

Day 215 - THURSDAY: July 27th

Psalm 90

Psalms 90:1–17 NKJV

A Prayer Of Moses the Man of God. LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man to destruction, And say, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; They are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and grows up; In the evening it is cut down and withers. For we have been consumed by Your anger, And by Your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of

Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom. Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants. Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, That we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, The years in which we have seen evil. Let Your work appear to Your servants, And Your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, And establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands.

Daily Deep Dive:

Here at the end of Moses life, we will read the Psalm of Moses. This Psalm begins the fourth section of the collection of Psalms. This is the oldest Psalm written. Here is the UCG writeup for Psalm 90: "**Psalm 90** is the only psalm attributed to Moses in the book of Psalms (although he wrote two other songs that we know of, found in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32). This attribution makes Psalm 90 the psalm of oldest recorded origin. It is "a prayer to the everlasting God to have compassion on his servants, who through the ages have known him to be their safe

haven (v. 1; see also Psalm 91:9) but who also painfully experience his wrath because of their sin and his sentence of death that cuts short their lives—a plea that through this long night of his displeasure God will teach them true wisdom (see v. 12...) and, in the morning after, bless them in equal measure with expressions of his love so that joy may yet fill their days and the days of their children and their daily labors be blessed. This psalm has many links with Psalm 39" (note on Psalm 90).

The translation of verse 3 is disputed. Where the KJV and NKJV have "destruction," other modern versions have "dust." The word here literally denotes "powder," though it can have the sense of "being crushed" or, as a footnote in the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh says, "contrition" (being broken and humbled). Paired with the word "return" in the next line, the idea in the KJV and NKJV seems to be that God has punished people for sin, bringing them to destruction or humbling, and then commands them to "Return" (to Him), this being the Old Testament term for "Repent." Just as God would here be telling the people to return to Him in verse 3, Moses in verse 13 asks God to "Return" to His people—not in repentance but in attentive care. Yet those who advocate the word "dust" in verse 3 see

the pairing with "return" as meaning that God commands mortal human beings to return to dust (i.e., to the ground), recalling the curse of Genesis 3:19. Moreover, this is seen to fit better with the imagery of people quickly perishing in the verses that follow (Psalm 90:4–6). It should be noted, however, that Moses used a very different word for dust in Genesis 3. And the context of quickly perishing could just as well mean, "Repent, for you don't have much time." Life can sometimes seem long to people—like they have plenty of time to do whatever they will do. But a human lifetime, indeed, as long a time as human beings have been around, is only a very short period in God's eternal perspective. Moses says that a thousand years (just over the longest time that anyone had ever lived, perhaps hearkening back to Adam, Methuselah and Noah, who lived to be 930, 969 and 950 respectively) are gone as yesterday (a single day) to God—or as an even shorter period of time, a watch in the night having been about four hours in the Old Testament period (verse 4). Early rabbinic tradition came to view this verse, juxtaposed with God's Sabbath command about resting from daily toil, as meaning that the thousands of years of human history are represented by the days of the week—6,000 years of man's sin and futile toil

followed by a 1,000-year Sabbath of God's rule. The apostle Peter appears to have been referring to Psalm 90:4 when He wrote of Christ's coming at the end of human history: "But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise" (2 Peter 3:8–9).

The NIV apparently gives the correct sense of the beginning of verse 5 in Psalm 90: "You sweep men away in the sleep of death." The latter part of the verse and verse 6 compare human life to grass springing up in the morning and, in the heat of the sun, withering by the end of the day. This should not be construed literally to mean that grass lives only one day—though it sometimes does live only a few days in the Middle Eastern deserts. This is rather a figurative picture, keeping with the imagery of human life as beginning and ending within a single "day."

Verse 8 is a reminder that God sees all of our sins—even our secret ones. We may hide things from other people, but we can't hide them from God—and His perspective is the one that ultimately counts.

In verse 9 Moses laments, "All our days pass away under your wrath" (NIV)—so that "we finish our years like a sigh."

In its note on verse 7, *The Nelson Study Bible* states regarding being consumed by God's anger and wrath: "The allusion is to the anger of God against the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness (see Numbers 13; 14). An entire generation spent their lives wandering in the wilderness because of their unbelief and rebellion." Other commentators, however, suggest that the context is not the wilderness experience of Israel but life outside the Garden of Eden. "If fellowship with God could be pictured as life lived together in a Garden, then it was sin that had excluded humanity from such a wonderful life (Genesis 3:22–24). Accordingly man now lives outside the Garden under the wrath of God" (George Knight, *Psalms*, comments on Psalm 90).

The latter idea here seems to fit better with the age limits Moses cites in verse 10. He presents a typical human life span as 70 years and points out that it may be extended to 80 if someone's physical constitution permits. This is not to cap human life at 80, but it does seem to label 80 as being a rather old age for people. Yet consider that Moses himself was already 80 at the time of the Exodus. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, he lived to be 120—and his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, were even older when

they died around that time. It seems odd that at such an age, looking back over the years of wilderness wandering, Moses would be saying that life might be stretched to 80. This fact would seem to support Moses having written this psalm closer to the time of the Exodus, when he perhaps did not expect to live to be 120—so that, as mentioned above, God's judgment in the psalm would refer to the whole of human experience since the Garden of Eden rather than merely Israel's years of wandering.

In any case, Moses' point in verse 10 is that human life is brief and that, even if it's longer than usual, it's still filled with labor and sorrow. It brings to mind Jacob's statement to the Egyptian pharaoh: "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage" (Genesis 47:9).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary states that the beginning of Psalm 90:11 is meant in the sense of a "strong affirmation: 'Nobody knows the power of your anger!'" The rest of the verse apparently means that the fear of God is justified because of what His wrath can result in. The point is that man should live carefully, with awe and respect for God,

fearing to disobey Him. Moses in verse 12 asks God to "teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." The idea here, the central point of the psalm for our sakes, is that we come to recognize how short our time is, to value the time we have so as to use it wisely (compare Ephesians 5:15–16; Colossians 4:5).

In Psalm 90:13, Moses pleads with God to return—meaning, as mentioned earlier, to revisit His servants with help and care. He interjects with the question common to laments, "How long?" (verse 13)—how long will it be until God does what he is asking. When will God return and satisfy us with His unfailing love so that we may be glad and rejoice? (verse 14). Moses asks that God make us glad in proportion to the affliction He has laid on us in this life (verse 15). In fact, He will ultimately go far beyond that. For as the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:18, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Moses prays that God's beauty (verse 17), the wonderful vision of His work and glory (verse 16), would be upon us, giving our lives and work a sense of continuity and meaning. His loving intervention for us establishes true value and purpose for life. "Frail, limited, and sinful as man

is, the love of God can transform what is weak to His own glory" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 17).

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, in its introductory note on Psalm 90, states: "So that the melancholy depiction of the human state here might not stand alone, the editors of the Psalter have followed it immediately with a psalm that speaks in counterpoint of the happy condition of those who 'dwell in the shelter of the Most High' (Psalm 91:1 [compare Psalm 90:1]) and 'make the Most High {their} dwelling' (Psalm 91:9; see also Psalm 92:13). To isolate Psalm 90 from this context is to distort its intended function in the Psalter collection. See also Psalm 103." [END]

I don't have anything to add to this chapter.