

# LIFE IS SHORT Sunday School- November 14, 2010

## Unifying Topic: GOD IS FOREVER

### Lesson Text

I. Our Everlasting God (Psalm 90:1-2)

II. Our Finite Life (Psalm 90:3-6)

III. Living A Wise Life (Psalm 90:7-12)

**The Main Thought:** Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. (Psalm 90:2 KJV)

**Unifying Principle:** We want to live in such a way that at the end of our days we can say confidently. My life was worthwhile. What help is available to make the most of our days regardless of their number? Psalm 90 reminds us that though life is fleeting, we can live wisely with God's eternal presence.

**Lesson Aim:** To teach Christians how our everlasting God holds us accountable to the way we live our brief lives, and to show how God wants us to live wise, responsible lives that please Him.

**Life aim:** To help students how God wants us to live our lives here on earth.

---

90 : 1 Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

90 : 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

90 : 3 Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men

90 : 4 For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

90 : 5 Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

90 : 6 In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

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

90 : 8 Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

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

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 labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

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

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

### **HISTORY:**

The superscription of Psalm 90 describes this Psalm as *A prayer of Moses the man of God*. It is interesting that a man who lived to the age of 120 with good eyesight and strength in his limbs (Deuteronomy 34:7) is the same man who wrote about the shortness of life. Note that this Psalm is called a prayer. Therefore, in your study of this Psalm, you should be seeking for the prayer requests that Moses makes.

1. intercession, supplication for anyone; 2. prayer or supplication in general; 3. a hymn or inspired song.

The phrase, "*the man of God*," in the title, is given to Moses in Deuteronomy 33:1; Joshua 14:6; Ezra 3:2; as a title especially appropriate to him, denoting that he was faithful to God; that he was a man approved by God. The Hebrew people were about to enter the promised land; the generation that came out of Egypt was passing away; Moses himself felt that he was near the end of his course, for he had been apprized that he could not enter the land of promise to the borders of which he had conducted the people. These things were eminently suited to suggest such views of the shortness of human life, and of its frailty, as are here presented.

The main subject of the psalm is the brevity - the transitory nature - of human life; the reflections on which seem designed to lead the soul up to God, who does not die. Our time here on earth is short in duration—nothing when compared to the eternity of God the Father—we are but a breath in a great wind, quickly dissipated.

The races of people are cut down like grass, but God remains the same from age to age. One generation finds God the same as the previous generation had found Him - unchanged, and as worthy of confidence as ever. None of these changes can affect Him, and there is in each age the comforting assurance that He will be found to be the refuge, the support, the "*dwelling-place*" of His people.

We can understand Psalm 90 as a final comment on Moses' life and a prayer for God's help in the coming struggles. Many generations of mourners have listened to his Psalm when standing around the open grave, and have been consoled thereby. This Psalm was penned by Moses. It is supposed that this psalm was penned upon occasion of

the sentence passed upon Israel in the wilderness for their unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion, that their carcasses should fall in the wilderness, that they should be wasted away by a series of miseries for thirty-eight years together, and that none of them that were then of age should enter Canaan.

## LESSON:

### Psalm 90:1-2 Our Everlasting God

**90:1** It opens with a powerful declaration of the greatness of God. "*Adonai*" the word used here means Lord, master, owner, sovereign, often applied to God. You can imagine Moses in the wilderness under the constant pressure of shepherding hundreds of thousands even millions of people, however, Moses points us to the fact that God is a "*habitation*", or "*dwelling-place*", a "*refuge*" or "*help*", in all generations to His people, whereas Moses led two generations out of Egypt. In reflecting on the past, Moses recognizes that the dwelling place of God's people has never been in a geographical locality, but rather has always been in Jehovah Himself. <sup>1</sup>What is a dwelling place? Well, it is where you live. It is your home. This statement declares that God has been man's home ever since man has been on the earth. In all the generations of man it is where he continually lives. God exists as a home for man. Here Moses is looking back over the course of human history and declaring that God is great because He is the God of history. Moses had seen the Pharaohs live and die. But God is Forever!

**90:2** Then the Psalmist points out that God is the God of creation. Mountains are always mentioned as the grandest and most ancient of God's works. Moses here is looking back across that record and saying, the mountains were formed, but before that, God was! Before the earth had left the blueprint of God's mind to become the product of His creative fingers, God was gloriously present! The land emerged from waters that covered the earth. So Moses is gradually moving back in time from the formation of the mountains to the emergence of the land and finally the creation of the earth itself. Before all this, God was. He is the God of history. He is the God of creation. But beyond all that, He is the God of eternity. It suggests the translation "*From the vanishing point in the past to the vanishing point in the future,*" thus, from everlasting to everlasting God exists. It indicates even more than just different dispensations, but totally different periods of time for the earth and totally different inhabitants. However, throughout all ages, God remains the same. How great He is! God is a God who never begins; has no beginning and can have no end, a timeless endless God who is beyond and above His creation, and beyond and above all the events of history – the Great "*I AM!*" God is the one place where we can go for constancy and security. Hallelujah!

