

“...we were borne away with rapid flight upon the wings of the past.”²

We can do no more than imagine, and that insufficiently, what it was even possibly like to discover that you were a child of great providence, what it was like to forsake one of the most powerful nations in the world and to identify with the people of covenant promise, to be a tool in the hand of God as he made his magnificent power known and his name famous, to receive the very Law of God written on tablets of stone by the finger of God, to lead the people of God on their way to their long awaited promised land, and then to watch as every single member of that generation died with the exception of two men. Moses was no stranger to death, but more importantly he was no stranger to truth.

Moses, was forever reminded by the very name he bore that he was drawn from the water. However, for posterity his name would be identified with the Exodus, the Passover, the Law of God, and the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy). It was the Torah, the first of the Hebrew Scriptures that he drew from in understanding the magnificence of God and the brevity of man as articulated in Psalm 90. He understood that all men would and will die because of the sin of Adam of which they were both born and immediately became a willful party themselves. He understood that God responds to sin with anger and wrath. He understood that death comes at the end of the days that the Lord has numbered for each man, and these days will be few.

The truths of Psalm 90 are both magnificent and somber. They are a diagnosis of the soul of all men and in their raw state are hard; but for the redeemed they give clarity for who we are and how there can be a recovering of the value of the fleeting elements of life.

Psalm 90 is one of three songs of Moses. Exodus 15 is a celebratory song when the nation of Israel witnessed their final deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus account. Deuteronomy 32 comes at the conclusion of both Moses' role of leading the people of Israel (they are now at the precipice of the promised land) and at the end of his life. Psalm 90 comes sometime between these two songs – when... is unknown. However, its insight into this temporal life and the direction given in praying that God's servants might be faithful stewards of this temporal life is transcendent. It did not have to come after Israel suffered a great plague or judgment. It came after the fall of man in Genesis 3 and that is effectively all the context one needs.

Addressing the challenges that Psalm 90 brings to us, Derek Kidner states that it is, “...a rehearsal of the facts of death and life which, if it was harsh at such a moment, wounded to heal.”³

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg.598

³ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 73-150. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 2008. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pg.359

Structure and Outlines

David Crowe

- 90:1-3 The LORD's Relationship with Israel and Man as a Whole
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- 90:4-6 An Illustrative Contrast to Demonstrate these Relationships and the Dynamic of Eternity and Time
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- 90:7-8 A Brief Exposition on the Element of Sin (It is bare before God and it produces wrath)
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- 90:13-15 Redemptive Joy for a Temporal Life is Rooted in the Compassionate Covenant of God
 - 90:13 A Request for Pity/Compassion
 - 90:14 Satisfaction in Covenant Love
 - 90:15 Redeeming the Temporal Life
- 90:16-17 Final Petitions: To See the Works of God and to Have Man's Works Established
 - 90:16 Petitions to see the Glorious Works of God
 - 90:17 Petitions to have God Establish the Works of Men

John MacArthur⁴

- I. The Praise of God's Eternality (90:1,2)
- II. The Perception of Man's Frailty (90:3-12)
- III. The Plea for God's Mercy (90:13-17)

ESV Study Bible⁵

- 90:1-2 The Lord Is Eternal
- 90:3-6 But Man's Life Is Fleeting
- 90:7-11 We Are Brought to an End by Your Wrath
- 90:12-17 Teach Us Wisdom and Establish Our Work

Arnold Rhodes⁶

- 90:1-12 Eternal God and Transitory Man
- 90:13-17 A Plea for God's Favor

⁴ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pgs.823-824

⁵ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs.1052-1053

⁶ The Layman's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pgs.128-129

Steven Lawson⁷

90:1-2	God's Eternality
90:3-6	God's Sovereignty
90:7-12	God's Severity
90:13-17	God's Mercy

James Boice⁸

90:1-2	The Eternal Grandeur of God
90:3-6	The Frailty of Man
90:7-12	Man's Sin and God's Wrath
90:13-17	Man's Need of God's Grace

Keil & Delitzsch⁹

90:1-4
90:5-8
90:9-12
90:13-17

Willem VanGemeran¹⁰

- A The Lord is God (vv.1-2)
 - B God's Authority over People (vv.3-6)
 - C God's Wrath (vv.7-10)
 - C' Proper Response to God's Wrath (vv.11-12)
 - B' Prayer for God's Mercy (vv.13-16)
- A' May the Lord Be Our God (v.17)

VanGemeran further provides what I was wrestling to see with proper clarity in 90:7-10, its shape and general form were clear enough to me, but not the details. This was a helpful element to better understanding the text through the medium of its structure:

"Verses 7-10 develop people's wretched condition in two strophes of two verses each in such a way that vv.7-8 parallel vv.9-10."¹¹

