

## Psalm 90

"A Prayer of Moses the man of God."

Rashi - "A prayer of Moses": Moses recited all the eleven psalms from here down to Psalm 101, "Of David, a song." Corresponding to them, he [Moses] blessed eleven tribes with eleven blessings, in (Deuteronomy 33): "And this is the blessing."

Moses blessed each tribe by name, enumerating them in the same way we saw the rabbis describe the numbering "by their polls" i.e. granting honor to each person individually as a member of the nation of Israel.

This is the psalm paired with Numbers chapter 1. The theme of numbering is in **verse 12** - "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

We number our days in the same way, honoring each day as an individual opportunity to serve God, to not be wasted, to dedicate to Him - i.e. "seizing the day" and living in the moment rather than sleepwalking through life.

At the same time this psalm serves also as dirge for the generation that experienced God's wrath (**Numbers 14**) by being swallowed up in the wilderness, whose story is related in the Book of Numbers. It emphasizes the temporary and fleeting nature of human life.

**Psalm 90:1** - "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

"Lord" = *Adonai* - emphasizing God as ruler and Lord.

"dwelling place" could also be translated as stronghold or refuge with a slight change of vowel point. The Targum has "helper."

The Promised Land is really only a shadow of our real dwelling place, God Himself.

Psalm 90:2 - "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth (*erets*) and the world (*tebel*), even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (*E*)."

"world" = *tebel* - The habitable world, the world's population

The picture is of a birth -

"brought forth" = *yalad* - to bear, give birth as a mother, beget as a father, be delivered of a child.

Psalm 2:7 - "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten you (*yalad*)."

"formed" = *chuwl* - twisted in the pain of childbirth, but also dancing or whirling in a circle. Also to create - possibly referring to the whirling of a potter's wheel?

The same two words are used here, speaking of Israel:

- **Deuteronomy 32:18** - "You ignored the Rock who brought you forth; you forgot the God who gave you birth."

"From everlasting to everlasting" - (literally, from hidden time to hidden). The beginning of time and the end are equally hidden from our finite understanding.

God's eternal existence is contrasted with man's fleeting life.

**Psalm 90:3** - "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men."

Jewish translation: "You bring man to the crushing point"

destruction = *dakkâ* - pulverization, this implies the dissolution of the body into its constituent elements. Beaten or broken small or very fine.

- **Genesis 3:19** : "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

LXX - "Thou turnest man to humiliation"

Rashi - You bring agonies upon man until You reduce him to a weakened state, near death, and You tell him with these agonies, "Return, O sons of men from your evil ways."

The LXX sees it as a cry: "Turn not man to dust, but say rather..."

The word for "man" = *enosh* - literally "mortal" - meaning humanity in its weakness, vs. "*adam*." The Messianic term "Son of Man" used in Daniel 7:13 is "*bar enosh*." Christ as the Son of Man became one of us in our weakness.

"return" = *shuwb*

### Human Life is Fleeting

**Psalm 90:4-6** - "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth."

Rashi - You said to Adam (**Genesis 2:17**): "for on the day you eat of it, you will surely die," and he lived nine hundred and thirty years. We find that a thousand years equal one whole day and a little of the night with it.

"they are as a sleep" - The years of the generations are seventy years, as is explained at the end of the chapter (verse 10): "The days of our years because of them are

seventy years," and they are regarded as one sleep. As the matter that is said (**Psalm 126:1**) "When the Lord returns the returnees to Zion, we shall be like dreamers." This was stated regarding the Babylonian exile, which lasted seventy years.

"sleep in the morning" - i.e. like a fading dream, almost unreal and escaping our grasp and memory

Ancient Jews divided the night into three "watches." A "watch" in the night lasts only three or four hours. In the New Testament, following Roman custom, the night had four watches.

- **2 Peter 3:8** - "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

"as with a flood" - a sudden unexpected flash flood could take away a nearby hut in a moment.

- **Job 27:20** - For the wicked man, "Terrors overtake him like a flood; a tempest sweeps him away in the night." ...Along with this life's honors, riches and pleasures.

Every day that passes, multitudes of every age, sex, condition and rank are swept away and consigned to the grave - as they would be if a raging flood should sweep over a land.

- *Barnes' Notes*

**Psalm 90:7** - "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled."

"consumed" = *kalah* - consumed, ended, completed, finished, destroyed

Our rebellion and disobedience has accomplished its goal, which is to bring us to destruction. It has completed its evil work.

