

Psalms: Book Four (Part One)

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With the coming of the Feast of Trumpets just over two weeks ago, we passed into another season on the sacred calendar—the season of the fall festivals which includes the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Day, often called the Last Great Day. It is a distinctly different part of the year. In nature, things begin to slow down. We know winter is coming. It is a nice cool time usually, after the heat of the summer. Obviously, in Israel, God made this time of the year after the harvest a time of celebration.

Spiritually, it is also similarly distinctive. These four feasts that I just went over, picture future events in God's plan: The return of Christ, the binding of Satan, the reuniting of man with God so that he is one with God, the wonderful Millennium under Christ's rule along with the Great White Throne Judgment, and eternity with God after that. So the fall season, in terms of its spiritual application through the holy days, is really breathtaking in scope. It has eternal scope, if you will.

But only 17 psalms are devoted to this season, and I find that extremely sad. That is how many psalms comprise Book Four of the psalter. As you know, Psalms contains 150 psalms, so 17 of them make only 11.3 percent out of the whole number of psalms. And if we add Book Four's summary psalm, which is Psalm 149, making a total of 18 psalms that we can say go to this season, that bumps it up only to a mere 12 percent. That is not very much for a time of year and spiritual revelation so eternal in scope. It just does not seem like enough psalms. It is the same amount as in Book Three.

Book Three has to do with summer and there are no holy days in the summer. We have four in the fall. I am only complaining a little bit. It would have been great to have a few more psalms, but God, in His wisdom, thought that these 18 would be enough, so we will go with it. Of course, it makes preparing these feast sermons a little bit more difficult because you have got to pull all your stuff out of just 18 psalms. But, like I said, we will go with it.

So I am going to give you a bit of a summary of Book Four just so that we all get a running start. I know we have been hearing these sermons on the psalms now for a couple of years, but it is always good to rehearse a little bit just so that we all get on the same page.

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Book Four begins with Psalm 90. Just so you know this in future times, for whatever purpose, this one is my favorite. So we will be spending quite a bit of time on it today. It ends with Psalm 106. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, it is summarized by Psalm 149.

In our coverage of books two and five, in just about every sermon that I gave on those two books of the psalms, I mentioned that the Old Testament contains a handful of parts organized in groups of five. And I used the word 'handful' on purpose because if you hold up your hand, you see that there are five things sticking out of it called 'fingers.' So if you look at your hand, you have a great organizing appendage (I guess you could call it) right there at the end of your arm. If you can tick things off on your fingers, you have a good way of memorizing things. So you have one book of psalms for each finger. God seems to have organized the whole Old Testament in these groups of five, or at least parts of it, that He wanted to be seen together.

There are also five books in the Torah or the Pentateuch. You have Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

There are also five festival scrolls and they are called the Megillot. They are the Song of Songs; for the Pentecost season, the book of Ruth; for the summertime, the book of Lamentations; for the fall (which we will be looking at), the book of Ecclesiastes; and for the winter, the book of Esther. Those are the five that go with the other five.

And, of course, we have the five seasons: We have the season of Passover, the season of Pentecost, the season of summer, the season of fall, and the season of winter.

So if you can think of those things and put them on your fingers, you can remember these five things (and the other five things and the other five things) that all go together.

The Jews found that these sets of five line up. So you have Book One of the psalms lines up with Genesis. It lines up with the Song of Songs and it also lines up with the Passover season. They found that when they looked at these groups of fives, similar themes ran along each one of these particular ones within the group of five. We went through Book Two recently, which is the Pentecost season (Book Two, Pentecost, Ruth, the book of Exodus).

Now we are going to do Book Four. Book Four lines up with the fall, as I have mentioned. It also lines up with the book of Numbers in the Pentateuch, and the book of Ecclesiastes, which we are all becoming quite familiar with. So if I am going to talk to you through phrases and things from the book of Ecclesiastes, I want you to know exactly where they are and be able to jot them down without giving you a citation for it.