- A "we are consumed" (v.7)
 - B "by your anger... by your indignation" (v.7)
 - C "in the light of your presence" (v.8)
 - D "all our days" (v.9)
 - B' "under your wrath" (v.9)
 - C' "pass away" (v.9)
- A' "we finish" (v.9)
 - D' "our years" (v.9)
 - D' "the length of our days" or "the days of our years" (v.10)

⁷ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150, Volume 12. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2006 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs.82-84

⁸ An Expository Commentary: Psalms, Volume 2. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1996 (Hereafter: Boice), Pgs.741-744

⁹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pgs.593-599

¹⁰ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemeran. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemeran), Pg.690

¹¹ VanGemeran, Pg.692

Derek Kidner¹²

90:1-2	God the eternal
90:3-6	Man the ephemeral
90:7-12	Man under wrath
90:13-17	God of grace

Header

Psalm 90 is identified as a prayer of Moses whose person and general contextual background was provided in the introduction. In this header Moses is referenced to as “the man of God” which as John MacArthur explains was, “...a technical term used over 70 times in the OT, always referring to one who spoke for God.”¹³

Keil & Delitzsch further develop this stating that the title was, “...an ancient name of the prophets which expresses the close relationship of fellowship with God...”¹⁴

Moses’ right to be included among the prophets is indisputable and he was even in this group exceptional: “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.” Deuteronomy 34:10-12

Of the aforementioned seventy plus times that the title “Man of God” is used in the Old Testament no less than six of those references are attributed to Moses.

Deuteronomy 33:1	"Moses the man of God"
Joshua 14:6	"Moses the man of God"
1 Chronicles 23:14	"Moses the man of God"
2 Chronicles 30:16	"Moses the man of God"
Ezra 3:2	"Moses the man of God"
Psalm 90	"Moses, the man of God"

90:1-3 The LORD’s Relationship with Israel and Man as a Whole

90:1 The Lord Cares for His People

Moses begins by stating that the Lord has been their dwelling place, their place of true habitation. A place of protection, sustenance, and stability.¹⁵

It is intriguing that the man who led the nation of Israel to their promised land where they were to dwell in houses and structures secured in conquest and built in victory, identifies the Lord as their dwelling place. He appears to be directing their attention to things greater than dwellings built by the hands of men; and they who dwelt as a wondering people under the providential care of God should understand this and take encouragement that they were the only nation with this magnificent testimony of The LORD’s unique kindness to them secured by promise.

The Lord has been Israel’s dwelling place “in all generations” but this was the first generation that constituted a formal, official, and independent nation. They entered Egypt as a clan of seventy persons and while growing into a nation they were under the immediate domination and rule of Egypt. However, from the moment that Abraham was set aside and

¹² Kidner, Pgs.359-363

¹³ MacArthur, Pg.823

¹⁴ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.593

¹⁵ MacArthur, Pg.823

provided covenant promise The LORD has been the dwelling place, the safe keeper, and help of his people and will continue to be their dwelling place.

Contextually, it is important to note that from here until 90:12 the scope of those addressed in Psalm 90 expand from the people of covenant promise to all of the sons of Adam, all of man. The psalm will fluctuate from precise to general and back to precise again. Not all people could identify the Lord as their dwelling place just as not all could plead for The LORD to turn from his wrath and have pity on his servants.

Finally, Derek Kidner does well to draw encouragement from this first verse where we are reminded of God's comforting care noting that there are darker elements ahead, but they no more have the first word than the last.¹⁶ You in turn would do well to plant this truth in your mind as you continue to work through the challenges ahead - man's sin and God's wrath are taxing realities, potentially discouraging, but ultimately good and there is hope as a redeemed people and the redemption of our days.

90:2 The Lord is the Eternal Creator God

Moses, who, under the inspiration of God, secured the creation account in the writing of Genesis was here referencing a "time" that preceded the natural creation, before the mountains or the world was formed. In making this point he chose to use the immediately recognizable giants of the natural creation and reference the preceding of the very majestic mountains themselves, those large, powerful, magnificent, obvious elements of this world that served as the stage for God's terrific meetings with Moses in the giving of the Law. Before these mountains were brought forth or the earth formed, before time itself, there was God who supersedes the constrictions of time.

Referencing time before creation is enforced by the affirmation that from everlasting (superseding time and creation) the Lord is and has been God. This truth demands worship, exultation, and a distinguishing of the eternal Creator from his finite creation, including man.

