

PSALM 90: A PRAYER OF MOSES

A revered and beloved hero of the faith, Moses was God's choice to lead the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. He wrote the first five books of the Bible, as well as this oldest of the psalms, during that remarkable journey.

As the great exodus unfolded, miracles of deliverance were awesome, unprecedented, continual. Divinely-sent plagues forced Pharaoh to release all the enslaved Hebrews – perhaps 2,000,000 souls. The Red Sea parted for their escape, then returned to destroy the entire Egyptian army. Led by His “cloud by day and fire by night,” God's people received manna from heaven for food, water that gushed from solid rock, and victories over far superior enemy forces. They witnessed His majesty as Moses received the Law on thundering Mt. Sinai. Their elders saw His very presence. Yet after all this and more, the Israelites continually distrusted, accused, and defied their faithful God.

1. a. Briefly recap the events at the border of the land--Numbers 13:21, 25-33, 14:1-4.

- b. What was the result of their decision, according to Numbers 14:19-24, 28-33?

For the next 40 years God cared for His people as they lived out (and learned from) the consequences of their unbelief. It was during this time that Moses penned this prayer. Read Psalm 90. And as you begin your study, ask God to open His Word to you.

2. Re-read verse 1. Note the first truth God causes Moses to recall: *Lord, you have been our dwelling place (also lit. home, refuge, shelter) through all generations*. Think what those specific words might mean to the Israelites at that time—tell how they encourage us.

This psalm will deepen our understanding of that declaration! Read verses 2-6, where Moses sets us on course for the lessons he has in mind.

3. Verse 2 takes us beyond the time frame of human generations. What do these poetic words communicate to us?

4. Verses 3-6 build on the ideas of verse 2. Now Moses is not just looking at their present situation but at the fundamental condition they share with all mankind.
 - a. What phrases show God's complete sovereignty over human life and death?

 - b. He is above the effects or control of time—but how are we pictured?

Death—it wasn't the original plan. Moses' choice of words shows his thoughts going back to the accounts he was given in Genesis. There God formed Adam and Eve, gave them constant fellowship with Himself, and a wondrous world to enjoy and impact.

5. What happened next? Scan and give a *brief* overview of Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-13. (Note Revelation 12:9 for the serpent's identity.)

6. In place of bliss comes a grievous flood of consequences. The rest of Genesis 3 tells more, but what's the bottom line in Genesis 3:19b, Romans 5:12 and Hebrews 9:27?

7. Personal: Like Adam and Eve (and the Israelites) each of us has the awesome privilege of choice and real impact. From their stories, what truths stand out to you?

8. Psalm 90:7-10 describes more of the fallout of the choice made in Eden. List the facts of human existence given here. (What a sad contrast to God's original plan.)

Note that sin is the heart of the matter, the root cause of misery and death. A holy God must respond to it with wrath. Ray Steadman discusses sin and wrath: *wrath is...God's moral integrity. He says...'face the truth. You were made for me. If you, in the dignity of human choice I've given you, decide you don't want me...you'll have to face the consequences.'* His absence is destructive to human life...it is God's wrath. God gives us our demanded independence but His grace actually holds back the full impact of our choice and seeks our rescue and return (as we'll see.)

9. Verse 11 asks, *who considers the power of thy anger?* We stubborn, deceived humans reject the reason for life's pain just as we do the fear (awe-filled reverence) of God.
 - a. What are some purely human ways people have come up with to cope with the facts of suffering and death?

 - b. It's perilously easy to fall into these attitudes, but read verse 12, the turning point of this psalm. Where (to Whom) does the psalmist turn in response to life's griefs?

10. In verse 12 Moses models for the Israelites and us the only way to life-giving reality. We humbly ask Him, " _____ us." He begins revealing to us the truth we need. That's how we gain " _____."

Relent (return) O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Verse 13 (NIV)

11. A heart that God is "wising up" increasingly *sees* its own sinfulness and futility and honestly *cries out* to Him for help, not because we deserve it or because He's been unjust but simply on the basis of His " _____."

12. What do such seeking hearts find out? As time permits, comment on the following: Jeremiah 31:3, Genesis 3:15

Isaiah 53:5-6, Romans 5:6-9, John 3:16

II Peter 3:8-9, I Peter 2:24-25

As we've considered Psalm 90:7-13, John Newton's great lyrics come to mind: *'twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved*. In response to anything God has shown you in this section, if you would like to call out to Him in prayer or praise, take time to do so now.

Read verses 14-17. Here Moses' prayer shows God's heart for all who've turned to Him. *Satisfy us early with your unfailing love (lovingkindness, unfailing love, mercy)...*

Verse 14a, NIV, RSV, KJV, NAS

The term *unfailing love* (NIV) is the Hebrew word *hesed*, speaking of God's covenant love. It is continuous, unchanging love, not based on our behavior but on His promise and heart alone. It is unqualified acceptance.

13. Remember the words of verses 7-10? Now look at all verse 14 begins to tell us. What does God teach you here about His *hesed* – His lovingkindness?

Read verse 15, which speaks of the restoring work of God, His work of healing, transforming, even using for good what once seemed hopeless and harmful, replacing old affliction with growing gladness. You may also enjoy reading Isaiah 61:1-3.

14. *As you wish*, answer either of the following personal questions:
Have you ever experienced this process? Explain.

In what situation does the message of this verse give you new or renewed hope?

15. Verse 16 is a wonderful prayer for ourselves and anyone on our hearts, a prayer God loves to hear. As Moses shows us here, what can we freely ask of God?

And let the beauty (favor, delight) of the LORD our God be upon us and establish thou the work of our hands; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. Verse 17, KJV

16. Once characterized by destructive sin, inside and out, now a new creation!. What does the Lord desire for each of His children? (Note II Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 2:10).

Personal: What thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, relationships, responsibilities can you now hand over to God to beautify them and make them His eternal handiwork?

God was at work: His people emerged from the wilderness years prepared to enter into their inheritance. Each moment of the day, our faithful Redeemer is at work in us, too. We'll see the *fullness* of all that these last verses describe when we're with Him forever in glory. Have you finished the study of this psalm with a deeper understanding and love of the eternal God, who is your home, refuge, dwelling place, and shelter? Wrap up your time with Him in His Word by using verses 1-2 and 14-17 as your closing prayer.