Just kidding.

What we are going to do, in the three sermons that I have at the feast, is we are going to go through Book Four and show its application to the feast. We have already looked at its application to the Day of Trumpets and to the Day of Atonement, so we have gotten those behind us. We know that those themes that are in Trumpets (God's judgment, coming as King) and Atonement (the unifying of the people under God) are also very prominent in Book Four. We are going to look then at how it applies to this time of the Feast of Tabernacles, looking forward to the Millennium.

And then, in my next sermon, we are also going to look at how it applies to the Sabbath, since the Sabbath is the seventh day and has parallels to the seven thousandth year (or that seven thousands grouping—a thousand years, the Millennium) and its application to this time as well.

Of course, we will go on and look at the Last Great Day on the Last Great Day and see how Book Four fits into that.

I want to give you five or six themes for Book Four. They are very interesting. We have already met a few of them, going through those other two sermons that I did. But I want to put them in a bunch here so that we kind of get a running start into the other sermons.

The first theme that I want to give you kind of jumps out quickly right as you begin Book Four, in Psalm 90. The first one is found in the title of the book of Numbers; and, of course, the title of the book of Numbers is the 'Book of Numbers.' So the theme is numbering. It is one of the themes, not only of Numbers, but it is also a theme in Ecclesiastes and in Book Four.

The reason it is called the 'Book of Numbers' is because the first several chapters of Numbers has to do with the census that God had Moses take of Israel. That is one of the main things that pop out at you. As soon as you start looking at the book of Numbers, you will see this tribe had so many, this tribe had so many, and then they counted the Levites and all that separately. So there is this idea that God wanted Moses to number Israel. He wanted to take a census. He wanted to see how many there were.

When you take a census, you take it for many different reasons in order to get a gauge on the group (where it is going, what it can do, how it is growing, how it is diminishing, what parts are growing, what parts are diminishing) and you can get a pretty good idea of the life of a nation. That is an important thing to think about the reasons why one

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

would take a census. Therefore, as we get into this a bit more, we begin to see how this concept of gauging (taking a snapshot of a people, of a particular life—of whatever it is— at a particular time) could be helpful, for planning for the future especially.

In Ecclesiastes, this idea of numbering comes up and it parallels what we see in Psalm 90. This is, to me, a memory scripture.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

So, right in the first psalm of Book Four, we have the word ‘number’ that pops out at us at the most critical part of the psalm, right in the hinge of the psalm as it were. Moses, up to this point, as we will see, has been explaining the way it is: The way God and man are in a faceoff, since Adam, up to now, and the two combatants, as it were, are not equally matched at all. So, when you get to verse 12, he is saying: “What’s the solution to this? God is going to wipe us off the earth. He is so strong, He is eternal. We don’t have a chance. He’s angry at us because we have sinned.”

So then he gets to verse 12 and he says: “The solution that pops into my mind is: God, You have to teach us to number our days so that we can gain this heart of wisdom.” So there is this idea of numbering that comes up immediately in Psalm 90.

And, if you would, flip over to Ecclesiastes chapter 12—we will go back, just a little bit, to the end of Ecclesiastes 11.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

He is talking to these young people and he is telling them that they can have a good time. They can have joy. In youth, you have all this energy and your prospects are before you. And so, Solomon says, “Go ahead and do what you need to do. Have fun. And go through your life with purpose, as it were. But just remember that in all that you do, God is watching and He is going to bring you into account for what you do.”

From the end of chapter 11, this transitions into the idea that pops up in chapter 12:

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them."

So right after he tells them "You're going to be judged for how you lived your life," he says the best thing to do is to "remember your Creator in your youth." This is just another way of saying "Figure out, count your days, number your life, get your priorities straight, and seek God early" because that will give you the best start in life. You do not want to put this off until you are old and your faculties are not as good, your mind's not as sharp, and you may die tomorrow. When things are more precarious in life, you do not want to have to be making a deathbed repentance type of thing. You want to get a relationship with God started and developing as early as you can. So the same idea is here in Ecclesiastes, as in Psalm 90 and in the book of Numbers.

