

Psalm 90 • A prayer of Moses

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Psalm chapter 90 stands out among the Psalms because it was written by Moses. Now, think about that for a minute. It was written by Moses.

This Psalm must have been written between the time that Moses was involved in the liberation of Israel from their bondage in Egypt and the time when they got to the promised land, just before they entered—because remember, he died. He died right before they entered into the promised land.

So this had to have been written during the wilderness wanderings. What kind of a Psalm would you have written during the wilderness wanderings? Here's one of the things we forget: When they went to Kadesh Barnea—in other words, when they got to the border of the promised land the first time—you'll remember that God had every intention for them to go in and take the land, but they didn't do it, did they? Because of their unbelief, they didn't take the land. They actually completely freaked out and would not believe God.

And so He sent them back into the wilderness for an additional 38 years. And He said this: Remember what the 38 years was all about? It was 38 years of judgment. And God basically said to the Israelites, alright, fine, every single adult will die in the wilderness. Every single one.

And you are all worried about your kids going into the land? They'll go in and take the land instead of you (Numbers 14:28-31). So what was that 38 years of wandering all about? It was about judgment. And it was about death.

I mean, think about that. If you were someone like Moses—40 years in the wilderness, 40 years of watching that entire adult population die. And most likely, it was happening every day because we think it was somewhere between 2.5 to 3 million people that came out of Egypt.

I would imagine that probably every time the people broke camp to move on, they probably left a new field of graves behind. Every time, every time. Can you imagine what that would be like, just doing that for a total of 40 years?

Now, the 38 years was the time of judgment, so we'll say 38 years, all right? You can kind of imagine the impact that would have on your daily experience,

can't you? It appears to be the impetus behind this Psalm. This is a Psalm of Moses, and it's largely about death. You'll see that as we go through here. Here's how it goes. He says,

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (ESV)

And then look at this, verse 3.

“You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!””

Now again, this—I mean, Moses could just be thinking about death, but I imagine it was probably a pretty common topic from the standpoint of what was going on. He says in verse 4:

“For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

⁵ You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

⁷ For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.

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

⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

¹⁰ The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

¹² So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

¹³ Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

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

¹⁶ Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!”

There is something there—there's a line in this Psalm that I hope caught your attention, and that is the request he voices in verse 12: *“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”*

If there's something that we can learn from the issue of death, which none of us likes to talk about, let's just face it. I mean, when's the last time you enjoyed going to a funeral? We do it to show respect and out of love and compassion, but nobody really wants to be there. And it's a difficulty. We don't really want to think much about it.

So the prayer to God to teach us to number our days properly or correctly, that we might be wise about our lives, is an important request. Moses makes the point several times in this Psalm concerning the brevity of our lives.

Understanding the briefness of the brevity as we do, it is important that we understand our days from God's perspective, to, as he says, number them properly or to number them correctly.

Beyond that, Psalm 90 has often been read—it's a popular Psalm at funerals, and I suppose mostly because of the fact that the emphasis is on death and the brevity of life and that sort of thing.

But, boy, I tell you, if you read Psalm 90 at a funeral and you don't go any further than that, you really cheated people out of something special. Because Psalms like this one, as insightful as they are, don't really speak to our New Testament understanding of death, do they?

I mean, they really don't—they really don't do it. Because in that sense, they don't have the ability to convey the comfort that you and I have regarding death that comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament declares the victory of Christ over death and the grave. So much so that Paul says, "...*to die is gain.*" (Philippians 1:21) Throw that baby into the Psalms for a moment. It really doesn't fit because, from their perspective, they just didn't see it. It was just not part of that sort of revelation to the general populace.

But for you and me, who are in Christ, death is something that has been robbed of its ability to torment us, terrorize us, and steal from us. It's been robbed—Jesus robbed it. He stole away its ability to do that. And Paul can say things now like, to be away from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). What a wonderful thing.

I love to be able to say that at funerals. When I've done funerals on those occasions, it's a blessing to be able to talk about eternal life and the hope that we have in Jesus.

The Psalms can give us some interesting compassion related to the suffering that goes along with the loss of a loved one, but they struggle to give us the hope that we have through the Gospel.

As insightful as this Psalm is, it still comes from an Old Testament perspective. And we need to remember that Jesus has won a victory over death and the grave. Grave, where is your victory? Where is your sting? (1 Corinthians 15:55)

It's been taken away.

Praise the Lord.