### Psalm 90:3-6 Our Finite Life

**90:3** The psalmist speaks of man, whose life is short, whose existence at times seems no more important than the grass which grows and is soon cut down, or the flowers which bloom in the morning and die out by evening. "*Man*", signifies a man full of misery, full of sickness and infirmities, a miserable man. So frail is man in the presence of the Almighty God that He who brought man into creation with a word possesses the power to bring him to destruction with a word. The words may be rendered, "*thou turnest man until he is broken*"; not an annihilation of body or soul, but a dissolution (ending) of the union between them; and crumbled into dust; thou turnest him about in the world, and through a course of afflictions and diseases, and at last by old age, and however by death, returns him to his original, from whence he came, the dust of the earth, which he becomes again, (Genesis 3:19) (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The word here translated "*destruction*", has the idea of crushed matter; referring to the body that does see corruption. The idea here is that God causes man to return to dust; that is, the elements which compose the body return to their original condition, or seem to mingle with the earth. Genesis 3:19: "*dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*"; and "*let the soul return to God who gave it,*" Eccl. 12:7. 4. This word "*dust*" refers to anything which is broken or beaten or pulverized into small particles. It could not refer to the inner man which is immortal (1Pt.3:4). God turns man because He wants them to return unto Him for reconciliation with Him.

For God kills and makes alive again, brings down to the grave and brings up. Sin came from Adam and so became subject to death. When men are brought to the brink of the grave, God returns them from sickness to health, delivers them from the pit, and enlightens them with the light of the living, as He did Hezekiah. Moses by lamenting the frailty and shortness of man's life moves God to pity. The point is: God turns till man becomes contrite, and God says, be ye converted, ye sons of Adam. God thereby call men to return unto him, that is, to repent of their sins and live a new life.

**90:4** God is above time: it does not exist for Him. "*...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" 2Pt.3:8. Moses reminds us of this because God is not limited by time. It's easy to get discouraged

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/3715/0386.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>

when years pass and the world doesn't get any better. Since we cannot see into the future, don't make the mistake of assuming that God has the same limitations. We have no sensation of time passing while we are asleep. A millennium is a long time for us but not for God. Don't worry, God is completely unrestricted by time.

<sup>2</sup>"A watch in the night" is a military expression concerning a guard protecting his post. The watch is usually considered such a long time as it is being carried out. Though it is but four hours, once it is over, it seems as just a moment in time. So what this is saying is that a thousand years to our Father is as just a moment at the watch station for our Heavenly Father. One day of our time is as a thousand years with our Heavenly Father in eternity.

**90:5** Moses is writing this Psalm after seeing over a million people die in the wilderness. All of those who came out of Egypt were condemned to die for their rebellion against God's plan to enter the Promised Land. <sup>3</sup>"**Thou carriest them away as with a flood**" – The idea is, that they were swept off as if a torrent bore them from the earth, carrying them away without regard to order, rank, age, or condition. So death makes no discrimination. Every day that passes, multitudes of every age, sex, condition, rank, are swept away and consigned to the grave - as they would be if a raging flood should sweep over a land. Life is compared to a stream, ever gliding away; but sometimes it is as a mighty torrent, when by reason of plague, famine, or war, thousands are swept away daily. Death comes as a flood. The flood is continually flowing, and they are carried away with it; as soon as we are born we begin to die, and every day of our life carries us so much nearer death.

**90:5b-6 "They are as a sleep"** – they consider not their own frailty, nor is even aware of how near the approach to an awful eternity. Thus we have a picture of God who can and does "*engulf men in sleep.*" The word "*sleep*" is a figure of speech for death. Also the idea that human life resembles a sleep, because it seems to pass so swiftly; to accomplish so little; to be so filled with dreams and visions, none of which remain or become permanent. Before it (life) can be well known of what it is, it's over and lost in oblivion; and so short is that human life.

In the morning the grass of the field covers the meadows with the beauty of youth. This metaphor makes great sense in the hot, dry climate of Israel and most of the Middle East. The small sprigs of grass that grow in the morning by means of the heavy dew are dried up and withered by the hot sun by the evening. Some understand: the morning, to be of the resurrection, when there will be a change for the better, but it is rather to be understood of the flourishing of men in the morning of youth. Life is like grass, which, though changing under the influence of the night's dew, and flourishing in the morning, is soon withered and cut down. This is the part pertaining to in the evening—Man, in his prime, does but flourish as the grass, which is weak, and low, and tender, and exposed, and which, when the winter of old age comes, will wither of itself: but he may be mown down by disease or disaster, as the grass is, in the midst of summer or the aging of winter. We are taught, that the frailty, vanity, and shortness of man's life is such—All flesh is as grass.