We will find as we go through Book Four, that it contains several psalms that force us into contemplating the wide gulf between man's way and God's way, man's goals and God's goals, and we have to consider, we have to number, we have to look at these things, count the cost as it were, and figure out which is the best way to go. So this is a major theme of Book Four.

Another theme is God's judgment. We just saw that at the end of Ecclesiastes 11. But I am going to go back to the book of Numbers. I am not specifically going to go to any chapter and verse. But after you get through the numbering part and the bit about the Levites (because, in addition to counting the Levites, it also gives out some of what their jobs are and such), there is the thing about the Nazarites, the offerings of the leaders in chapter 7, and then we start getting into various judgments that God makes because of situations that came up in the wandering in the wilderness.

By the time you get to chapter 9, you have the thing about the second Passover. There were men who had touched a dead body and they did not want to miss the Passover, but they would have been ceremonially unclean. So God makes a judgment that there was going to be a second Passover a month later, but this time they would be clean again and they could take the Passover then. So He makes a judgment about this particular situation.

In chapter 5, there was a judgment that He made about adulterers and how to figure out the adulterer in the marriage.

Chapter 11: God makes a judgment on complaining Israel.

Chapter 12: God makes a judgment between Moses and Aaron and Miriam, and Miriam is the one that gets the leprosy.

Then we get to where they were: On the borders of Canaan. God sent in the spies and most of them brought back a bad report. Joshua and Caleb bring a good report. The Israelites listen to the guys that brought the bad report. The next day, they decide that they are going to rush in there and God makes a judgment on them and they die. Then He says, "You are going to spend 38 more years in the wilderness." Quite a big judgment there.

You go to chapter 15. This was the man who went out gathering sticks on the Sabbath. At the end of it, God makes a judgment about breaking the Sabbath.

There is a huge judgment in chapter 16. This is Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their rebellion against Moses. The people begin to murmur, at the end of that chapter, and He makes another judgment on the people and many die in the plague.

It just keeps going on as you go through the book of Numbers. It is judgment after judgment after judgment.

There is Moses striking the rock, in chapter 20, and God makes a judgment on Moses: "You shall not enter the Land. You will die on this side of Jordan."

Then there are the chapters, in the early part of the 20s here, about Balaam and Balak. What did the Israelites do? They go after the gods of the Moabites because the ladies of the Moabites enticed them. There is another judgment, and Phinehas is the one that has to stop the plague by running one of those couples through.

So judgment after judgment after judgment in the book of Numbers. Obviously, the Jews saw this. They saw what was going on in the book of Ecclesiastes and in the fourth book of Psalms and saw that it was a major theme.

If we go to Ecclesiastes 12, there are several places where it says that God is judging, that He is watching, that He is looking at what we are doing. But in verse 14, it makes a very clear statement of this.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether [it is] good or [whether it is] evil.

So, in Ecclesiastes we see God, not necessarily in the thick of judgment, but we see Him kind of watching—watching our lives as they progress—not necessarily intervening all the time, but He is aware of what is going on. The book of Ecclesiastes is intent on getting us to make sure that when we do come under judgment and when we are under judgment, we pass that judgment by being wise, by doing what is right by what God wants us to do. The previous verse says “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man [this is man’s all].”

So if you want to be on the good side of God’s judgment, this is where you start: Fear God and keep His commandments. Of course, as he said a little earlier in the chapter, start it when you are young, make it a habit, and do it all your life. We need to prioritize godly living very high up so that we are judged well and God says, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Now Book Four contains a handful of psalms in which God’s judgment is highlighted (we saw some of those on Trumpets) and are often linked with the return of Christ, as we saw on Trumpets. I will just give you right now the psalms that deal with this more exclusively (Psalm 94, Psalm 96, Psalm 97, Psalm 98, and Psalm 106). Those are the ones that mention judgment frequently, particularly in the context of the return of Christ.

