KJV; LXX has λαμπρότης, "brilliancy/radiance/splendid conduct"; cf. Ps 27:4; Prov [illegible] 15:26; 16:24; Zech 11:7, 10). Sometimes "sweetness" is used (JB, "May the sweetness of the Lord be on us!"; note Prov 16:24; KJV of Ps 141:6, following LXX). Levenson (*VT* 35 [1985] 61–67) has made a case for the meaning of נעם in Ps 27:4 and in 90:17 as a reference to an affirmative, visible sign [illegible] God, probably originally rooted in forms of divination, especially through fire as it consumed [illegible] failed to consume a sacrifice (noting Ps 4:6–7, the departure of the angel in the flame from the altar in Judg 13:20, and the description of Yahweh as a "devouring fire" in Exod 24:17; Deut 4:24; 9:3; [illegible] 30:27; cf. Isa 33:14). Thus in Pss 27 and 90 the longing is for "a theophanic fire employed as [illegible] affirmative omen" (63). Possibly the idea of the fire of a theophanic appearance is reflected in the LXX's reading of 90:17 (above). This technical sense does not, however, mean that there is not [illegible] more general meaning of "brightness/pleasantness," which is favorable and affirming (64). I have chosen "approval" in the translation of 90:17, which seems to fit the context, but it is rather bland. See also Levenson's treatment of Ps 16:5–6, 11 (*VT* 35 [1985] 64–66).

17.b. The colon is too long and perhaps "our God" should be omitted (*BHS*). Possibly both [illegible] and אלהינו are variant words for יהוה; the reader is either to pronounce one or the other. The [illegible] together are equivalent, of course, to "Yahweh our God."

17.c. The polel form כון may be factitive and translated as "affirm/approve," or "say 'yes' to" (Levenson, *VT* 35 [1985] 64). The meaning "give attention to" is also possible; note the polal of כון in Job 8:8, though the meaning there could be also "affirm/approve"; cf. Isa 51:13.

17.d. The last colon should not be omitted on the basis of dittography (as in NAB). V 17 is a tricolon, using the expanded colon technique (see notes on Ps 92:8, 10), or else 17a should be read with v 16, forming a tricolon.

Form/Structure/Setting

Ps 90 is treated as having two major divisions (vv 1–12; 13–17) by most commentators, with a number arguing for two different poems put together as one (see Jacquet, II, 720). Gunkel (399) says that the first part deals with God and human beings, of matters which are of concern to all persons, while the second part is more characteristically Israelite relating to Yahweh and Israel. The meditation, or reflection, in vv 1–12 is the context and foundation for the petitions in vv 13–17. These divisions of the psalm are also woven together by a rather intricate literary structure. Vv 1b–2 form an introduction to the psalm, a frame which is completed by vv 16–17 as the conclusion. Vv 11–12 form a pivotal linkage between vv 3–10 and vv 13–15.

The literary structure of the psalm seems to be marked by the use of an envelope formation (A X B), either deliberate or incidental. V 4 follows v 2 more naturally than it does v 3 (and commentators sometime transpose the verses), so that vv 1b–2 and 4 form an envelope around v 3, which properly begins a unit composed of vv 3, 5–10, and interlocks the introduction of the psalm with the first main part. In turn, vv 3 and 5–6 form a frame around v 4. Vv 7 and 9 put v 8 in an envelope, and vv 9 and 11 frame v 10. As already noted, vv 11–12 link the two main parts of the psalm. V 12 relates best to "our days" in vv 9–10, while v 11, though closely related to vv 9–10, provides a transition to vv 13–15. Vv 13 and 16 frame vv 14–15 (cf. Auffret, *Bib* 61 [1980] 272–75); note the "servants" in both verses. The four-colon structure of vv 5–6 and v 10 encloses the two-colon verses in vv 7–9 and vv 14–15 have a total of four colons with unity of content between the two-colon verses 13 and 16 (Auffret, 275). The three-colon structure of v 2 matches the three-colon formation of v 17. The use of שוב in v 13 rather obviously relates to the use of the same verb in v 3 (see *Comment* on v 13). For further discussion, see the studies by Schreiner and Auffret.