Everlasting is the very antithesis of time as time by its very nature has a definitive beginning and end, it contains and restricts, however, everlasting or forever is unable to be bound, by its very nature it has no end and here when it is coupled with a "from/to" pairing it is from forever (no beginning) to forever (no end) - absolutely eternal, eternal past and eternal future - uncreated and outside of time, the Eternal Creator God. This dual use of everlasting is putting an emphasis on the eternality of the Lord God from forever past to forever future. Forever the Lord is God. Infinitely/eternally always has been and will be God. He is the only character or element in the psalm that supersedes time in a context densely populated by references to time.

While the emphasis is on the eternality of God and his being infinitely beyond creation one does not need to lose sight of the fact and reality of creation along with its own rightful merit and place in Redemptive History. "The foundation of this world's history is the creation."¹⁷ This affirmation will be quite important as soon as the immediate verse to follow which in demonstrating the Creator's lordship over man's temporal life draws from the creation account secured in Genesis.

Sidebar: The everlasting or forever attributes of God extolled in the Psalms.

Psalm 9:7	"...the LORD sits enthroned forever...."
Psalm 10:16	"The LORD is king forever and ever...."
Psalm 29:10	"...the LORD sits enthroned as king forever."
Psalm 33:11	"The counsel of the LORD stands forever...."
Psalm 41:13	"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen."
Psalm 45:6	"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."
Psalm 45:17	"...therefore nations will praise you forever and ever."

¹⁶ Kidner, Pg.359

¹⁷ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.594

Psalm 66:7	"...who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations...."
Psalm 72:19	"Blessed be his glorious name forever...."
Psalm 89:52	"Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen."
Psalm 92:8	"...you, O LORD, are on high forever."
Psalm 93:2	"Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting."
Psalm 100:5	"For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."
Psalm 102:12	"But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations."
Psalm 103:17	"But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him...."
Psalm 106:1	"Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!"
Psalm 106:48	"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!"
Psalm 107:1	"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!"
Psalm 111:5	"He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever."
Psalm 117:2	"For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!"
Psalm 118:1,29	"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"
Psalm 118:2,3,4	"His steadfast love endures forever."
Psalm 119:89	"Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens."
Psalm 119:142	"Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true."
Psalm 119:144	"Your testimonies are righteous forever...."
Psalm 119:160	"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."
Psalm 135:13	"Your name, O LORD, endures forever, your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages."
Psalm 136:1	"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."
Psalm 136:2-26	"...for his steadfast love endures forever."
Psalm 138:8	"...your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever."
Psalm 145:13	"Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations."
Psalm 146:10	"The LORD will reign forever...."

Sidebar: LORD or Lord?

Willem VanGemenen makes a helpful observation regarding the choices of title and reference for God in these opening verses. I personally had wondered about the choices here, notably the absence of "LORD" or the covenant name of God. So it was helpful to see that in view of the context these titles, "Lord" or "Ruler of the world" (90:1) and "God" or he "who alone is 'God'" (90:2)¹⁸ establish a proper point of relation and understanding to him who holds man's years in the balance and to whom man must submit his time on earth. "The psalmist states that there is no other Lord than the God who is eternal and who is the 'dwelling place' of his own."¹⁹

90:3 The Creator is Lord of Man's Temporal Life

Beginning here with the Lord's authority over man and his days is an unpacking of the temporal nature of man - seen through various similes and images that continue through 90:6. When Moses says that the Lord returns man to dust, he is demonstrating the sovereignty of the Lord over the life and days of man. The Creator is Lord of man's days and while the exact term from Genesis 3 is not used here, it is clear that the overt reference to dust is pointing back to the fact that it is God who formed man from dust and breathed life into him and not simply a reference to the physiological reality that the body will in time break down and return to the earth.

From dust to dust. Note the use of "return" when it was Adam that was personally made from dust and yet we are all ultimately, but dust... and will return to it. This is a humbling reminder of man's place... what is man... but dust... and yet....

¹⁸ VanGemenen, Pg.690

¹⁹ VanGemenen, Pg.690

Further, the quoted statement appears to show personal intentionality - man does not just die, but is sent to the earth by his Creator. "When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust." Psalm 104:29

"Humanity lives under a decree of death and cannot escape it."²⁰ But why... "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, *till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*" Genesis 3:17-19

90:4-6 An Illustrative Contrast to Demonstrate these Relationships and the Dynamic of Eternity and Time

90:4 The Boundlessness of an Eternal God

Note that while the references in 90:3 are clear regarding man's place and endurance in this life, it is here framed in a more eternal perspective, in the context of God's own existence that supersedes time and is not restricted within it. The thousand years to a day comparison - understand the relationship of time and eternity with God is also picked up with Peter in 2 Peter 3:8 and applied in a reverse fashion to make a similar point. However, neither reference diminish the integrity of a thousand years any more than they do the integrity of one day, but because each hold their value there is a clear comparison of man who is restricted in time and God who is not (see sidebar before for further).