A third major theme is God’s sovereignty, that He rules over all, that He is in control. We will not go through the book of Numbers again, but when we go through it chapter by chapter and read what is going on in the details, we think Israel was a mess and they were going here and there and God was always having to do stop-gap measures to stop them here and to help them here.

But when you lift back a little bit, you see that that is not the case. God was in control the whole time. He was not responding to them, He was leading them. And He was putting them in situations where they had to make decisions, and their human nature would come out, and then God would spank them for being bad or reward them for being good (that did not happen very often). But He would give them what they needed.

So God was in complete control, bringing them out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Even though they seemed to be wandering hither and yon and all over the place, God was taking them down the route He had planned for them. We get the idea, not that God was reacting to them but that God was leading them. He had a step-by-step procedure that He was taking in order to leave an example for us.

Ecclesiastes says similar things. It is not right upfront that He says this, but we get this idea when we see the various little phrases that He uses. I am going to Ecclesiastes 3

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and just pull this right out of its context. But it says:

Ecclesiastes 3:10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

He has given a task for men to do and we are to be occupied doing it. He is in control of what men are supposed to be doing.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

God is involved in a work and God has given mankind little hints of what is going on. Men do not know, but there is a purpose, a reason, why God has put this yearning for eternity in men's hearts because He is trying to lead them to something and they need this to get the fires going. It is like a pilot light on the knowledge of God, and if God decides to turn the pilot light on, then this yearning for eternity can be very helpful in moving people forward and motivating them.

Ecclesiastes 5:18 Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.

I wanted that phrase 'all the days of his life which God gives him.' God gives us each a number of days and we have a span of life that He is working with in order to get us to the point where He wants us. So He is sovereign over our days, you could say.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other.

Here we see that God is sovereign over our days of adversity and He is also sovereign over our days of prosperity. He has given both and He has given them for a reason because we can learn things both from prosperity and adversity. So He is sovereign over those parts of our lives, which is our lives in general. We seem to go from pillar to post on that. Hardly ever seem to stay in the middle between prosperity and adversity, we are either in one ditch or the other.

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Ecclesiastes 9:1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.

I wanted that one sentence there: “the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God.” It cannot get more under control than that. God is watching. God is aware. God is controlling as sovereign. So we see that Ecclesiastes fits into that. We see Numbers fits into that.

Book Four frequently shows God as sovereign and working out His plan to bring His people into His Kingdom.

Psalm 93:1 The Lord reigns . . .

Psalm 96:10 Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.”

Psalm 97:1 The Lord reigns . . .

Psalm 99:1 The Lord reigns . . .

Psalm 103:19 The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

You cannot get much more sovereign than that. God is there on His throne in heaven. He is directing everything. He rules over everything. He is very much in control. And as wild as the world can get, as evil as the world may seem, as bad as the economy may be (our personal economies or the world economy), He is still ruling over all. You can take that to the bank.

The fourth theme I have here is the vast difference between God and man. I have mentioned this already. We are talking about Psalm 90. We are going to go into it a little bit more deeply when we go into it verse by verse, but obviously it is there.

In Numbers, men are shown to be sinful, weak, complaining, rebellious, foolish, and subject to death. Just incident after incident, people are shown to be hardly worthy of God’s attention at all—even Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. You start going down and the

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

only ones that end up coming out of this book looking pretty good are Joshua and Caleb because they stood up and were faithful. They were the ones that were allowed to go into the land. But they are still men and they are still subject to death.

God, on the other hand (if you go through the book of Numbers with this in mind), comes out as pure and strong and upright. He is just. He is merciful. When He could have blotted them out all, however many millions, He did not; He stayed His hand. He showed mercy rather than justice. He is constant. He is faithful. He is wise. Over all of this, He is eternal: He lives forever. It is just a complete contrast with man. Man should be kicked to the curb and not thought of again. But God is awesome and He has the power to do anything He pleases. That is what we get out of Numbers.