This is especially referring to the doomed generation of the Book of Numbers.

- **Numbers 14:33** - "And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness."

"troubled" = *bahal* - to tremble inwardly, to be disturbed, dismayed, terrified, anxious

**Psalm 90:8** - "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance."

Compare:

- **Psalm 19:12** - "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

- **Psalm 44:21** - "Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart."

- **Psalm 69:5** - "You know my folly, O God, and my guilt is not hidden from You."

- **Psalm 139:1** - "O LORD, You have searched me and known me."

- **Psalm 139:2** - "You know when I sit and when I rise; You understand my thoughts from afar."

- **Proverbs 15:11** - "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD--how much more the hearts of men!"

- **Jeremiah 17:10** - "I, the LORD, search the heart; I test the mind to reward a man according to his way, by what his deeds deserve."

Usually God's countenance shines as favor. But here it illuminates our sins, which come before his face for examination and evidence against us. His pardon puts them behind his back:

- **Isaiah 38:17** - "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

**Psalm 90:9** - "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told."

"in thy wrath = "under thy wrath"

"tale that is told" = *hegeh* - a moan, a growling, a sigh, a muttering; or a meditation, a thought.

Targum: "We have consumed the days of our life as the breath or vapor of the mouth in winter" That bit of fog which rapidly disappears.

James quotes this: "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." (**James 4:14**)

**Psalm 90:10** - "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow (*âven*); for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

"sorrow" = *âven* - vanity, from a word that means "panting"; self-effort, and therefore iniquity as it is sometimes translated.

**Seventy years?**

Some compare this to the statement in Genesis:

- **Genesis 6:3** - "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years."

This could be referring to the time left until the Flood. And the Psalm passage could refer to those who would die in the wilderness.

Moses died at the age of a hundred and twenty (**Deuteronomy 34:7**), Aaron at the age of a hundred and twenty-three (**Numbers 33:39**), and Miriam at an age which was even more advanced (**Numbers 20:1**; comp. **Exodus 2:4**). David lived to age 70, (**2 Samuel 5:4**).

But Rashi explains this verse is referring to the time of exile in Babylon, 70 years. (See above, verse 5) "He says: According to the number of our years, which are few, so shall You chastise us."

- **Ecclesiastes 11:8** - "So if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is futile."

- **Ecclesiastes 12:1** - "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them"

**Psalm 90:11** - "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

Who understands or lays to heart the intensity of God's wrath against sin so as to fear Him duly with that reverence which is man's safeguard against offending Him?

- *Cambridge Bible*

It could also be rendered: "No one knows what Thy anger can do..."

Some, like the peoples taken by the flood, and the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, tasted it. Among the living, only Christ truly experienced it on the cross and understood it.

"according to thy fear, so is thy wrath" - the actual experience of God's wrath even outstrips our fears.

**Psalm 90:12** - "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Out of the recognition of our frailty and the fleeting nature of life, wisdom grows in our hearts. A short life should be wisely spent. Live as if the present one was our last.

## A Cry for Mercy

**Psalm 90:13-14** - "Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

"early" = in the morning

"Return: = *shuwb* - to turn, repent

Targum: "satisfy us with thy goodness in the world, which is like to the morning"

Isaac ben Moses Arama, 15th century rabbi and scholar, associated the "morning" in this verse with the time of the resurrection of the dead.

- **Hosea 6:3** - "...his going forth is prepared as the morning..."

**Psalm 90:15** - "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Rashi - Cause us to rejoice in the days of our Messiah according to the number of days that You afflicted us in the exiles and according to the number of years that we experienced evil.

The wilderness wanderings of 40 years were analogous to the 40 days the spies spent in Canaan. The Jews considered the days of Messiah would last 400 years to make up for the 400 years they were afflicted:

- **Genesis 15:13** - "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years"

**Psalm 90:16** - "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children."

The glory of the Shekinah - as at the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

- **Joel 2:28** - "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions"

**Psalm 90:17** - "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

Rashi - The two times "and the work of our hands establish" [are mentioned are for the following purposes]: One is for the work of the Tabernacle, when he blessed Israel and prayed that the Shechinah should rest on the work of their hands in the Tabernacle, and

one is that there should be a blessing in the work of their hands.

Spiritually, the work of our hands should always be seen as building the Tabernacle, building up the kingdom of God, edifying one another.

- **Colossians 3:23** - "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

This brings us back to numbering our days, living in the moment.