The content of the psalm is also intricately formulated. Vv 1b–2 express confidence in God and gratitude for his help through the generations, affirming his everlasting nature. These verses are directly addressed to God in the language of prayer, which continues throughout the psalm. Vv 3–11 reflect on the human condition of mortality and life under divine wrath and ends with the petition in v 12. The reflective language constitutes a kind of complaint, but is not in the language common to the individual and communal laments (see the discussions by Westermann, "Der 90. Psalm"; idem, "Psalm 90," 158–65), though the complaint becomes rather specific in vv 7–10. The petitions of vv 13–17 are direct and contain language common to the laments. Thus the psalm is a communal prayer composed of grateful reflection, complaint, and petitions for gracious divine action.

The speaker in the psalm is not specifically identified (apart from the title), but vv 13 and 16 clearly indicate that the prayer represents the experience, reflection, and petitions of a community of people who identify themselves as the "servants" of Yahweh. The post-exilic use of the term "servants" for faithful members of the Israelite communities (see Isa 56:6; 65:8–9; 65:13–15; 66:14; cf. Mal 3:18; 3:22[4:4]; Ps 123:2; 134:1; 135:1) is evidence for the origin of this psalm in those communities. We may assume that the speaker is one of the "servants" whose prayer is designed to encouraged and instruct his/her distressed fellow "servants."

Though the context(s) of the psalm's composition and use cannot be absolutely fixed, the ascription of the psalm to Moses in the title is undoubtedly the result of later (probably post-exilic) scribal exegesis, even though the Mosaic origin of the psalm is still defended by a few scholars; among older commentators Delitzsch is notable. Dahood (II, 322) argues that archaic language in the psalm points to an early date of composition, possibly in the ninth century B.C.E., but not to Moses. We cannot follow exactly the midrashic tracks of the scribes who attributed the psalm to Moses, but their general course is reasonably clear. Earlier traditions had associated him with songs and poetry (Exod 15; Deut 31:30–32:47), and the similarities of language between Ps 90 and the song of Moses in Deut 31:30–32:47 was probably the starting point for either the composition of Ps 90 and/or its assignment to Moses, who is further designated as "the man of God" (cf. Deut 33:1; Josh 14:6; Ezra 3:2). Various linguistic parallels between the song of Moses and Ps 90 strengthen the relationship with Moses: e.g., the unusual ימות ("days") and שנות ("years") in v 15 are found together in Deut 32:7; the noun פעל ("work") in v 16 occurs in the Pentateuch only in Deut 32:4 and 33:11 (Delitzsch, III, 59). Freedman has observed that only Moses and Amos, apart from Ps 90, are able to intercede with God and get him to "repent" (נחם, "change one's mind/relent"): see Exod 32:12, 14; Amos 7:1–3, 6, though Yahweh does נחם in other contexts for other reasons (e.g., Jonah 3:10; cf. Jer 15:1, 6)—in fact only Moses *tells* God to נחם (Amos only says "Forgive" and "Stop it!"). Thus it is likely that the scribe(s) who put Moses in the title of Ps 90 was/were aware that only Moses could tell God to "turn" and "change his mind." Freedman suggests that Ps 90 was composed with the episode of Exod 32 in mind and "imagined in poetic form how Moses may have spoken in the circumstances of Exodus 32." See "Who Asks (or Tells) God to Repent?" *Bible Review* 1, 4 (1985) 56–59. In any case, such clues are all the scribes needed; the assignment to Moses required no extraordinary exegetical ingenuity (see E. Slomovic, "Formation of Historical Titles in the Books of Psalms," *ZAW* 91 [1979] 376).

The content of the psalm indicates long-lasting communal distress and need (vv 13–15), perhaps long and exhausting hardships from famine and disease (Johnson, *CPIP*, 191). The speaker and the community appear to have lived close to death for an extended time. The communal distress is not specifically defined, but the scribal interpretation of the psalm as Mosaic naturally took the time of affliction and distress in v 15 as a reference to the servitude of Israel in Egypt (Eerdmans, 430), which is reflected in the Targum for v 1: "A prayer of Moses the prophet, when the people of Israel sinned in the desert" (an interpretation which influenced older commentaries such as that of Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms*, III, 1–2). However, the experience of exile after 587 B.C.E. is much more probable. Vawter (*CBQ* 37 [1975] 460–70) argues for a close relationship between Ps 90 and the developed wisdom of the post-exilic period, and finds similarities between the psalm and the wisdom inspired prayer in the Wisd 9:1–18; 15:1–3. Mowinckel (*PIW*, II, 102) asserts that "Obviously the psalm derives from Jewish times, not from the earliest period." Von Rad ("Psalm 90," 221) is satisfied to assume that the psalm "derives from about the same intellectual and theological situation as Ecclesiastes," associating it with wisdom thought (also Müller, *ZTK* 81 [1984] 266–68) and judges it: "certainly post-exilic. We cannot fix the date of its writing any more precisely than that" (222).