This comes across in spades in the book of Ecclesiastes. I will not go into it, but we will just pick out one phrase that we all know. It is shown there that men live 'under the sun' lives. But God, where is He? He is over the sun. He is over everything. He is in control of everything. So we get the same disparity between terrible man and wonderful God, transient man and eternal God—all these opposites.

So we understand, once we go through Numbers and Ecclesiastes and Psalm: Book Four, that what we are looking at here is perspective. We need a proper perspective between man and all of his imperfections, and God and His wonderful perfections. So we get these opposites that are playing off one another and how God is going to figure out and solve this problem. Because He wants to bring evil mankind—sinful mankind—to the purity of God.

How do you do that? It is through the sovereignty of God and the judgment of God and these other themes that we are working with that come out. But this is an ongoing problem, as the psalmist looks at what is going on and what they see versus what God has promised, and they are somewhat befuddled and they have got to figure out answers to overcome this great disparity—this wide gulf—between man and God. Particular psalms in Book Four that go into this are Psalm 90, Psalm 105, and Psalm 106. They are full of this theme, among others.

The final theme that I am going to stress is the theme of salvation, and that is the answer to the previous question: What is going to happen to bring man to the point of God? This comes through very clearly.

In Numbers, God saves Israel time and time again. He is shown as their Redeemer—the One who brought them out of Egypt. He is the One that gives them things, saves them from hunger, saves them from thirst, saves them from their enemies,

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

saves them from wicked leaders, saves them from false prophets, saves them from plagues, saves them from serpents—saves them from this, that, and the other thing. Besides that, He saves them from themselves time and again.

This theme is also underneath the book of Ecclesiastes, but it comes out in hints—that God is there to save. I am just going to point to a verse in Ecclesiastes 8.

Ecclesiastes 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

This is a general statement of God's saving power. But, by using the phrase 'who fear God,' it reaches further into the future, in eternal salvation. We will be seeing this a lot as we go through. It comes in psalm after psalm after psalm in Book Four.

If you want to give Book Four its major theme, it is salvation, because that is what happens in this festival period (is it not?). God is talking about the salvation that He brings: He brings salvation to the firstfruits; He brings salvation to the whole world; He brings salvation to everybody in the Millennium; He brings salvation to those who are in the White Throne Judgment. He is eternally the Savior of all mankind. So that is what he is trying to bring out within this book of psalms.

For the rest of the sermon, we will take a look at the keynote psalm: Psalm 90. Then we will also go over the summary psalm—Psalm 149—and see how these two tie together. I think, by going through these two psalms, we will get a pretty good overview of these themes that I have discussed already and we will begin to feel the tenor of this particular book of Psalms.

To me, Psalm 90 is just an incredible psalm. Someday I am going to memorize the whole thing. Most of it keeps dropping into the holes in my brain, but someday I will get it right.

Let us go ahead and begin in Psalm 90 and read the first six verses. As we have just gone over the themes, I am sure now you will start seeing them pop up.

Psalm 90:1-6 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, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man to destruction, and say, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.

So here we see the theme of the disparity between God and man. He starts this off with a bang: “You are God. You were there before everything was created; in fact, You created it. You have been our dwelling place in all generations. You have been around in my father’s time and my grandfather’s time and my great grandfather’s time and my great great grandfather’s time.” Now this is Moses. Of course, it was pretty close to the time when God called Abraham. So we have Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons, and then a couple of generations, and you get to Moses.

But the way Moses looks at this, God had been their God for as far as back as anybody could remember and beyond that. He had always been around. He was the constant for Israel. He was the constant for Moses’ own family. And then he turns and says, “Look at us.” He says, “You turn men to destruction.” Remember, God is sovereign. That is one of the themes that comes out here. He says, “You give men nudges. You make them go in certain ways and then You tell them to come back.” Remember, He gives us the days of adversity and He gives us the days of prosperity. So He is controlling what is going on.