This dramatic comparison demonstrates God's perspective, framing the temporal nature of man and the eternity of God. The image goes on to reduce from a day that has past to a unit of a night, a watch in the night (three to four hours long). What would appear so extraordinarily long to natural man is but a passing day or a few hours of the night to God. Man who is but dust is further framed in his temporal structure of life.

Sidebar: Understanding a Thousand Years, Literally

We must submit to how language is used - if a thousand years did not have a literal understanding to it then the statement is meaningless - some abstract number. If, however it has a literal understanding then the simile holds. The same applies to a tree planted by streams of water - the image is operating off a literal understanding of the qualities of a tree planted by streams of water and not just some abstract fixed botanical object. Another example could be pain in childbirth - it has no meaning unless rooted in a real pain. The simile has no quality to its meaning if there is not a literal quality to the original object referenced. Therefore, for the simile to hold up it has to be rooted in a literal thousand years. With this in view, a thousand years are *like or of a similar nature and quality to* an abbreviated period of time. They are qualitatively similar to God which is the point of the image – they are so radically different to us as finite creatures who have no working concept of a thousand years beyond pegging recollection of historical facts to it or observing inanimate elements of creation that have endured this length of time.

Kidner also introduces another problem to persons who would abuse the language here as they would have to be equally consistent with a watch in the night and I do not believe that they are prepared to do this.²¹

Sidebar: A Watch in the Night

John MacArthur²² and Willem VanGemen²³ state that a watch consisted of a four-hour period of time. Steven Layson states it was a three-hour period of time²⁴

²⁰ MacArthur, Pg.823

²¹ Kidner, Pg.360

²² MacArthur, Pg.823

²³ VanGemen, Pg.691

²⁴ Lawson, Pg.83

Keil & Delitzsch do not provide a time frame, but that there were three watches a night. Further, rather than drawing on how long they state that the emphasis would be that these were a watch in the night... seemingly even more passing and without great event they are over, often slept through or drowsily endured.²⁵

90:5-6 The Restriction of Time and the Introduction of Sin's Influence (Life will end with death)

Moses goes on to express that not only is man but dust, constrained to a temporal existence that is incomparable with the limitless perspective of the eternal Creator God, but man's existence even in terms of the restrictions of time is brief and this is by God's doing. This is demonstrated through three images: a flood, a dream, and grass.

Swept away as with a flood. This first image is not necessarily overtly violent so much as it is a rapid and absolute transition. There is no restraining or stopping this action, man's time will conclude quickly just as a heavy rain and overflowing banks quickly overtake the surrounding earth.

Man is like a dream. There are various conclusions with the finer details of this image that appears to be translated sleep in effectively every other use. However, what is clear is that it is among the illustrations demonstrating man's temporal experience on this earth. Also, without intending to artificially read into the image, sleep and its correlation with death would appear to fit well with the following image of grass – in the morning is renewal (awakening) and in the evening the image of death (sleeping). Further, several have stated in various ways that sleep here is directly referencing death itself, among them Keil & Delitzsch who stated that, "He whom a flood carries away is actually brought into a state of unconsciousness, he goes entirely to sleep, i.e., he dies."²⁶

Finally, if the image is more intended to be that of a dream, while not developed, it presumably could also be communicating the temporal qualities of one's dream - experienced but for a moment (almost man's version of what a day must be like to God - so very temporal and fleeting).

Like grass, a common image in the Scriptures and James Boice states that the image of grass here would possibly be a carpet of green grass that would often sprout in the morning in the Near East after a night rain, but would soon be scorched out by the sun before the coming night.²⁷

Further, in addition to the familiar image of grass rounding out the third image of this sequence it also appears to serve an additional purpose of addressing a cyclical renewal and not exclusively an immediate and permanent end. However, being that this is not some reincarnation loophole for man the image must be addressing something else if renewal is one of its components and it clearly appears to be here. So how are the cyclical references to be understood? As subsequent generations of man, all who will die after their brief lives.

"Perishing humanity renews its youth in ever new generations."²⁸ Keil & Delitzsch make a compelling argument that the references to renewal here are the renewal of subsequent generations of men. One generation dies and another arises. In addition to having a grammatical case for this point it also appears to be the most contextually consistent – the brevity and passing of man and the rising of another generation that also will enjoy but a temporal existence. "Just such an alternation of morning springing froth and evening drying up is the alternation of the generations of men."²⁹

Kidner appears to concur with Keil & Delitzsch regarding the renewal of man through subsequent generations when he states, "The reiterated word *renewed* points to a landscape reclothed in morning freshness, and so to the human scene as a whole, ever renewed but ever fading."³⁰

²⁵ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.595

²⁶ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.596

²⁷ Boice, Pg.742

²⁸ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.596

²⁹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.596

³⁰ Kidner, Pg.361

Fittingly the illustrations of the temporal nature of man finish with fading and withering just as Moses transitions into the reason for the universal temporal experience of man, God's anger.