The psalm has the general nature of a prayer of lament: complaint in vv 7–10 and petitions in vv 13–17. Features common in individual laments are found in the use of the imperative שובה ("turn/return") directed to Yahweh in v 13 (Ps 6:5; 7:8; 80:15; cf. 126:4), in the "How long!" of v 13 (cf. Ps 6:4; 74:10; 94:3), and the commitment to praise when the petitions are answered in v 14b (Müller, 268). Because of these features the reader might postulate a worship service of communal prayers of lament as the appropriate context of Ps 90—and, indeed, the psalm may have been used in such ceremonies (Kraus, II, 796–97). A model for such an occasion is provided by Joel 2:12–17 which depicts the community gathered in the temple to pray for divine mercy and deliverance (note the use of שוב and נחם in Joel 2:14 and Ps 90:13). See also Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 51; 1 Kgs 8:33–40; for evidence of regular services of repentances and fasting in Jerusalem after 587 B.C.E., see Jer 41:4–8; Zech 7:1–7; 8:18–19.

On the other hand, the sharply delineated conditions of immediate distress which seem to characterize the communal laments are missing in Ps 90 (Kraus, II, 797; Müller, *ZTK* 81 [1984] 266–67): complaint about the actions of enemies, cries of distress, drought or famine, and pleas for God to intervene to deliver the people from oppression (cf. Pss 44; 80; 84; 137; Lam 5). Thus it seems more probable that Ps 90 is a literary composition, belonging to the category of "learned psalmography," i.e., psalmography from circles of sages and scribes for the use of individuals and groups, but especially for personal piety and devotion. Von Rad ("Psalm 90," 222) summarizes this interpretation: "The genre of the national song of complaint, which gives the psalm, even in its present form, its unmistakable stamp, is accordingly to be understood only as an art form. It is no longer cultic, but a freely chosen literary figure which an unknown poet used for his poem." Von Rad suggests that the author would have been someone like Ben Sira, whose work is set forth in the Book of Ecclesiasticus. According to Mowinckel, the "learned psalmography" was characterized by the pastiche-like nature of compositions; intermixed materials which "do not keep to the rules" and make genre classification difficult, and by the reuse of old primary forms (see Mowinckel, *PIW*, II, 104–25; J. L. Kugel, "Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, vol. 13 of *World Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Green [New York: Crossroad, 1986] 129–34). Thus Ps 90 probably owes its existence and preservation to learned scribal composers, collectors, and interpreters of psalms and teachings in post-exilic Israelite communities who considered themselves servants of Yahweh, and prepared prayers and teaching for Israelites who sought to live as the devoted servants of Yahweh during hard times long endured.

Title and address to God (vv 1–2, 4). The designation of the psalm as a "prayer" (תְּפִלָּה; Pss 17:1; 86:1; 102:1; 142:1; also 72:20) is appropriate for a psalm in the tradition of "learned psalmography" (Mowinckel, *PIW*, II, 108). The didactic material of such psalms is expressed in the forms of prayers addressed to God. The ascription of the prayer to Moses incorporates both the authority of Yahweh's servant par excellence and the ancient cultural feature (commonplace in Jewish literature) of grounding statements in antiquity. Overt newness was suspect; the more ancient the saying, prayer, or instruction, the more legitimate was its authority. Note the testimony of Wisdom in Prov 8:22–31 and the use of David, Solomon, Job, Daniel, Enoch, et al. in later literature. The appeal to "apostolic authority" is well known in Christian history.

The prayer begins with 1b, which is linked with v 2 in an artistic structure. Auffret (*Bib* 61 [1980] 263) notes the framing provided by "O Lord . . . you" and "you are God," and the pivotal expressions "were born" (ילדו)—of the mountains—and "travail with" (ותחולל)—of the earth and the world; also the parallel between "in generation after generation" and "from everlasting to everlasting." The result is a powerful address to God which sets forth his enduring help from creation on; merging the historical and the transcendent realms of God (Vawter, *CBQ* 37 [1975] 463). God has been a source of help and a refuge (מעון may convey both ideas, see note 1.b. above) from the beginnings of the world—"from everlasting to everlasting" (or "from beginning to end," Müller, *ZTK* 81 [1984] 270).