But Moses is, in a sense, complaining here. He says, “Look, You can do all this manipulation. You are forever—a thousand days. Or a thousand years,” he says, “are like yesterday to You. You’ve got to look at things from our perspective, God. You live forever. You can make these long-range plans and, of course, You’ve got the power, as Creator, to make them all work and do all this stuff. And here we are, pitiful men. We last for about this long” (as he says we are like asleep overnight—eight hours—or we are like grass that comes up and then at the end of the day it is gone). “Can You look at it from our perspective and see that we are in trouble over here? We are weak.” “God, look at us and have some mercy,” he is saying.

What he is doing here is that he is just basically saying, “God, You are forever. You are in control. But we are very transient. We have very brief lives. We are very weak. If we were to die now, who would remember us? What kind of works would we leave behind us? We are nothing.”

Psalm 90:7-11 For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

in the light of Your countenance. For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.

What he is doing here is setting out the connections between man's sin and his weaknesses, and God's anger. God is a God of justice. When we sin, as a God of justice, He has to become angry at us, as it were, because we have contravened the law and we are now sinners; we are guilty; we are under judgment. And he is saying "God, we've been under judgment all this time. All the days of our lives, we've had this sword of Damocles hanging over us" and as he says here, "We are ready to fly away." "We've had so much stress under this waiting judgment that we can't take it anymore."

Now we need to understand a little background here. Remember, this is Moses. Moses is saying this. Who knows, perhaps Moses wrote this after his own judgment, in Numbers 20, when he struck the rock. I could easily see him reacting to that judgment with something like this. Even though that may not be true, we do need to look at this in terms of the wilderness wandering and the journey through the wilderness and the many, many sins of Israel. At the very earliest, this probably was written after Israel was told they will be 38 more years in the wilderness.

Because what we are looking at here is Moses looking at what was going on through Israel's eyes and saying, "Oh no! We've got to walk this wilderness for 38 years! We should be able to walk into that land in a couple of days or a week. But God has made a judgment—He has penalized us—for 38 years of slogging through this sand, over these rocks, looking for water. And not only that, He's told us that we're all going to die here." Talk about being under judgment. That is a prison sentence, except you are outside walking in the desert and you do not know where your next cup of water is coming from. It is horrendous to think about what they were going through.

Now you can understand some of the emotion that was coming out here when he uses such phrases as "We have been consumed by Your anger" and "by Your wrath we are terrified." Thousands of people, or at least hundreds, were dying every day—if you are talking about a group that big.

We could go to Hebrews 3 where Paul gives the imagery of graves being strewn throughout the wilderness, bodies of Israelites being put into the sand there, because of God's judgment on the people.

So Moses is saying, “We’re so weak, we can’t handle this. But You, God, are Almighty. You are Sovereign. What do we do?” That is why he asked the question there in verse 11: “Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.”

What he is saying here, if we can put it all together, is that because of Israel’s sin, God’s wrath had shortened their lifespan. He is asking how they can change that. “Is there anything we can do to change Your mind? Is there anything we can do to respond to this in a right way? Because our days are passing like a sigh” (not a sigh of contentment, but a sigh of terror—you know the kind of shudder you get when you know you are about to die). You also get the idea that their lives were passing away like a breath, in terms of not only being short, but being insignificant—that they will not leave anything behind them except a record of their sins.

There is a great deal of despair in this section because of their sins. And Moses, being a converted man, understood just how terrible this was and it terrified him to be under God’s judgment like this—that our decisions that we make could bring on something so terrible and awful and deadly. It really hit him hard.

Another way we need to look at this too, just to add this to your thoughts (because this also comes out in some of the other psalms): Israel is being used as the example for all humanity. Israel went through the wilderness. Israel sinned. Israel is the one that did all of these things contrary to what God wanted. But we need to understand that Israel does not stand alone among the peoples of the earth. Everybody has done this.

