



Hard Passages in the Bible

Gaining confidence for engaging the
biblical story

Psalm 90

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.

2 Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

3 You turn people back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."

4 A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.

5 Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of

death—

they are like the new grass of the morning:

6 In the morning it springs up new,
but by evening it is dry and withered.

7 We are consumed by your anger
and terrified by your indignation.

8 You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence.

9 All our days pass away under your wrath;
we finish our years with a moan.

Psalm 90

10 Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;

yet the best of them are but trouble and
sorrow,

for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

11 If only we knew the power of your anger!

Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your
due.

12 Teach us to number our days,

that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Relent, LORD! How long will it be?

Have compassion on your servants.

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing
love,

that we may sing for joy and be glad all our
days.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have
afflicted us,

for as many years as we have seen trouble.

16 May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendor to their children.

17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Reaction to the readings

- What word images stand out to you?
- ? What themes do you hear in this psalm?
- What are you confused or unclear about?
- Does this passage present any theological difficulty for you? If so, what?

Observations about Psalm 90

- Attributed to Moses; signals that it should be interpreted with the story of Moses leading the people to the Promised Land in mind
- The psalm presupposes an experience of suffering, such as the aftermath of exile
- The psalm ends on a note of hope
- “People of faith have found courage to live each day by the grace of God, and work and pray that God will use their labors and life for eternal purpose” – James Waltner

“Big” questions this Psalm raises

- Is God (necessarily) the author of suffering?
- Should suffering or pain be interpreted as the result God's “wrath” in response to sin (individual or collective)?
- How do we account for suffering if God is both sovereign and loving?
- Can God be faithful and loving without removing suffering?
- Can we take each day of life as an undeserved gift even in the face of significant challenges?
- What does “establish the work of our hands” mean?

Other scriptural voices about the human predicament

- The Books of **Job** and **Ecclesiastes**
 - Ask probing questions about God's fairness
- “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity [shalom] and create disaster [evil/calamity]; I, the LORD, do all these things.” – Isaiah 45:7
- Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. – Luke 13:1-3

Questions

- Where does this passage fit in the overall message of the Bible?
- What is the main question this passage raises for you?
- What is the most helpful idea you take away from this conversation?
- What wisdom, insights, or call can we take from this passage, as followers of Jesus, reading it in light of the witness of Jesus ?