Creation is conceptualized in the cosmogonic mode of being given birth, known from other creation stories in the ancient world (cf. Prov 8:25 for a similar statement). The statements in v 2 may assume the generative power of the earth, which produced the mountains (cf. Gen 1:20, 24; Job 38:8, where the primeval waters of the seas gush forth from an unspecified "womb"—the primordial waters below the earth[?]; cf. Job 28:14; Gen 7:11; 49:25; Deut 33:13; Isa 51:10; Ps 36:7). Kraus (II, 798), however, incorrectly argues that God was not a participant in the process. The passive verb "was born" in 2a has an indefinite subject, which could be understood as the earth. But the verb "travailed with" in 2b refers to God; it is God who has given birth to the earth and the world, along with the mountains (v 2a), as massive evidence of his creative power.

The synergistic nature of biblical creation accounts is often overlooked, especially when creation is defined in terms of the narrow scope of creation out of nothing. Creation is the result of divine initiative, but the process involves a working together of the divine with earthly and human powers. V 2 roots the confident testimony of v 1b, c in the wider horizon of God's works. The God who has been "our" help or refuge for generation after generation is the Creator who was God before the world began, and who still is. The eternal God who continually helps his people does not suffer from the transitory nature of humanity and of all earthly things which is set forth in the following verses (Westermann, "Psalm 90," 159).

In this section, v 4 relates most directly back to v 2; the eternal God is not vulnerable to the passage of time as are human beings, though we should not say that "time has no meaning with God" (Cohen, 298). The language is

comparative, not absolute (cf. Isa 40:15–17 for a similar comparison). "It puts our world into its context . . . and our time-span into its huge setting of eternity" (Kidner, II, 329). On the "night watch," see Ps 63:7. A thousand years, of course, is an exceedingly long time for human history—a millennium—but to God only like a night watch, which may seem like an eternity for some, but for those who sleep it is as nothing.

The mortality of humankind (vv 3, 5–6). A complaint begins with v 3a which sets forth the divine responsibility for the death of humankind. The meaning of v 3b is the subject of different interpretations. One line of interpreters (e.g., Luther, Kissane, Delitzsch, Westermann) understand it to mean a return to life in the sense that "Human life will go on!" (Westermann, "Psalm 90," 161)—human beings die, but they do not die out (Delitzsch, III, 51). But it is more probable that 3b adds to the expressiveness and intensity of 3a and means that human death is as much the result of divine fiat as is creation. Humankind lives under a divine mandate of mortality, which no human being can escape.

Vv 5–6 further define the process and nature of human mortality. As von Rad ("Psalm 90," 214) says of v 3: "God himself is the cause of bleak transience." He pours out on humanity a "sleep" which pervades all of human existence (though no translation of v 5a inspires much confidence). The "sleep" is a bad sleep, which leaves those engulfed by it unable to respond adequately to life. In Ps 76:6–7, stout-hearted warriors are immobilized by sleeping a sleep which keeps them from raising a hand; at the rebuke of Yahweh, riders and horses are thrown into a deep sleep. The "shepherds" (leaders) of Assyria slumber under the deactivating wrath of Yahweh in Nah 3:18 (cf. 1:2). See also Jer 51:39, 57.

In Ps 90 all human beings are under a "sleep" which leads to death, but which anesthetizes them to the transitory nature of life and the reality of the wrath of God (vv 7–10). They do not know how to "number" their days (v 12), and are beguiled by short-lived flourishes of life, symbolized by the morning grass. The mortality of humankind is compared to the transience of grass in a dry climate, which flourishes in the coolness of the early morning dew only to wither and shrivel under the heat of the day. There seems to be a two-way comparison in vv 2–6: (1) humankind's "days" of life are very brief in comparison to the being of God, and (2) the transience of human existence is emphasized by the enduring nature of the mountains and the world.