It says there in Romans 2 that certain things are known by the Gentiles because it is just common sense. God has kind of put it into us that there are various laws of God that they all know and they all follow, and so they are going to be held accountable for those things. The peoples of the earth have also had a witness—of Israel, of the church, of various others. The apostles went all over the world after Christ died and they have had a witness of a lot of these things. So there is a bit of culpability in everyone because they should know these things.

Romans 1 talks about the creation itself as a witness to them that there is a God. And what have they done? Well, they booted God out and decided to worship created things. And so all the peoples of the earth are in the same boat as Israel. But Israel is the example from which come all the lessons that we learn, at least out of the Bible. So we need to expand our scope just a little bit beyond Israel to understand that all of humanity is in this same boat. They are all under judgment.

Now we come to verse 12, which we have read before.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

This is the answer to his question that he posed in verse 11. The answer has to do with how we will remedy this problem of human brevity on the one hand and sinfulness on the other. How will we get to the point where we can understand God and understand Him enough to be saved and to have eternal life? How do we bridge that gap? And the basic answer is that God has to teach us wisdom. We will get to that later because I am going to come back to verse 12. Just planting the seed here that we need to get the right perspective. That is the answer to the problem. It is a lot more than that, but that is it in a little bit of a nutshell.

Psalm 90:13-14 [So he says:] Return, O Lord [as if God has gone far away]! How long [How long are You going to stay away]? And have compassion on Your servants. Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!

He is trying to turn this around. This is a very downer psalm up to this point, and he is trying to turn it around so that we can have some joy in life. The only way that can happen is if God returns to us, returns from being so far away; or, you could say, turns from having His back turned to us, so now He is facing us and we can see His face.

Psalm 90:15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil.

What he is asking here is for God to balance things out. He is saying, "Look God, we've been so long in this bad strait, it seems like years" (which makes me think that this was actually written toward the end of the wilderness wandering, not at the beginning). But they have been in terrible affliction for so long. It has been so bad. For all of these years (maybe an entire generation or a generation and a half) that they have been in terrible situations, they have not had anything to be happy about. All the news is bad, they cannot get any breaks it seems. He says, "God, balance this out so that we can have at least the same number of years of good that we have gone through on the bad side of the ledger. Bring some balance back to our lives. Make us happy. Make us be glad. Help us to be joyful. Give us something to live for." And then he says:

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Psalm 90:16 Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children.

Now we are beginning to see a bit more hope here. We are also beginning to see a more spiritual outlook on, let us say, what is happening in the future.

Psalm 90:17 And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.

He is requesting God to return to them, to give them joy, to bring them good. And then he also asks for Him to work among them: “Let Your work appear.” Let Your creative power begin to work among us, not only “to Your servants,” but then he pushes it forward: “Your glory to their children.” He brings in God’s glory which would come with God’s presence. We are beginning to see just hints of moving this far forward into the future where Christ returns and begins a work among the children of Israel. Is that not what He is supposed to do when He comes back? He starts with Israel. He brings Israel back in the Second Exodus: He comes back to earth, He establishes His government, and He begins to work among all Israel to convert them and their children.

Then he talks about “let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” This is kind of a Hebrew code having to do with holiness. There are psalms that talk about the beauty of holiness. So he is asking God to convert the people of Israel, that even though man goes through this terrible time of sin and of being apart from God, being under His wrath, being totally miserable, that there is a time coming when God will work with His servants and their children—the people of Israel—to bring them back. To bring holiness to them, and to establish the work of their hands, to give them a fitting memorial to make their lives mean something so they can build something that is going to be forever.

And this repeating of it—“establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands”—is not only a pleading thing, it is this kind of superlative type of thing (like the phrase ‘holy of holies’ or ‘song of songs’). He is asking it for it to be wonderful and great and the best work ever that is established. And that is of course what would become God, would it not? Would it not be the greatest memorial ever, to be part of God’s family—that the work that you put into your spiritual life would last throughout God’s Kingdom which will last for eternity? That is the kind of idea that comes across here that he is saying, “This is what we really want and this is the only way it is going to happen—if You return to us—and we can grow, live in Your presence.”

