

God Is Forever

Lesson Text: Psalm 90:1-12

Background Scripture: Psalm 90

Devotional Reading: Psalm 48:14

Psalm 90:1-12

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³ You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." ⁴ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. ⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: ⁶ In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. ⁷ We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. ⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. ¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. ¹² Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

TODAY'S AIM

- Facts: to show that God is eternal and we are finite and that He is a great Protector.
- Principle: to emphasize that our God is forever and therefore can protect us.
- Application: to show that we are frail and finite beings and that God, the eternal One, can protect us when we look to Him.

INTRODUCTION

One day a man in the crowd following Jesus spoke up and said, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divides the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus then warned, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (v. 15).

Jesus explained that a certain rich man had reaped such abundant crops that he became concerned over his lack of storage space. As he thought the problem through, he came up with a solution: he would tear down his present barns and build bigger ones adequate to hold his crops.

The man concluded that he would then be able to say, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." (Luke 12:19). His perspective was entirely temporal; so God responded. God said, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (v. 20).

Jesus concluded by reminding His listeners that this is what happens when a person focuses only on his temporary situation and leaves God out of the equation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: 1445-1405 B.C. **Place:** unknown

The superscription attributes this psalm to Moses, making it the oldest in the Psalter. There is a good possibility that it was written during the years of Israel's wilderness wanderings. When we see how clearly Moses delineated and contrasted the eternity of God with the transitory nature of people, we are struck with the depth of his understanding. The same can be said of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and others. Much was known about God early in mankind's history.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD (Psalm 90:1-6)

We are going to see a contrast between the infinite God and finite humans; so the psalmist began with a

statement of the eternity of God. If Moses wrote this while Israel was wandering, it would be especially meaningful to express the fact that God was—and always had been—their dwelling place. This term means more than a home; it includes the thought that God is a protecting shelter. It is more than a geographical location; it is our sheltered position in God Himself that is so meaningful and comforting when it comes to our security.

Generations come and go, but God is a constant and has been since long before Creation. In eternity past, God was there; in fact, He has always existed. As difficult as it is for human minds to comprehend, it is true that God is self-existent. He had no beginning and will have no end. Isaiah said of God, "*For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy:*" (57:15).

1. Why did Moses begin the psalm with a statement of the eternity of God (Psalm 90:1,2)?

In comparison, man's time on earth is fleetingly brief. We were created from dust and will return to dust (Gen. 3:19). The Hebrew word used in Psalm 90:3 for "destruction" is not the term that is used for "dust" in Genesis, but the context indicates that this is probably what Moses had in mind. The word for "destruction" is one that sometimes means "crushed to powder," which describes quite well man's return to dust at the end of his life. It is God who decides when this will occur ("You turn").

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "While we all thank God for modern science and the ministry of skilled medical personnel, we cannot successfully deny the reality of death or delay it when our time comes. The school of life is preparation for an eternity with God, and without Him, we cannot learn our lessons, pass our tests, and make progress from kindergarten to graduate school!" (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Cook).

2. What is the end of man's brief time on earth (v. 3)?

Is there any way to compare God's eternity and man's transitoriness? Although it probably falls far short of adequacy, Moses attempted to do so by saying that a thousand years in our perspective is nothing more than a day in God's. Peter quoted the statement: "⁸ *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.*" (2 Pet. 3:8). His context was that while things will get worse in the last days and we might be concerned, God will judge men in His own time.

One of the most difficult things God requires of His children is waiting upon Him for answers to prayer and resolutions to difficult situations. We become impatient when God does not act according to the timetable, we try to set for Him. We must endeavor to understand that the eternal God sees things from a much different perspective and has everything under control. As we see worsening conditions during these last days, we can be confident that justice will soon be rendered and we will be safely in His presence.

A "*watch in the night*" (Ps. 90:4) was typically four hours long. As only one portion of the night, it also illustrates the brevity of life.

3. How did Moses compare the eternity of God with the transitory nature of man (v. 4)?

Moses then described more fully the fleeting nature of human life on earth with three illustrations that build climactically. The first is that of a flash flood. The Hebrew word used is *iszaram*, which means "to gush." It has been translated "carries them away as with a flood." We have seen television reports of the devastating effects of flooding. At times we have seen large buildings, cars, and other items being swept along by raging waters. That is how swiftly life passes.

