

The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Chapter 12 – Conclusion: Psalm 90

INTRODUCTION

- The introduction to the Psalms study was Psalm 103, a praise of God’s goodness
- At the end of the study is Psalm 90, which is a lament of God’s anger and wrath
 - “...we are consumed by thy anger; by thy wrath we are overwhelmed” (v. 7)
 - Belongs to the Community Lament but the structure is different
- Psalm 90 is a proclamation of human transitoriness, the frailty of humanity

PSALM STUDY

- READ Psalm 90
- **The Absence of God**
 - Points to a later age, an age for which God’s wrath has become a dark and burdensome reality
 - In this psalm the history of salvation has been silenced almost completely
 - “The burden of a history in which God seemingly no longer helped his people for centuries at a stretch was a burden too heavy to bear. Nothing of God’s goodness was any longer apparent and therefore these people pleaded with God” (120).
 - “Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children” (vs. 16).
- **Looking Back to God’s Prior Work**
 - Even though the psalmist mentions little of God’s present work, he still looks back to a time when God was present
 - “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations” (vs. 1).
 - People who could no longer recognize anything of God’s activity or of his glory in their world *nevertheless pleaded* with this angry God who was hidden to them
 - These people still stood in the chain of a tradition in which it was told from generation to generation that God could be depended on
- **Calling on God in the Midst of Wrath**
 - The people here with an extremely sober recognition of the transitory nature of human existence (a recognition that bordered on skepticism) called, in the midst of these facts of their own history, on the God who in his anger and wrath stood behind these realities.
 - “Return, O LORD! How long?” (vs. 13)
 - Calling on God even in the midst of wrath points to a connection with previous generations. Their fathers praised God continually, regardless of circumstances.

EMOTIONS IN THE PSALMS

- Psalm 103 is exuberant praise of God
- Psalm 90 is anguish at the anger/wrath of God
- These two extremes highlight the genuine tonality of the Psalter
 - The polarity of lament and praise corresponds to the polarity of the anger and mercy of God

SILENCE AND LONGING

- The silence of God found in Psalm 90 reminds us of the 400 years of silence before Jesus was born on earth
 - The Israelites longed for relief from God's silence and punishment
 - Relief was found in the person of Jesus
- For Christians, relief has come already. We find rest for our weary bodies in the strength of Christ. There is no longer silence from God. He has spoken through his written Word and the Living Word.

Discussion Questions

- Have you experienced a time when God seemed absent? How did you respond?
- Does the polarity of emotion in the Psalms seem genuine? Do you think it's appropriate for God's Word to contain such "human" emotions?
- How do you find comfort in Christ, even when God "seems" to be silent?