Life under the wrath of God (vv 7–10, 12). The life of humankind is not only brief, it is also lived under wrath, wearisome with toil, and in trouble. The "somber reflections" (von Rad, "Psalm 90," 214) in this psalm continue in these verses; the "bleak transience" of vv 3–6 moves to an even more "somber horizon": "We are consumed by your anger, / and overwhelmed by your wrath." The relationship of humanity to God is complicated both by transience and by sin: the guilty waywardness of human beings is constantly before the face of God; sins kept secret from other human beings are not hidden from him (v 8). The light which streams out from the divine face illumines the dark places of human culpability; God knows human beings—all of us—as they actually are. These verses recall, of course, the accounts in Gen 2–3, and also the analysis of sin by Paul in the Book of Romans (Westermann, "Der 90. Psalm," 347): "Here, as there, what is in question is the fallibility of the whole human race and not just the sinfulness of the people of God" (Westermann, "Psalm 90," 161).

Vv 7 and 9 form a frame around v 8 and constitute a literary unit (Westermann, "Psalm 90," 161); note the use of ("for/so") at the beginning of vv 7 and 9, and the use of the verb כלה ("finish/complete/consume") in the same verses. V 9 expresses the meaning of v 7 in a complementary way. The human guilt which God keeps before his face (v 8) is like a radioactive core which poisons all of life, which is completed like a הגה, a "sigh," a short expression of resignation and weariness (cf. Ezek 2:10 and note 9.d. above), or, a "breath of the mouth" (Targum). The days pass by in the wrath of God, only to end with a sigh. Von Rad's description of these verses as presenting a "somber horizon" is well taken.

Vv 10 and 12 form an addendum to the material in vv 7–9 and develop further the description of human distress (cf. Müller, *ZTK* 81 [1984] 274–77; Westermann, "Psalm 90," 162). Even when human life is extended to its full length, the span of the years is full of toil and trouble, and as the years fly by they are soon gone (v 10). A somewhat similar reflection on the eternity of God and the brevity and evil of human life is found in Ecclus 18:1–14, where, however, human life is said to be possible for a hundred years (see also Isa 65:20). *Jub.* 23.8–15 contains a reflection on the decline in longevity in the accounts of the patriarchs in Genesis: after the flood, human beings began "to grow old quickly and to shorten the days of their lives due to much suffering and through the evil of their ways." With Ps 90:4, 10 in mind, an evil generation will say: "The days of the ancients were as many as one thousand years and good. But behold, (as for) the days of our lives, if a man should extend his life seventy years or if he is strong (for) eighty years, then these are evil. And there is not any peace in the days of this evil generation" (tr. O. S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985] 100). It is worth noting, however, that none of the pre-flood patriarchs in Gen 5 actually lived a thousand years; even the long life span of Methuselah (969 years) falls short of the millennial ideal (cf. *Jub.* 23.27).

V 12 is a petition which corresponds most closely to v 10. The need for human beings is for a mind wise enough to sort out the days, with their events, responsibilities, and opportunities, so that they can cope with the transience and evil of human life (v 10). This verse represents mainstream wisdom theology and acknowledges that the wisdom required lies beyond the power of humanity. It is the gift of God, a power of discernment which is not the result of human endeavor, but must be taught by God (cf. Prov 2:6–15). Cf. Eph 5:16, "making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (RSV), and Col 4:5, "conduct yourselves wisely . . . making the most of the time" (RSV).

V 12a is traditionally understood as "numbering days" (מנה) in the sense of realizing how few the days of human life are; i.e. a constant awareness and response to the temporality of life—the wisdom which emerges from contemplation of "the fleeting character and brevity of our lifetime" (Delitzsch, III, 57). This is doubtless true, but "numbering our days" is surely more than checking them off on the calendar and thinking about the reduced number left! After all, we hardly need to ask God to teach us how to count days. We can do that very well. The verb מנה does mean to "count/number off" in its simple forms: e.g., 2 Sam 24:1; 2 Kgs 12:11. But some contexts suggest that more than mere numbering is involved: e.g., 1 Kgs 20:25; Isa 53:12 (KB, 537, suggests "summed up with"); Ps 147:4; Ecclus 40:29. Thus the meaning probably includes the ideas of "evaluation/judgment" and the like. Perhaps the English "deal with our days" gets to the meaning rather well.

Appeals to Yahweh for a reversal of wrath (vv 11, 13–17). V 11 serves as an interlocking verse between vv 7–10, 12 and vv 13–17 (see *Form/Structure/Setting* above). The subject matter of the wrath of God relates back to vv 7–9: note the repetition of עברתך ("your wrath") in both vv 9 and 11 and the use of אפך ("your anger") in vv 7 and 11. Vv 9 and 11 form an envelope around v 10, which without v 11 would lead easily to v 12. At the same time the use of the verb ("know" in v 11 and "cause to know/teach" in v 12) binds these verses together.