The mention of sleep is a euphemism for death. When people are swept away in the figurative flash flood just mentioned, the end result is their death. All of us are swept away by God into the sleep of death as if by a flood (see Psalm 76:5,6).

The third part of this illustration is a comparison of the brevity of life with the life span of grass. Moses described grass as growing up, glistening with dew in the morning, then being cut down in the evening, and withering away. Isaiah wrote, " ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." (Isa. 40:6-8).

4. How did Moses illustrate the fleeting nature of life on earth (vs. 5,6)?

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF MAN (Psalm 90:7-12)

Humanity's sin and guilt have a consequence that consumes all of life. This consequence is the wrath of God. This is one of God's responses to human sin. This wrathful, angry response includes God's command to all humanity to "return to dust!" (see v. 3, above). What He intended in the creation of Adam and Eve was ruined by their rebellion. They were cast out of the Garden of Eden to till the ground during their short lives, eventually to die in the "dust of death" (see Genesis 3:19,23).

Moses was also writing from the perspective of Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land at God's command, resulting in their many years of wandering in the wilderness. They had rebelled and caused God to be angry with them (Numbers 14:11-25).

Moses wrote that they had been consumed by God's anger and troubled by His wrath. The years of wandering were filled with numerous trials and failures, along with multiple deaths as the older generation disappeared. Warren Wiersbe commented, "Moses asked God to pardon their sins, but the Lord still judged Israel by causing the older generation to die in the wilderness during the next forty years. It was the world's longest funeral march." God was greatly grieved by their sin.

David once wrote, "God is a righteous judge, a God who displays his wrath every day." (Psalm 7:11). Those who think their secret sins are hidden from God are only fooling themselves (see Psalm 44:21; 101:5; Jeremiah 16:17,18). "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" (Marvin Tate).

God desires that we confess sins and seek His face instead (see Psalm 38:18; 51:2–17). Which will we hide in our hearts: our sins or God's Word? Psalm 119:11 says that we hide God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin.

What had made God angry with Israel? Why do we live under the cloud of His anger today (vs. 7,8)?

What Do You Think?

What was a situation where a public figure tried to hide his or her sin? What tactic did he or she use? How does this serve as a warning to you personally?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- *Rationalizing
- *Blame-shifting
- *Claiming victim status
- *Denying the reality of the sin

Undead Foxes

"Look out, there's a dog in the road!" <Screech ... THUMP!> My dad pulled the car off the highway and walked back to see if the dog was dead, but it wasn't a dog. Dad came back to the car holding a limp grey fox by

the tail. To my mother's chagrin, he threw the carcass in the trunk, a trophy to take to his taxidermist friend.

Twenty minutes later, Dad pulled into the garage and opened the trunk ... but there was no fox! Then from the dark recesses of the trunk we heard a demonic growl, and we caught a glimpse of two bright eyes. In a flash of gray, our "dead" fox sprung out and disappeared into the junk of the garage. Dad grabbed a shovel, Mom grabbed the children, and 15 minutes of screaming chaos later the fox was dead for good.

Sin can be like that. We defeat a problem, or so we think. Rather than getting rid of all vestiges of it, we hang on to a few trophies. An unhealthy friendship. A questionable Web site. A hidden resentment. Suddenly, what seemed dead and defeated growls menacingly to life again and wreaks havoc. Even the great apostle Paul confessed his inability to conquer sin (Romans 7:14-24). What hope then is there for us? The same hope that he had: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:25). —Andrew R. Wood

The concept of *time* is a major theme throughout this psalm: "*throughout all generations*" (v. 1); "*from everlasting to everlasting*" (v. 2); "*a thousand years*" (v. 4); "*a day that has just gone by (yesterday)*" (v. 4); "*a watch in the night*" (v. 4); "*morning*" (vs. 5,6); "*evening*" (v. 6); "*days*" (vs. 9,12,14,15); "*years*" (vs. 9,10,15); "*quickly*" (v. 10); and "*how long*" (v. 13). Here our life span is measured in terms of *days* and *years*.