90:7-8 A Brief Exposition on the Element of Sin (It is bare before God and it produces wrath)

90:7 The Undoing of Man by God Because of Sin

God is not arbitrarily angry. He is angry, but it is because of man's sin.

What was looming in the background is now directly addressed and there will be a substantial focus on wrath/anger and man's welfare before God from here through 90:11. What is now being unpacked is that man's days are ended by God's anger, a clear consequence of the curse – all will return to the dust. All are culpable in Adam and immediately in their own rite too as Moses painfully observed with the exodus generation including his own sister, brother, and finally what would be his own fate.

By God's anger man is brought to an end, his temporal life will conclude. By God's wrath man is dismayed, he is terrified, afraid, and troubled as well he should be given the offended party and the consequence of the offense.

90:8 All Sin is Plain and Known by God

God is angry on account of man's sin: his iniquities and his secret sins.

Man's iniquities are his offenses against God, his disobedience and indulgences in sin. These offenses are here said to be submitted to the most terrifying position, before a holy, just, and righteous God.

Man's secret sins fall into one of two possibilities. Secret sins are sometimes sins that are committed unknowingly - while there is a culpability for them regardless, there are also instructions on how to respond to their coming to the offender's attention (particularly becoming unclean without realizing it). There are also contexts that do address concealing offenses intentionally too.

Leviticus 4:13 "If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is *hidden* from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt...."

Leviticus 5:2,3,4 "...and it is *hidden* from him and he has become unclean, and he realizes his guilt..., ...and it is *hidden* from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt..., ...and it is *hidden* from him, when he comes to know it, and he realizes his guilt...."

There is also the likely possibility that these are sins that one would attempt to conceal, "those acts hidden from the public eye but seen by the Lord."³¹

Either way these inadvertent offenses or these clandestine offenses are made plain in the light of God's presence.

Man in his guilt is laid bare before God. His offenses are before him and there are none that are concealed or overlooked - they are made plain in the light (a reality the darkness hates, but I do not think there is an antagonism here so much as there is a being undone - nothing and no way to hide the guilt and culpability). The sins of man anger God, they have and do make him angry. This is both good and terrifying. Good because God is good and terrifying because we are not good.

Our sin... It's there, it's terrifying, and it will undo us before God and we will return to dust, Adam sinned, we have sinned and to dust we will go. We are all being rightly tied into Adam's offense, just as was later articulated in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 5.

³¹ VanGemeren, Pg.692

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come." Romans 5:12-14

"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Corinthians 5:21-22

All guilty with nowhere to hide.

"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Hebrews 4:13

90:9-10 A More General Account that Sin Influences our Temporal Existence Over Which God is Lord

90:9 Life Under the Wrath of God.

Continuing with the argument Moses states that man's days pass away under God's wrath - appearing to give a cause / effect relationship - man's sins result in God's wrath which ends with man's short life.

As referenced in the above section on Structure, Willem VanGemeren drew out several parallels present in 90:7-10. Here elements of 90:7 are quite poignant again.

90:7 Man is brought to an *end* by God's anger, by his *wrath* they are dismayed.

90:9 All man's days pass away under God's *wrath* and their years are brought to *end*.

Further, it appears to me that on some level that 90:9-11 are a commentary or unpacking of 90:7-8 which themselves are a commentary or unpacking of 90:3-6.

Developing the theme of the final judgment of sin with death - the wrath of God against sin from the outset, Adam was guaranteed death and so now his entire posterity (save Jesus, the second Adam). 90:7-8

Developing the theme of the temporal nature of man's time, even years are almost immeasurably small when a 1,000 are but a watch in the night. 90:3-6

Finally, this brings us to days leading to years, all so immeasurably nothing... in view of eternity. So very fleeting - ending like a sigh.

Keil & Delitzsch argue that this is directly referencing the generation that has and/or is passing in the wilderness. The generation that experienced the exodus, but will not enjoy the promised land.³²

90:10 The Temporal Expectations of this Life

Here we have such a precise anticipation of what man can expect of his life, but ironically it was written by Moses who himself lived to be 120 and even at that age, "His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated." Deuteronomy 34:7
Moses was then followed by Joshua who himself lived to be 110 years old.

Further, beyond these examples there are numerous persons who have and continue to live well into their seventies, eighties, and beyond so this clearly was not a prescription, but a description of the brief life man might can hope for short of accident or tragedy not taking him sooner.

³² Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.597

So what is the intent here? It is a continuation from 90:9, years and days... days pass and years end. Man can expect a relatively short life in the larger scheme of things. Man can also anticipate that those years will be marked by toil and trouble.

Toil and trouble are said to be attributed to the unfaithfulness and disobedience of members within the larger community and not necessarily every member.³³

Toil and trouble being the external and peripheral elements of life of which so many have applied their strength and attention, such as these are and have brought nothing but toil and trouble in this brief life.³⁴ “The poet glances back from the end of life to the course of life. And life, with all of which it had been proud, appears as an empty burden; for it passed swiftly by and we fled away, we were borne away with rapid flight upon the wings of the past.”³⁵

A very somber conclusion:

“Even more disquieting is the thought that people’s very existence characterizes itself as sinful and that God sees nothing but humankind’s sin (‘before you,’ ‘in the light of your presence,’ v.8). Because of this, God’s wrath is always there (‘all our days,’ ‘our years,’ v.9). People’s lives are therefore marked by brevity (‘seventy years – or eighty’) and vexation (‘trouble and sorrow,’ v.10; cf. Ecc 6:12). Man is ‘consumed’ (v.7; = ‘we finish,’ v.9) by God’s wrath.”³⁶

You may very well hate that statement. It is offensive and tragic. It is contrary to the smiley stickers that we like to place on all of life’s assignments and the participation trophy that one might mock at a recreation league, but privately hope to enjoy at the end of their own life (they were a good participant and all...). My encouragement would be to see that it is a fair and honest treatment of Psalm 90 and that the context of it was birthed from Genesis 3. Now, rejoice in the good news of the gospel that though we will all die after our relatively short lives, when we stand in judgment we stand covered and legally innocent because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Further, use your short life and apply the disgust you may have had with these disappointing realities and mortify the flesh, put to death the old man, and walk in newness of life and conformity to the Risen Son.

90:11-12 It Is Wisdom to Fear God and be a Faithful Steward of this Temporal Life

90:11 Properly Understanding the Fear of God

This verse appears to be the closing book end on this small section of concentrated attention on the wrath and anger of God toward man’s sin (90:7-90:11). Obviously I have concluded it is an unpacking of the previous sections’ tiers down, but this gives it a returned closure as what has been explained as the context is now being beckoned to be considered more completely.

These things... 90:1-10 should drive us to the fear of God... and yet so frequently they do not!³⁷

“The frustrations in life are explained away or accepted as long as there are not too many problems. The greatness of God’s wrath should evoke fear, and that fear should be commensurate with God’s wrath (v.11).”³⁸

Too harsh... too much? I do not think so. Anger, wrath, fear... these things written by the man who beheld The LORD in a way that no other natural man has and who walked with him as no other natural man has.... I am persuaded that an accurate view of God’s power, anger, or wrath produce like fear. The problem is that the question is going unanswered.

“Not only has Moses set the weakness of man and the shortness of his life against the grandeur and eternity of God, he has also traced man’s mortality to its roots, seeing death as a judgment for sin.”³⁹

³³ ESV SB, Pg.1053

³⁴ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.598

³⁵ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.598

³⁶ VanGemeren, Pg.693

³⁷ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.598

³⁸ VanGemeren, Pg.693

³⁹ Boice, Pg.743

Beloved this is among the reasons that we so vigorously defend the integrity of the whole of Scripture and why, I believe, that there is such a radical effort to undermine the first chapters of Genesis because they are the foundation of the Gospel. You will never have a right view of God, man, sin, life and death without this foundation. You cannot have Jesus without Moses.

Regarding the question itself. Lawson points out that this is effectively a rhetorical question: no one properly considers God's holy and angry response to sin.⁴⁰ However, Kidner seems to argue not for a rhetorical question, but one that reflects the naivety of man regarding these matters. "In spite of all these signs of God's displeasure, the message never registers until God brings it home to us."⁴¹

I am not sure these two conclusions are very far apart – perhaps the question is not meant to be answered and perhaps it cannot naturally be answered without help.

Sidebar: Exhortation to Fear God!

I have consistently argued that fearing God is more than just a respectful submission, but has a very tangible element of genuinely being undone by him. Perhaps no better place to present articulates this than when the anger and wrath of God against the universal offense of every man (sin) is directly addressed along with its consequence of returning to the dust that touches every man... it is here that the fear of God is again introduced. We are but dust and it is on account of our offense to God that has provoked his rightful anger that we should fear. We are undone. Further, I am persuaded that while redemption restores the relationship, our pending death also reminds of us of its residual realities and our proper place before God. From dust, to dust, so fear God.