The eternal world is real; all here is either shadowy or representative. On the whole, life is represented as a stream; youth as morning; decline of life or old age, as evening; death as sleep; and the resurrection as the return of the flowers in spring. All these images appear in these curious and striking verses, Ps.90:3-6.

This imagery declares the shortness of human life. But why is human life consigned to such a short expectancy, even if a person lives to be over 80? The next verse tells us.

## **Psalm 90:7-12 Living A Wise Life**

**90:7** All of the original generation, but two, would be cut down by the scythe of death before they would enter the Promised Land, and Moses knew why. <sup>4</sup>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. Sin has provoked Him to anger. This wrathful, angry response includes God's command to all humanity to "*turn back to dust!*" We are consumed, we are troubled, and it is by God's anger, by God's wrath. Sin entered into the world and death, by sin. Are we consumed by decays of nature, the infirmities of age, or any chronic disease? It must have been a very mournful sight to Moses to see the whole nation melt away during the forty years of their pilgrimage, till none remained of all that came out of Egypt. As God's favor is life, so His anger was death. "**And by thy wrath are we troubled**", or terror stricken.

Death is a consumption of the body; in the grave worms destroy the flesh and skin, and the reins of a man are

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theseason.org/psalms/psalms90.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://bible.cc/psalms/90-5.htm>

<sup>4</sup> [http://lrchmc.org/index.php?option=com\\_biblestudy&view=studydetails&id=34&templatemenuid=1&Itemid=89](http://lrchmc.org/index.php?option=com_biblestudy&view=studydetails&id=34&templatemenuid=1&Itemid=89)

consumed within him; hell is a consumption or destruction of the soul and body, though both always continue: saints, though consumed in body by death, yet not in anger; for when flesh and heart fail, or "*is consumed*", "*God is the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever*", Ps.73:26, their souls are saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, and their bodies will rise glorious and incorruptible; but the wicked are consumed at death, and in hell, in anger and hot displeasure: and by thy wrath are we troubled; the wrath of God produces trouble of mind, whenever it is apprehended, and especially in the views of death and eternity; and it is this which makes death the king of terrors, and men subject to bondage in life through fear of it (Gill).

**90:8** "*Our iniquities*" are our sins—always implying guilt, wrongdoing, and vileness. Sin is the cause of all trouble, consumption, and death. When we sin, that is the time to ask God for forgiveness for our sins. Will you sin again? Yes, but that is what repentance is for. Since God is a righteous judge, He is calling us to an account for them; He has arrayed them, or brought them forth to view. Many Christians are all wrapped up in themselves, and think that they can hide something from God. 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) — (A. R. W.). God knows all our sins as if they were spread out before Him, even the "*secret ones*." We don't need to cover up our sins before Him because we can talk openly and honestly with Him. God is not shocked by what we confess, He already knows it. "*The light which streams out from the divine face illumines the dark places of human culpability (guilt); God knows human beings—all of us—as they actually are*" (Marvin Tate).

**90:9** The life of man is rather measured by days than by months or years; and these are but few, which pass away or "*decline*" as the day does towards the evening. Justice shortens the days of rebellious Israel and man. This has a particular reference to the people of Israel in the wilderness, when God had sworn in His wrath they should not enter into the land of Canaan, but wander about all their days in the wilderness, and be consumed there. From hard taskmasters of Egypt to the wrath of an angry God displeased at their sin, Moses' people had known little in life but trouble.

<sup>5</sup> **"We spend our years as a tale that is told"** – In a tale there is oftentimes a mixture – something pleasant, and something tragic; such changes are there in life, which is filled up with different scenes of prosperity and adversity: and perhaps this phrase may point at the idle and unprofitable way and manner in which the years of life are spent, like that of consuming time by telling idle stories; some of them spent in youthful lusts and pleasures; others in an immoderate pursuit of the world, and the things of it; very few in a religious way, and these with great imperfection, and to very little purpose and profit; and particularly point to the children of Israel in the wilderness, who spent their time wandering. Life ended in woe and weariness.

**90:10** "**The days of our years are threescore years and ten...**" which refers either to the days in which we live, or to the persons of the Israelites in the wilderness. God has given men and women a life span of threescore years and ten which computes to the number 70, while fourscore means 80 in this flesh body. However, if, by reason of a strong constitution, some reach to these years, yet in their strength sometimes they have little joy and it does at times serve to prolong their misery, and make their death the more tedious; for even their strength then is labour (trouble) and sorrow, for the years have come in which they have no pleasure in. However, sometimes by our careful planning and right diet and living it may be extended in their few years of joy and strength. Sure we might make it to ninety years old, but in those added years they will not be the strength of the prime of our life. Our whole life is toilsome and troublesome; and perhaps, in the midst of the years we count upon, it is soon cut off, and we fly away, and do not live out half our days. If you haven't thought about it:

- When "should" a person die?
- How you will be remembered?
- Your "bucket list"
- What will happen to your family?
- Where you will end up?

