

Midian or Mt. Sinai?

(A study in Psalm 90)

Before jumping into **Psalm 90**, let us appreciate the man behind the Psalm—Moses, the man of God, as stated in **Deut. 33:1**; **Josh. 14:6**; **Ezra 3:2**. **Numbers 13:3** describes him as “*very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.*” Raised as an Egyptian but born a Hebrew, Moses, by God's instruction and power, returned to lead Israel from Pharaoh's oppression. He served as the mediator between God and Israel and was the Lawgiver—Jesus even referred to the commandments as “the Law of Moses.” Moses connects to Adam, whom God told about future slavery and liberation, to Jesus, who fulfilled the role of the prophet like Moses who was to come, and to us, since his story of slavery and redemption is woven into biblical DNA. Though we are not Jews under the Law, Moses' narrative still impacts us. Moses could not have known the impact he would have on God's people. Even non-believers know about the ten plagues. Many know almost as much about Moses as about Jesus. We have learned about Moses since our youth. He is larger than life, a hero of faith. We are blessed to read his prayer now. Ready?

Psalm 90 A Prayer of Moses, the man of God (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; Ezra 3:2).

1-2 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, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

- At that time, in both Mesopotamia and Egypt, the prevailing belief was that the cosmos and the gods came into existence and were eternal. In other words, they were both comprised of “primitive substance.” They both came into being through the same process. You see how Moses stands out, showing God as the creator of all things, with no beginning or end. Many times, mountains are associated with deities. Moses may also be saying, “Our God is older than your gods.”

3-4 You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!” For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

- God, who made man from dust, has the authority to return Him to dust at will. He is also not affected by time as we are. Like **2 Peter 3:8**, we should not abuse the fact that life goes on. It doesn't mean God's wrath won't come. God gives mankind time to repent!

5-6 You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

- Humanity is swept away as with a flood. Makes you think of the recorded flood of Genesis 6. Man's time on earth is brief and fragile. God is neither. Both Peter and James speak as if life were like grass, fragile and soon gone.

7-9 For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

- Moses has punishment in mind. Not only is the time brief, but it's brought to an end by God's wrath because of iniquity. His wrath is real. Their lives ended in disappointment (sigh).

10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

- Moses died at 120 years old. He's speaking in general terms. He viewed life as difficult and fleeting.

11 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

- Here's the point: is anyone paying attention? But in particular, paying attention to His anger and wrath? And why anger and wrath? Because a fear of God was lacking! We are to have reverence towards God, and we're told that fear is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom in Proverbs 1:7; 9:10.

12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

- Moses witnessed the difference between those who practiced wisdom and those who did not. The majority did not. Every day should be lived for the Lord. By His grace, we wake up and make it to the end of the day. We are not owed anything, and as stated, this life passes quickly.

13 Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!

- Moses has experienced the wrath of God and realizes their need for His mercy and favor.

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

- Yes, they need God's grace. They need to be restored. They need the joy that only He can bring.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.

- Here's a plea for God to bless them as long as He had afflicted them. They had indeed seen evil. This is not moral evil on God's part, but evil/disaster/destruction from God because of their sins. Or it is referring to the moral evil practiced among Israel over the years. It's hard to live in a dark world.

16-17 Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

- A final plea for God's kindness in answer to this request. Not only are they asking for God's blessing, but also for their children's. Israel needed God's favor and strength to do His will. They were to inherit the land, work, and serve God. Moses knew they needed God in every way.

- Okay, so why have I titled this "Midian or Mt. Sinai?" Let me start by asking this: Did the tone of the prayer from your great hero of faith surprise you? Is it darker than you'd expect? Are you shocked to hear so much about sin, affliction, wrath, and anger? Most would love to live as long as Moses if they were in his shape. He seems to find life exhausting. How could Moses' prayer sound so defeating when God revealed Himself in this way: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . . but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7.

- **Moses could have stayed in Midian instead of turning to Mt. Sinai, and his life would have been much different.** "You don't hear anything about his time in Midian." That's true. There are no dramatic confrontations with Pharaoh, but I bet it was much more peaceful. Nothing to write home about. Living your life. Enjoying your wife. Keeping busy with work. Having children. Of course, he would have to disobey God. He wouldn't have grown close to God like he would over the next 40 years. He wouldn't have encouraged millions upon millions, faces he'd never see, over who knows how many centuries before God calls all home? This is true for you, as well, beloved. Now, God has not called you to save a nation, but He's asking you to save yourself by putting faith in Jesus. He's asking you to help your

spouse, children, and neighbors. He's going to make you face challenges in life to strengthen your faith and, typically, help others. At the bare minimum, we grow in sympathy when we see others struggle, and many times God blesses us with wisdom so we can lend a helping hand. We've been there. We've made it to the other side of the sea, if you will. When we put our faith in God, we please Him and, over time, come to share in His holiness.

- **Acknowledge people who choose Mt. Sinai over Midian.** If you've not made the same choice, be careful not to judge them too sharply. We are to have joy, but that doesn't mean we can't discuss the realities of life. Moses' Psalm has a darker tone. Yep, that checks out. Would you want to be in his shoes? He lived 120 years, and they weren't all peachy. He was wrongly accused throughout his last 40 years. He could never do right by everyone. He felt the burden of the people on his shoulders and wandered in the wilderness for 4 decades. Even his own brother and sister spoke ill of him behind his back, but the Lord had his back. No one wants to spend the last 40 years of their life like Moses. Have compassion for him, and remember . . . he's probably more meek than us. Moses trusted God in big ways, and many times, we're struggling to sacrifice small things to God because it is inconvenient. We struggle telling people about God, while Moses told Pharaoh to his face, "Let His people go!" And you think sharing the good news of Jesus is scary? Brethren, appreciate those who choose Mt. Sinai. It's easy to praise God in Midian, but it's another thing to serve him in the wilderness.