Even in restoration the fear of God is present and is viewed as a kindness from God:

"Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul." Jeremiah 32:37-41

90:12 Wisdom and the Stewardship of a Temporal Life

In view of the temporal span of man's life and the association that has with the anger/wrath of God... teach us to number our days - "that we may get a heart of wisdom." The request is that they, presumably the covenant people of God, would be taught to number their days and use them well.

With the providing of seventy and eighty years as a general evaluation of one's life the request is help to be a good steward of this brief time. Moses is saying that in view of your perennial care as a magnificent and eternal Creator God who we have offended and will be wise to fear as we are but temporal creatures who return to the dust... in view of this Lord, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Make us wise LORD, knowing the fear of you, teach us or make us to know the numbering of our days... that we might exercise skill in the application of truth in our hearts.

A heart of wisdom... an inner man that exercises skillful application of knowledge and truth - specifically in properly evaluating that in our fallen condition this natural life is temporal and we must discern how to use the years that we have well for our eternal Creator God. God give us the grace to redeem our fleeting days and years.

⁴⁰ Lawson, Pg.83

⁴¹ Kidner, Pg.362

Wisdom and the Fear of God

Job 28:28 "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."
Psalm 111:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding."
Proverbs 1:7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."
Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."
Proverbs 15:33 "The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor."

90:12 effectively begins a series of petitions:

90:12 Teach us to number our days.
90:13 Return, O LORD.
90:13 Have pity on your servants.
90:14 Satisfy us in the morning.
90:15 Make us glad.
90:16 Let your work be shown.
90:16 Let your glorious power be shown.
90:17 Let you favor be upon us.
90:17 Establish the work of our hands.

90:13-15 Redemptive Joy for a Temporal Life is Rooted in the Compassionate Covenant of God

90:13 A Request for Pity/Compassion

By authority The LORD tells man to return to dust in 90:3 and here with hopes of mercy man request of The LORD that he return or relent from his continued wrath toward him that he might experience his great compassion or pity.

Further, while it is a reasonable assumption that the persons of 90:12 are The LORD's servants, as they are requesting to walk well before him, here it is overtly stated that the focus has returned to this precise group within mankind, namely the covenant people of God.

Being as this is the people of God this request rooted in compassion was neither new or short lived. It was an identifying element of a people who were prone to wonder, but were bound by covenant promise.

Pity or compassion was a sustaining element that The LORD ever so graciously extended to his people time and time again, but it was ultimately rooted in his own great fame and that he had extended covenant promise and covenant love. Swearing by himself he willfully bound himself to relationship that would consistently be identified as abounding in pity/compassion.

After the offense of Achan he is stoned to death in punishment, "And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD **turned** from his burning anger." Joshua 7:26 A case where The LORD turned/returned from anger/judgment when sin was addressed.

Rehoboam suffered under bad counsel and his own foolishness, but when he humbled himself the wrath of God turned away. "And when he humbled himself the wrath of the LORD **turned** from him, so as not to make a complete destruction." 2 Chronicles 12:12

"You withdrew all your wrath; you **turned** from your hot anger." Psalm 85:3

In an intensive account of The LORD's faithfulness to Israel who consistently strayed and acted rebelliously we see that after so many deliverances that they were finally given over to the nations and then... "Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry. For their sake he remembered his covenant, and **relented** according to the abundance of his **steadfast love**." Psalm 106:44-45 This steadfast love, God's covenant love toward Israel is what restored his affections and care for them. This appears to be what Moses is requesting here as he was faithful to do throughout the historical narratives too.

How long... there is a waiting for God to be pleased to act. "...they wait patiently for the compassion of their Master."⁴²

This was a request for a return of The LORD's favor and the return of the execution of his plans through Israel.⁴³

Here we observe both the covenant name of God, LORD (Yahweh) in 90:13 and the petition to his covenant love (steadfast love) in 90:14.

90:14 Satisfaction in Covenant Love

Satisfy us, make us full, complete, fulfilled in the refreshment of morning with your covenant love to the end that we may rejoice, that we may sing.

It appears that this is the aim... "But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love." Psalm 59:16-17

The petition is to be satisfied in God and the response in turn is inevitably declaring his excellencies and making much of his name through song and rejoicing. Moses is petitioning to make these temporal lives to be filled with extolling praise to God, the fruit of receiving compassion/pity that is rooted in covenant love.

This appears to be in contrast to 90:9 until one recognizes that the conversation has become more precise from the common experience of man to the experience of the covenant people when enjoying compassion for their failures and blessing in their obedience.

