

The Prayer of Moses (Part I)

Psalm 90:1-11

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

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Introduction: Psalm 90 is the oldest of the Psalms, written by Moses, who is called in the title to the psalm, “*the man of God*” (also in Deuteronomy 33:1; Joshua 14:6; & Ezra 3:2). The description is used nearly 70 times in the O.T. for men such as Elijah & Elisha. It is used only twice in the N.T., I Timothy 6:1 & II Timothy 3:17. In both the Old & New Testaments it refers to one who spoke for God. The setting for Psalm 90 appears to be when Israel was experiencing the wilderness wanderings. Some suggest it was written right after the disobedience of the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea (see Numbers 13 & 14). This disobedience caused Israel to spend the next 40 years in the wilderness, during which time the entire older generation perished before the next generation entered the Promised Land. It seems best to say that this Psalm was written near the close of Moses’ life, toward the end of the wilderness wanderings (see Numbers 14:22-23 for the Lord’s prophecy).

Warren Wiersbe outlines this chapter: We are travelers & God is our home (:1-2); we are learners & life is our school (:3-12); & we are believers & the future is our friend (:13-17). I suggest we can outline the chapter: The eternity of God (:1-2); the frailty of man (:3-11); & the possibility of mercy (:12-17). Tonight we will look at the first 2 points, touching briefly on verse 12 which I believe to be the key verse of Psalm 90.

I. The **eternity** of God (:1-2)

A. He is our sanctuary (:1)

1. “*Dwelling place*” – translated “*habitation*” in Psalm 91:7 & “*abode*” in Deuteronomy 26:15. It refers to a place of refuge & safety (cf. Deuteronomy 33:27).
2. “*In all generations*” – literally “in generation & generation” – each successive one.

B. He is our security (:2)

1. “*Mountains*” – speak of antiquity & permanence, but they had a beginning (Genesis 1).
2. “*Brought forth*” – literally “travailed in birth” (cf. Job 38:8, 28, 29). The same term is used of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:18.
3. “*Earth*”- the planet generally speaking; & “*world*” – the continents specifically, or the habitable part of the earth.
4. “*From everlasting to everlasting*” – eternity to eternity, or infinite past to infinite future. “His eternity is not measured. It is without the succession of moments, hours, days, years, ages or cycles. The special design in speaking of it here is to contrast it with the brevity of man’s earthly existence” (Plumer).
5. “*Thou art God*” – “El” > the God of Sovereign power; emphasis upon His strength.

II. The **frailty** of man (:3-11)

A. Man’s brevity (:3-6)

1. The **destiny** of his physical body:
 - a. “*Destruction*” – “crushed matter” > “Literally ‘pulverization,’ implies the dissolution of the body into its constituent elements” (Kirkpatrick). What about cremation?
 - b. “*Return, ye children of men*” –refers back to Genesis 3:19, “*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, & unto dust shalt thou return*” (& see Genesis 2:7).

2. The **description** of the physical life:
 - a. God is not bound by time as is man. The oldest man lived to be 969 (Methuselah), but that nearly 1,000 years is but a day to God. Man's life is but a "watch" (4 hours of the night).
 - b. "Men are taken out of life in great number & with great rapidity" (Plumer). "As a sleep" - "Humanity lives its existence as though asleep or in a coma. People are insensitive to the brevity of life & the reality of God's wrath" (MacArthur).

B. Man's iniquity (uncertainty) (:7-11)

1. The **context** of that day (:7):
 - a. The Book of Numbers could be summarized as the story of sin, wrath, & death.
 - b. "Great numbers of the Israelites in the wilderness perished by God's wrath breaking forth in the most terrible manner & in extraordinary judgments. Wrath is felt in consequence of man's guilt" (Plumer).
2. The **condition** of all mankind from his fall (:8-11):
 - a. "This verse 8 tells us why God is displeased. It is for sin. The whole story is told in Gen. 2:27; Psalm 51:5; Ezk. 18:4; & Rom. 5:12-19. We deserve our sufferings. We deserve worse than ever befalls us in this world. We may not deserve ill of man; but we all deserve wrath from God, & God has a right to use man as His sword" (Plumer).
 - b. "Tale" (:9) is "meditation" or "mourning" or "sigh." "We come into the world with a cry, & we go out of it with a groan" (Watson). A moan of woe & weariness?
 - c. Note "days of years" (:10) – By uniting days & years "it reminds us that years are but as days, & that our lifetime may be counted by days as well as by years" (Plumer).
 - d. "Thy fear" (:11) – "Instead of explaining away life's curses, a wise person will recognize God's wrath towards sin as the ultimate cause of all afflictions & consequently learn to fear God" (MacArthur).
3. The **challenge** to our day (:12):
 - a. "...That we may gain a heart of wisdom."
 - b. Next week will we consider the prayer, perspective & prospect in this verse.

Conclusion: Moses has apparently witnessed the perishing of nearly the entire older generation of those who came out of Egypt because of their sin of unbelief (see Numbers 13-14). Hebrews 4:1-11 offers a N.T. commentary on Psalm 90. There is a lesson for all on the consequence of unbelief. For the unbeliever, there will be eternal destruction. For the believer, there needs to be an awareness of God's eternity contrasted with man's frailty. Such awareness leads to the prayer of verse 12, "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*" We will look more closely at that verse next week. In closing tonight, consider the thoughts for personal/family worship from the Reformation Study Bible. "Death is not a natural event to which we should resign ourselves, but a sign of God's anger upon mankind for our sins. Though we would rather not think about it, we gain much wisdom by meditating on the brevity of life, the certainty of death, & the eternity of the God who rules both life & death. The reality of death strips away our pretenses of pride & independence & reminds us of God's absolute power over us & wrath against sin. The reality of death also moves us to find a dwelling place in God that will outlast this life." As the song writer puts it, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through; My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue..." It has been wisely said, "Only one life, twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." To which has been added: "So you better work fast." How wise are you tonight?