

A Study in Psalms, Week 4 Psalm 90: The Place for Pessimism

*“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,
knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”*

James 1:2-3

Introduction

1. Conwy castle in North Wales
 - a. **Beautiful**, but very **decayed**
 - b. Build on the sea in **1280’s**; Occupied by powerful **King Edward I** and his court
 - c. Seven **towers**, great **hall**, royal **apartments**, **chapel**, **drawbridge** and **moat**
 - d. Adjacent **town** enclosed by one mile **wall**, 24 feet thick—great military engineering
 - e. Signs of a great society, but **long gone to history**
2. Looking around, trying to imagine what it was like to live there
3. Now just a **tomb**—a testimony to the **brevity** of life
4. Psalm 90 deals with the **dark nature of life**
 - a. We don’t like to look at this side of the coin
 - b. There’s a lesson to learn, however, in studying this somber psalm

Background

1. Oldest of the Psalms
2. Only psalm attributed to Moses, the “*man of God*” (Joshua 14:6, Ezra 3:2)
 - a. Most agree with this authorship
3. Possibly written after the incident at Kadesh Barnea (Num 13 & 14)
 - a. Moses sends 12 spies into Canaan (40 day mission)
 - i. “People strong or weak? Few or many?”
 - ii. “Land good or bad? Land fat or lean?”
 - iii. “Cities: camps or fortifications?”
 - b. The spies report <**Read Num 13:27-33**>
 - i. “Land flows with milk and honey”
 - ii. “Strong people; very large, fortified cities”
 - iii. Ten spies: “*They are too strong for us...we are like grasshoppers in their sight.*”
 - iv. Caleb: “*We should... take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it*”
 - c. The people’s response <**Read Num 14:1-4**>
 - d. Joshua’s response <**Read Num 14:8-9**>
 - e. Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb in danger of being **stoned!**
 - f. Moses **petitions** God to **pardon** sinful Israel. God does, but...
 - i. Israel to **wander** for **40 years** (one year for each day of spying)
 - ii. **Moses** would **lead** this “**funeral march**” (older generation dies)

- 600,000 Hebrew **men**
- Avg Canaanite city: 5000

Why were they so afraid?

Facts

Interpretations

We are pilgrims; God is our home

1. <**Read Psalm 90:1-2**>
2. Moses led Israel as they camped in 42 different locations during their journey
3. (v.1) Moses describes God as man’s “dwelling place”
 - a. Lends credence to Moses’ authorship—he wondered for much of his latter life
 - b. **David** also knew that home was not here on earth

“For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.”

King David, 1 Chronicles 29:15

c. **Jacob**, too, was a **pilgrim**

“The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life...”

Jacob, to Pharaoh, Genesis 47:9

d. Jacob was a pilgrim to the **very end**—leaning on his staff as he was dying! (Heb 11:21)

e. For **everyone**, life is a journey from **birth** to **death**

f. For **believers**, it is a journey from **earth** to **heaven**

i. *“For our citizenship is in heaven”* Phil 3:20

4. Re. “dwelling place,” Moses describes God as **above**, **below**, and **before** us:

“There is none like the God of Jeshurun [affectionate name for Israel], who rides the heavens to your help, and through the skies in His majesty. The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and He drove out the enemy from before you...”

Deut 33:26-27

5. Reminds us of Jesus’ admonition, “*Abide in Me*” (John 15:4)

a. This means finding **strength**, **comfort**, **encouragement**, and **help** for each day’s demands

We are learners; Life is our school

1. <Read Psalm 90:3-12>

2. Moses was taught “*all the learning of the Egyptians*” but learned more walking with **God**

3. Lesson 1: Life is **brief** and passes **quickly**, so make the most of it (vv. 4-6)

a. **Death** is a result of **sin** in the world

i. **Medical science** is a great **ministry**, but it isn’t a **solution**

“For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:19

ii. People made of dust can’t defy God and repeal the Law of Sin and Death!

b. Life is a **preparation** for **eternity** with God—we need His help to learn our **lessons**, pass our **tests**, and make **progress** from kindergarten to graduate school!

c. The **older** we get, the more we realize how **short** life is

d. God dwells in **eternity** (Isa 57:15), where “*one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day*” (2 Pet 3:8), but man’s days are **limited**

i. In v.4, “1000 years” eludes to the longest human lifespan (Methuselah, 969 yrs)

“You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”

James 4:14

e. (v.4) To God, man’s lifespan is like a “*watch in the night*” (four hours)

f. (v.5-6) Mankind appears to God as **grass**, sprouting and dying in a single day

i. In the east, grass often grows in thin soil and has no deep roots

ii. A field can be lush in the **morning**, and wither before **nightfall**

“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF.”

1 Pet 1:24 (quoting from Isaiah 40)

4. Lesson 2: Life is **difficult** and may seem **futile** at times, but it’s the only way to **mature** (vv. 7-12)

a. Here, Moses refers to God’s reaction to Israel’s unbelief at **Kadesh Barnea**

i. Or maybe to man’s **original sin**??

b. God is “*slow to anger*” but Israel’s complaints and rebellion tested even His longsuffering

“Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

God, to Moses, after the people made and worshipped the molten calf, Exodus 32:10

- c. We don't like to think about God's **wrath**, but “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom 6:23)
 - i. Every obituary reminds us of this fact!
- d. (v.9) We finish our years “*like a sigh*” (“*with a moan*” says the NIV)
 - i. It's hard, but we marvel that it goes by so **fast**!
- e. (v.12) **Now** is the time to ask God for **wisdom** to become better **stewards** and **students**
- f. We number our **years**, but life is lived **day by day**. A successful life is composed of successful days that honor the Lord

We are believers; the future is our friend

1. Moses finishes with a **prayer** <Read Psalm 90:13-17>
2. Yes, life is **difficult** and God **disciplines** us when we fail, but there's **more to the story**
 - a. **Overheard** at the **airport**: “*Just enjoy the moment—it's all that matters!*”
3. The emphasis of this psalm is **life**, not death—life prepares us for eternity!
 - a. This prayer emphasizes God's **compassion**, **unfailing love**, and His desire to give us **joy**
 - b. It demonstrates God's ability to make life **count** for an **eternity**
 - c. When **God** is your **dwelling place**, the **future** is your **friend**
4. (v.13) The word “return” carries the notion of God **turning** from His **anger**

“Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people.”
Exodus 32:12b
5. (v.14) A reference to **manna**? Or to the joy of a life begun with an early commitment to God?
 - a. Manna sustained for **40 years**; God's Word sustains for an **eternity!**

“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”
Deut 8:3
 - b. It is **His Word** that enables us to be **faithful pilgrims** and **successful learners**
6. (v.15) Moses asks for blessings “*according to the days of affliction*”
 - a. Remember, Israel **wandered one year for each day of spying**
 - i. Maybe asking for a year of gladness for each day of affliction/wandering?
 - b. Heaven will be **better** than we can **imagine**
 - c. God's **rewards** far outweigh the **burdens** of this life
 - d. The New Testament echoes this message

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Rom 8:18

“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”

2 Cor 1:5

“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

2 Cor 4:17-18

Summary and Conclusion

1. Moses, like us, struggled as he lived his life for God
2. Life is **brief**, so he prayed “*Teach us*”
3. Life is **difficult**, so he prayed “*Satisfy us*”
4. His work at times seemed **futile**, so he prayed “*Establish the work of our hands*”
5. God answered Moses, and He answers us today and prepares us for **eternity**

“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

1 Pet 5:10

Next week, Psalm 92...