Kidner, who was the most overtly encouraging commentator when reading on Psalm 90, appears to concur with this observation. "The contrasts continue. Whereas 'all our days' are, by our deserts, 'under thy wrath' (9), within the covenant *all our days* can be joyful."⁴⁴ He is drawing out the distinction that must be made when addressing the common context of all men and the superior relationship of being God's servants and the change that introduces – from common, to joyfully satisfying.

Lawson argues that the petition is effectively for better days ahead... that the remaining days would be joy under grace rather than angst under wrath.⁴⁵

90:15 Redeeming the Temporal Life

Here we transition from a request that will make them glad to an outright request to be made glad. It is in a way another approach to the request for pity as its application and the satisfaction of the steadfast love will make them glad and resolve the affliction that they endure from God. They are further asking that their gladness might match their affliction, that they might enjoy as much as they endured.

It is again, all but a reversal of 90:9.

90:9 Days passing under his wrath.

90:9 Years ending like a sigh.

90:15 Days afflicted by God – Restored.

90:15 Years seeing evil – Restored.

While not necessary to serve as a balance to the extensively quoted statement of VanGemenen on 90:10 the following statements do serve that end while also being insightfully helpful as we have turned our attention from man in general to the request of The LORD's servants.

⁴² VanGemenen, Pg.695

⁴³ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.599

⁴⁴ Kidner, Pg.363

⁴⁵ Lawson, Pg.84

"The act of rejoicing is set in contrast to the 'trouble and sorrow' of human existence (v.10). The act of salvation finds expression in his restoration of favor and in his deliverance."⁴⁶

"The phrases 'all our days,' 'many days,' and 'many years' (vv.14-15) are symmetric with 'all our days,' 'our years,' and 'the length of our days' (vv.9-10) so as to bring out the contrast between a whole life of sorrow under the rage of God and the life of rejoicing because of his favor."⁴⁷

90:16-17 Final Petitions: To See the Works of God and to Have Man's Works Established

90:16 Petitions to see the Glorious Works of God

The final requests are rooted in work - God's work and man's work.

Moses petitions that the people of God might continue to see his magnificent work of redemption, care, power, justice, holiness, etc. This is seen in their covenant obedience as he supplies the extraordinary demands of the sacrificial system (so many animals in proper condition and so many vegetative elements). This is seen as they enjoy victory over and against those who will not cry out for pity, but will cling to their sins and attempt to challenge the people of promise. This is seen in the rain that nourishes the land and the people. This is seen in the joy and peace that is experienced in fellowship with the Creator God.

He further requests that their posterity might also know this kindness, those who sprout up when this generation withers (90:6), those who are on the precipice of the promised land who will enter and secure the land by his great power – that they may be witness bearers to the God who keeps his promise and who fights for his people. He asks that these might see his glorious power and in turn be witness bearers to the excellencies of God.

Finally, because one generation will yield to the next the request stands for each subsequent generation. It is a petition that their favor and obedience as a covenant people might be as pervasive as the offense of Adam is among man in general. The people of promise know that they must also be a people of pity.

While man's time is temporal here we see something exceeding the temporal - his posterity, his children. The hope is that they might enjoy the favor of God.

90:17 Petitions to have God Establish the Works of Men

The request has progressed from pity to favor. That The LORD would look well upon his people and in such establish the works of their temporal hands.

Having petitioned to see the magnificent works of God, it is now petitioned that man, made in the image and likeness of God, and made to work - might have his own work established. Let me see, and let me mimic in my brief time. Again another element tethering this psalm to the early chapters of Genesis.

A petition that my work, for which I was created to participate in fulfilling before the fall and its expectations remain thereafter, might it be valuable, enduring, and pleasing to the Lord. Might my temporal hands do good with the time and strength you afford them.

⁴⁶ VanGemenen, Pg.695

⁴⁷ VanGemenen, Pg.695

Conclusion

In Adam all are guilty and all will return to the dust in a short time. But in The LORD's kindness we have been afforded today and perhaps even tomorrow. Pursue a heart of wisdom to evaluate the time that you have and that it might be submitted in joyful submission in fulfilling the works of God.

Evaluate the time you have had too. There may be some repenting that is necessary for sloppy stewardship of a life that appears to have operated off of the assumption that it was wholly about you or the elements of a fleeting world.

If young, then seek to exalt the Lord with your strength and with a life that has the trajectory to be spent for eternity.

If middle aged then examine not how to grab hold of longtime fantasies with toys and temporal pleasures, but how to build stamina to run a strong race enjoying the pleasures of God.

If old, then resolve yourself to finish well. There may or may not have been lost years, but there need not be more.

Exemplify for all who would follow what it looks like to have the works of your hands established and petition that this legacy perpetuates with those who follow.

We may be returning to the dust with Adam, but we will also be rising on account of the Son. Live accordingly, you do not have long.