Unfortunately the meaning of v 11 is less than certain. Kirkpatrick interprets the rhetorical questions in the verse with one of his own (552): "Who understands or lays to heart the intensity of God's wrath against sin so as to fear Him duly with that reverence which is man[kind]'s safeguard against offending Him?" The answer assumed is "No one." Though the consuming power of God's wrath has been experienced (vv 7–10), its full extent and potential lies beyond human ken. If the translation above is correct, v 11b means that the same ignorance of the power of God's wrath is manifest in the disproportionate human responses in worship ("the fear due you"). Both the power of God's wrath and the quality of reverence due him elude the "knowing" of human beings, which makes imperative the petitions in vv 12–17. Perhaps, also, the measure of the homage not given to God is the measure of judgment (Kidner, II, 330, n. 2).

The language in vv 13–17 is easily recognizable as that of petitions in psalms of lament (Westermann, "Psalm 90," 163; idem, "Der 90. Psalm," 348; Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 128–29). The "turn back" of 13a relates to v 3 with some irony. The "turn back" (שוב) in v 3 (twice) is used to describe God's sending humankind back to dust, but the "turn back" in v 13 petitions for a turning of God *from* wrath, i.e., "relent" (cf. Exod 32:12). Yahweh is implored to change his mind about his servants, who have endured long distress, and to make manifest to them his enduring love, which satisfies and evokes joyful responses of praise (v 14). For the expression עד־מתי, "How long?" see Pss 6:4; 49:5; 74:10; 82:2; 94:3; Exod 10:7; 1 Sam 1:14; Jer 4:14, 21; Prov 1:22; a "poignant exclamation rather than a question" (Cohen, 13), which expresses the weariness and perplexity of acute distress long endured. In this case, how long will Yahweh continue wrath without relief?—an interpretation that seems more probable than the idea that Yahweh has been absent and is asked to return to his people (cf. Ps 79:5).

The "morning" in v 14 is the use of a conventional idea of the time for the answer and help of God (Kraus, II, 800; see Pss 5:4; 30:6; 46:6; 143:8; also, 59:17; 88:14; 2 Sam 23:4; Zeph 3:5 (for discussion of "God's Help in the Morning," see C. Barth, *TDOT*, II, 226–28). The idea is rooted in worship experiences of prayer and the sense of the renewed presence of Yahweh, sometimes concretely symbolized in the temple by such means as fire and smoke, and with the coming of dawn which brought the worshipers from the darkness of night into the light of a new day. Historical traditions which associated Yahweh's saving intervention with the morning were doubtless a factor also (e.g., Exod 14:27; 2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36; also Josh 10:9–11; Judg 6:28).

The "days-years" combination in v 15 is a *leit* motif which appears also in vv 4 and 9. "By repeating this parallelism, the author deliberately links the plea in distress from the communal lament with the motif of human transitoriness"

(Westermann, "Psalm 90," 164). The years of distress ("evil") in v 15 is a specific example of the more universal statements about human life in vv 3–12. The time of great distress for Israel is presented against the background of the days of "toil and trouble" for all human life as described in vv 3–10.

The petition in v 15 is for days of joy equal to the years of distress. This will be possible when Yahweh is no longer hidden and his glorious works are again apparent to his servants (v 16). When Yahweh "changes his mind" (נחם, v 13) about the condition of his servants and bestows upon them his gracious approval (v 17, נעם, see note 17.a.), productive life will be possible; the work of human hands will be effective and enduring, despite the transience of life. The prayer is for stability and worthwhileness in normal human endeavors, so that the somber human conditions described in vv 3–10 do not overwhelm the spirit of the servants of Yahweh and so that they will know that their work is "not in vain" (cf. 1 Cor 15:58; Kidner, II, 331). The visible success and effectiveness of the "work of our hands" would be a sign of the appearance of Yahweh and of the "change of his mind" (v 13) which is expressed in his gracious approval (vv 16–17; Levenson, *VT* 35 [1985] 63). The "work(s)" (פעל) of Yahweh in v 16 is/are that of salvation and "providential intervention" (Anderson, II, 655; cf. Pss 92:6; 95:9; 111:3; 143:5; Hab 1:5; 3:2). The divine epithet "Lord" (אדני) used in v 1 is now identified as "our God," who is Yahweh (v 13).

