



Psalm 90

Inductive Discovery Lesson 11

The inscription above Psalm 90 indicates that it was written by Moses. It is the only psalm with this distinction, likely making it the oldest recorded psalm in Scripture. Composed more than fourteen hundred years before the coming of Christ, scholars believe it was written at some point during Israel's wilderness wanderings. What should have been a few weeks or months of travel from Egypt to the Promised Land turned into forty years of desert circles, until nearly all the generation that God had delivered died out in the wilderness.

Moses led a stiff-necked nation of God's people who, instead of obeying, insisted on rebelling against God time after time. In the midst of continuing disappointment and despair, Moses composed Psalm 90 as his prayer to God, to keep his focus on the eternal. The psalm itself transcends time, written to remind Moses and everyone who followed that what truly matters in life is not what is temporal but eternal, not what is visible to the eye but what is essential to the soul.

In today's world, we are so tethered to our technology that we let time control us rather than the other way around. How on earth did Moses ever find his way through the wilderness without his GPS when leaving what was familiar to go out into the unknown? Would we like the Israelites be willing to leave all modern conveniences behind and learn to trust God for what we need? Could we disconnect ourselves from our I-Phones, computers, and time-pieces for a season to learn to sense God's presence and listen for His voice? The Israelites didn't pass their test of obedience, though they were given multiple opportunities over forty years. If you could just imagine yourself in their sandals for a moment . . . as God looks down at your life, how would He say that *you* are doing?

Did you know ~

When mortality begins staring you in the face, the psalms offer a many-faceted picture of who God is and what He's done on your behalf. In these poems our ordinary earthly life takes on a heavenly perspective, as issues are played out with God at the center of it all. In them we learn that our raw human emotions are not only an essential part of this life, but that they matter to God as well. *Here is poetry which more than vies with that of Milton and Shakespeare, yet it is the poetry of downright reality; and, as "the body is more than raiment," so here, the reality is greater than the poetry which expresses it.* (J. Sidlow Baxter)



Psalm 90

Our Timeless God and the Brevity of Life

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God

- 1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought forth or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
- 3 You turn man to destruction and say, "Return, O children of men."
4 For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night.
- 5 You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep.
In the morning they are like grass which grows up:
- 6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.
- 7 For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.
- 8 You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.
- 9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.
- 10 The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years,
Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
- 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.
- 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- 13 Return, O Lord! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.
- 14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!
- 15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us,
The years in which we have seen evil.
- 16 Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your glory to their children.
- 17 And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.

OBSERVE

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.” – Psalm 119:18

The basic thing to remember about observing a psalm is that it is poetry—and poets think in images. Whatever type of psalm it may be (praise or lament, meditation or petition, just to name a few) the psalmist uses familiar images to turn his experience into a picture. He uses figurative language to reflect on God’s character and express the stirrings of his own soul.

Start by reading the entire psalm through a few times. You might try reading it aloud, or have someone else read it while you listen intently.

Some things to look for: Does the psalmist compare or contrast one thing to another? Does he repeat a specific word or phrase to emphasize a theme? The psalmist may use hyperbole (an exaggeration for the sake of effect, not meant to be taken literally). What experience does he describe? What emotions does he express? What characteristics of God does he mention? Does he make a vow or a declaration? Use the **first column** to describe what the psalmist says. Use the **second column** to jot down your own notes, thoughts, impressions or questions.

Write the definition of words listed in each section. Use a regular dictionary or an Old Testament Word Study dictionary if you have one.

Psalm 90:1-2

What the psalmist says:

My notes and personal observations:

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everlasting (v.2) _____

What does the image of a “dwelling place” suggest about God ? _____

What does Moses declare about the Lord? _____

Psalm 90:3-12

What the psalmist says:

My notes and personal observations:

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.....

Psalm 90:3-12 (continued)

What the psalmist says:

My notes and personal observations:

 **Did you know . . .**

Psalm 90 is the oldest psalm, written by Moses in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. Moses may have written this lament psalm shortly after the spies returned (Numbers 13-14) and the people refused to enter Canaan. After a night of weeping and regret for leaving Egypt, they conspired to reject Moses and go back to Egypt. But it was God they rebelled against. And so, instead of entering the Promised Land the nation was sentenced to wander in the wilderness until all the rebellious generation passed away.

Psalm 90:13-17

What the psalmist says:

My notes and personal observations:

beauty (v.17) _____

establish (v. 17) _____



CONSIDER

According to Psalm 90 . . .

What makes earthly life so precious? _____

What can be gained from learning to number our days? _____

INTERPRET and APPLY

“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”

– Psalm 119:130

Look for a spiritual lesson. The imaginative language of the Psalms helps us to understand that God’s Word provides guidance for our feelings as well as our faith. As you look for spiritual lessons, keep in mind that this collection of prayers and songs teaches us how to worship God—not just with our lips but with our lives. While the Psalms address all aspects of life and human experience, ultimately they point us back to our Creator.

Ask: What is the theme of this psalm? How does the psalmist express himself to God? What does this psalm reveal about God’s character or His relationship with His people? Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or avoid? **State the lesson in one simple sentence.**

“I pondered the direction of my life and I turned to follow Your statutes.

I will hurry, without lingering, to obey Your commands.”

– Psalm 119:59-60 NLT

We don’t read the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to **put it into action.**

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to obey what we have learned. Ask yourself: What can I learn from the psalmist’s experience? How does this help to line up my feelings with my faith? Does it provide comfort? Does it provide correction? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. **Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.**

Psalm 90:1-2

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

_____?

Psalm 90:3-12

Lesson: _____

Application: _____
_____?

Psalm 90:13-17

Lesson: _____

Application: _____
_____?

Summary

Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the psalm is about. _____

Give your own title to the psalm to help you remember what it says.

Up close and personal

**Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
Psalm 90:1-2**

Memorize God’s Word

Choose the translation you prefer to memorize the verse in and re-write it here.

Meditate on God’s Word

As you memorize this verse, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea: the longer it steeps, the richer the flavor. So give yourself permission to slowly savor God’s Word! Use the questions below (like a tea bag) to keep dipping into this verse.

Challenge alert: You won’t always see an obvious answer directly from the verse. Just *think and pray* about it and share what the Lord brings to your heart and mind.

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God? (For example, look for signs of His character, His attributes, His works, His promises.)

Look around. What does this verse teach you about the world and people in general?

Look within. What does this verse teach you about yourself?

Look ahead. Does this verse give you reason to hope? Briefly share your thoughts.

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth found in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

Make God's Word Your Prayer

As you memorize and meditate on this verse, pray it back to the Lord. Let the Holy Spirit examine your heart, increase your understanding, and help you to pray. Ask Him for faith and strength to *act* on the truth of God's Word.



A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path

What has been the most important lesson, for you personally, as you studied this psalm? How will you begin today to put what you are learning into practice?