Should one live beyond those allotted years? There was little reason to boast in longevity, for those lengthened years wrought only trouble and sorrow. Moses' life was an exception. He died at the age of one hundred twenty

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/geb/view.cgi?book=ps&chapter=090&verse=009>  
<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>

(De 34:7) and Aaron at the age of one hundred twenty-three (Num.33:39). The body is soon cut off and goes back to dust, but fly away either to – hell if wicked (Ps.9:17; Is.14:9; Lk.16:19-31) and to heaven if righteous (2Corth.5:8; Phil.1:21-24; Heb.12:23; Rev.6:9-11).

**90:11 "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?"** – The angels that sinned knew experimentally the power of God's anger; damned sinners in hell know it; but which of us can fully comprehend or describe it? Those who make a mock at sin, and make light of Christ, surely do not know the power of God's anger. It is expressed in His judgments on men. The afflictions of this life are not to be compared to the miseries which await them who live and die without being reconciled to God, and saved from their sins. God's wrath concerning hell will be equal to the reverence He has demanded and which the wicked have refused to give. Moses and the people of God, though they feared God, yet, confess that they failed in respect of that measure of the fear of God which they ought to have had. So back to the question: "*Who knoweth the power of thine anger?*" Nobody knows the ultimate extent of the power of God's anger. God's wrath should be matched by our fear of Him. When we approach God in prayer, we should do it with reverence and humility. Let God be God and humans be humans.

**90:12** <sup>6</sup>God would teach us to number our days, as if the present one was the last; for we cannot boast of tomorrow; we know not but this day, or night; our souls may be required of us: but the sense is, that God would teach us seriously to meditate on, and consider of, the shortness of our days; that they are but as a shadow, and there is no abiding; and the vanity and sinfulness of them, that so we may not desire to live here always; and the troubles and sorrows of them, which may serve to wean us from the world, and to observe how unprofitably we have spent them; which may put us upon redeeming time, and also to take notice of the goodness of God, that has followed us all our days, which may lead us to repentance, and engage us in the fear of God: "*that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*"; to consider our latter end, and what will become of us hereafter. The passage lets us know that man may number his days, and consider the shortness of them, and apply his heart to folly, and not wisdom. We are to "*apply the heart*" – Not merely mental, but moral wisdom; not merely speculative, but experimental; not merely theoretical, but practical. Our own ability is insufficient through the perversion both of the mind and heart by sin. This wisdom only comes from God.

### SUMMARY:

Moses the prophet (Deut.18:15-22) was unique in that the Lord knew him "*face to face*" (Deut.34:10-12). Man of God (Deut.33:1) is a technical term used over 70 times in the OT, always referring to one who spoke for God. The thrust of this magnificent prayer is to ask God to have mercy on frail human beings living in a sin-cursed universe. Moses begins the Psalm with a reflection on God's eternity, and then expresses his somber thoughts about the sorrows and brevity of life in their relationship to God's anger.

The concept of time is a major theme throughout this Psalm: "*in all generations*" (v.1); "*from everlasting to everlasting*" (v.2); "*a thousand years*" (v.4); "*yesterday*" (v.4); "*a watch in the night*" (v.4); "*morning*" (v.5, 6); "*evening*" (v. 6); "*days*" (v.9, 12, 14, 15); "*years*" (v.9, 10, 15); "*soon*" (v.10); and "*how long*" (v.13).

Here our life span is measured in terms of days and years. Man's shortness of life is shown to be a result of his sin. Verses 1-6 contrast God's infinity and man's finiteness. Moses proceeds to contrast man's sinfulness with God's righteousness in verses 7-10. Man's life is "*short and sour*" because we are sinners living under the righteous judgment of God. "*The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away*" (v.9-10). "*As we gain a heart of wisdom*" (v.12) speaks of the pride of man's heart being broken, its self-sufficiency banished and its' surfacing governed by wisdom. For us to think that we will live eternally here on earth is not using the wisdom God has given. This Psalm is a reminder that life is fleeting but God is eternal and the One to please. When that time comes, we are to have our house in order that will teach us to number our days with wisdom!

### APPLICATION:

Life is too precious to waste. A wise heart seeks God's will in life. What did this Psalm teach you about yourself and what did it teach you about God? How do you respond to this saying?"— "Life is short, and I'm going to enjoy it to the fullest while I can." Take another look at (your) life and who God is!

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/geb/view.cgi?book=ps&chapter=090&verse=012>  
<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>