From the hard taskmasters of Egypt to the wrath of an angry God displeased at their sin, Moses' people had known little in life but trouble. "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (Ps. 90:9). The word translated "tale" means a "muttering" or "sigh." John MacArthur commented, "After struggling through his life of afflictions and troubles, a man's life ends with a moan of woe and weariness" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson). Everything good enjoyed in life draws to a close at the moment of death. That does not mean that we should not enjoy what God allows us to have and do in this life. God gives joy, peace, and contentment to those who walk with Him. Even so, we recognize the brevity of life and know very well that it is going to end one day.

Seventy years is mentioned here as average, and an extra 10 years is evidence of extra strength. These numbers are not a guarantee of a certain length of life but are given to represent the fact that life is brief. Moses himself lived 120 years; Joshua, his successor, lived 110 years. Caleb was already 85 years old when Israel entered Canaan (Josh. 14:10). Yet the longest of lives amounts to a minuscule moment on the clock of eternity.

As good as life can be when one is walking in fellowship with God, it is always uncertain. Moses said there is always labor and sorrow, after which life ends, and we fly away into eternity. The most important thing for us is to know where we are going to spend that eternity.

6. What does the mention of seventy and eighty years illustrate (vs. 9,10)?

One of the things we will never understand in this life is the vast gulf between God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Sin is not just something God can wink at and let mankind get away with it. It is the violation of His awesome holiness.

The context of this psalm as a whole reveals the meaning of this verse. The psalm is not just about encouraging us mortals generally to brace up against the trials of life that are caused by our own sins and imposed on us by God's wrath. Rather, the community being addressed is suffering extensively from some particular adversity, and the question *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? or, If only we knew the power of your anger!* (NIV) indicates that nobody knows the ultimate extent of the affliction (compare 2 Samuel 12:22; Proverbs 24:22). Thus we have the question "How long?" in verse 13 (not in today's text). The community wants relief for as many days as it has been afflicted (v. 15)

The second phrase here in verse 11, "*Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you*" (NIV) means that God's wrath should be matched by our fear of Him (see Proverbs 9:10). When we approach God in prayer, we

should do it with reverence and humility. Let God be God and humans be humans.

7. What are we unable to comprehend about God's holiness and sin (v. 11)?

The emphasis throughout verses 3–11 has been how mortals live under the wrath of God. All of life has its sorrows. It is the attitude we take toward all the toil and trouble we face daily that makes the difference.

The attitude should be that we are to petition God to *teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*. The ability to number our days is one of the most important discernments we may have! When we have this discernment, we will not waste the life process. Life is too precious to waste on counterproductive pursuits.

A wise heart seeks God's will in life; when that happens, one can deal properly with life's brevity and sorrow. To number our days is to evaluate and make judgments concerning our thoughts, attitudes, and actions every waking day! Are we consciously trying to please God or ourselves?

8. What should be our attitude and desire in light of God's eternity (v. 12)?

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that people “number their days” properly and improperly?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

*Luke 12:15–21; Philippians 1:21

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Because our God is eternal, we have eternal hope (Psalm 90:1,2).
2. God's plans are assured, for they are not confined to our lifetimes or limited by our power (vs. 3,4).
3. As transitory creatures, our hope and meaning must be found in our eternal God (vs. 5,6).
4. We should be quick to confess our sins, for they can never be hidden from God (vs. 7,8).
5. We understand God only if we recognize that He is a God of righteous wrath (vs. 9-11).
6. Our brief time on earth demands that we seek God's wisdom to live rightly (v. 12).

CONCLUSION

Make Time for God

Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 is a sober look at growing old and dying. The shortness of human life requires that we take seriously our relationship with the eternal God as He is known to us through Jesus the Christ and present to us in the Holy Spirit.

The church I attend promotes this relationship through small groups for fellowship, Bible study, and spiritual growth. My wife and I join several other couples in a weekly meeting. In March 2007, one of our members had a seizure and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Within seven months he was gone. Bill was only 64 years old. For our group he was “young” and just at the point of enjoying years of retirement. But we were comforted by

the fact that he had a great relationship with God, the Scriptures, the church, and his family.

We all miss Bill. But I am confident that Bill had “numbered his days” correctly, because in his 64 years he had made time for God. Bill now has eternity with Him and the certain hope of a coming resurrection. I wish my dad in his 90 years had made time for God. —A. R. W.

PRAYER

Eternal Father, teach us to number our days so that we don't waste our lives in trivial pursuits or sinful living. Be our dwelling place throughout all generations so that we may experience Your unfailing love forever in eternity. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Seek God in all circumstances.