Explanation

Ps 90 is well known for its treatment of the transitory nature of human life in the context of the eternal nature of God (vv 1–12). The mere brevity of human life is not, however, the major concern of the psalm. "The main point of Ps 90 is not the hymn, praising the eternity of Yahweh, nor the contemplation of the shortness of human life, but the prayer for the Eternal God not to overlook the short life of a man [*sic*] and let it pass away in misfortune, but to have mercy upon his congregation which consists of such short-lived people" (Mowinckel, *PIW*, II, 75). Mowinckel's fine summary points toward the tension in the structure of the psalm in which the reality of the limited and troubled course of the lives of human beings is framed by the confident confession of faith in God at its beginning and by petitions for divine intervention at the end (Westermann, "Der 90. Psalm," 349). The somber portrayal of the brevity of life and its waywardness under the wrath of God forms one pole while the joy and majestic vision of the saving work of Yahweh for his servants form another. The psalm reaches out for "the eternity of God in the midst of man[kind]'s passing life" and the faith in God's grace which frames the psalm shines "like a star from another world" (Weiser, 603).

Without the use of precise analysis, Ps 90 witnesses to a direct relationship between sin and death, probably with Gen 2–3 in the background. A connection between the wrath of God and the shortness of life seems to be assumed as necessary, though the same lack of direct statement regarding the relationship found in Gen 1–11 is also present. In Genesis the shortened life span is regarded as the judgment of God because of human sin (so most commentators from Luther on), or as the result of diminished vitality because of increasing distance from the original vitality of the starting point of creation (G. von Rad, *Genesis*, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 961] 67) and the deterioration resulting from the spread of sin (see

D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOT SS 10 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978] 64–77). "The author of Psalm 90 sees sin and death as interconnected, but an intellectual calculation of the relation . . . is not possible for him" (Westermann, "Psalm 90," 161–62). Westermann argues that this is the point of v 8: the "unverifiable and incalculable" relationship is "shifted to where it ought to be, into the light of God's countenance"—which displays gracious love as well as anger.

The world-view which lies behind and around Ps 90 (as of all the Bible) differs in some significant particulars from that we commonly know today. One of these particulars is that of what may be called a theological-ecological understanding of life. Modern analyses tend to separate the physical and spiritual realms of life and to demarcate the realm of nature from other aspects of life. Even in theological studies a separation of creation from history is common. The biblical approach, generally, is much more systemic and ecological; one in which the spiritual and the physical, the divine and the human, are in constant interaction. Human behavior and what we know as nature are dynamically interconnected; a relationship continually maintained by the creative-judging-saving presence of God. Therefore the miserable condition of life in post-exilic Israelite communities is integrated with the universal situation of humankind in vv 3–10 and with the broad horizons of Yahweh's saving work in vv 1b–2 and 13–17. The biblical propensity to move back and forth from the general to the particular is also evident. The specific distress of the servants of Yahweh in vv 13–17 is juxtaposed with the universal condition of humankind in vv 1–10; the specific is dealt with in the context of the general. The converse is also true. The Bible usually refuses to postulate generalized doctrines without moving swiftly to personalized particulars: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, . . ." (Luke 10:29–30). The accounts in Gen 1–3 shift from humankind in the context of the whole of creation until the focus is on Adam and Eve and God in the Garden in chap. 3, and on to the family in chap. 4. The general and the particulars must be held together in a continual dialectic.

The message of the psalm seems to cluster around two poles. First, v 12 points to the "heart (mind) of wisdom" which can be ours when we allow God to teach us how to "number our days"; that is, the wisdom to cope with the days and years of our mortal existence in ways which will be healthy and happy. Such wisdom makes it possible for God to establish "the work of our hands" (v 17). Second, the psalm's broad horizons, somber though they are, help us to persevere until the saving work of God is fully apparent in a majestic appearing of his glory to his faithful servants (v 16). See 2 Pet 3:8–10. Isaac Watts' (1719) paraphrase of Ps 90 still stirs us:

> O God, our help in ages past,
> Our hope for years to come,
> Our shelter from the stormy blast
> And our eternal home. . . .
>
> Be thou our guard while life shall last,
> And our eternal home.

Amen.