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Let us get back to verse 12 because, like I mentioned, this is where the psalm hinges and we go from bad to good. But the key is this: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." That is the only way that we can go from this terrible situation, in the first part of the chapter, to the glorious ending in the last part.

Literally, if we were to take this directly from the Hebrew, in English it would be: "To number our days aright, let us know. And we bring the heart to wisdom." So if we look at these two separate clauses here, the first one is heavy emphasis on God: "Teach us to number our days, let us know." He is saying, "You have to do that for us." It is something that is revealed, it is something that is given, because otherwise we could not even come near what is necessary to understand how to number our days aright, how to set our lives out properly.

Then the second part emphasizes the work that we have to do, which is, of course, once we get to the end of the psalm, it says "establish the work of our hands." So, the second part, having to do with "bring the heart to wisdom," gives us the understanding here that this is a cooperative process with God. He does the revelation of things to us to teach us, and then we pick up the ball in response and we put it into practice so that we gain a heart of wisdom.

One of the things that it tells me is that the heart of wisdom is built through experience. It is built through the things that we go through in lives, in our day-by-day activities, and the spikes of this and that (of stress that comes up and how we react to it). But this heart of wisdom is born or produced through a great deal of trial, testing, and experience that we go through with God.

I want to explain these a little bit more closely. Some of that I have said already, but I want to just expand on it a little bit. Moses says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." First thing is something I have already mentioned: Numbering our days must be revealed to us. We must be taught to number our days. The natural, human, carnal mind does not know how to number his days. We do not know what the right priorities are. We barely know how to put one foot before the other without slipping into the ditch. We are always on the verge, teetering on the brink of disaster, especially with God. That is what he brought up in the first part of the psalm here that we are always, as natural men, on the outs with God because we are so full of sin. Sin has so clouded our minds, so befuddled us, so perverted how we think, that we cannot find the way. We cannot find how to number our days. It is just beyond us as natural men.

Just go and look at the self-help section of your local bookstore. Everybody has got a

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

different idea on how to prioritize their days, how to make their lives better. They are all competing. Very few of them talk about God in any good way. All of these wonderful things you can do to be this kind of leader and that kind of person and make all this money, AD nauseam, but there is only one way that we can know for sure is the right way, and that is the way that God reveals. So that is the big thing that comes out of this first phrase or first clause of this verse, that God has to teach it to us, reveal it to us. Otherwise we are going to be floundering just like everybody else.

Psalm 119:65-68 You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes.

He is saying (whoever the author was here—Jeremiah? David?) that before God got a hold of him, he was a mess. He went astray. He did this, he did that. He did not have an established route to go. God gave him what it took. He taught him His statutes and he believed the commandments. He was taught by God good judgment and knowledge and that put him on the right path.

Moses is saying a similar thing in Psalm 90, that God must work with us to give us the right perspective on life. We are not going to find it on our own. So, in a New Testament way of looking at this, we would say that numbering our days, prioritizing our lives properly, has to be done in the confines of a relationship with God.

Eternal life is to know God. If you want to go along the path to the Kingdom of God, you have to go and walk it side-by-side with your Creator and Savior. That is the only way you are going to get there, and so you are in a relationship. As we walk, we learn, we grow, and finally, at some point in the future, we will reach our destination. But we have always got to be hitched to Jesus Christ (and ultimately we will be hitched to Jesus Christ forever) in the marriage sense. So just think of it that way.

As the book of Ecclesiastes shows, skill in living (the Hebrew idea of wisdom)—doing the right things at the right time for the right purposes—is not a natural way of life to humanity. Man will automatically live an ‘under the sun’ life. He is bound to his selfish nature. It is going to push him and pull him in ways to satisfy himself and it will drag him down. That is just the way natural man is without the Spirit of God guiding him. So only by God’s intervention, through His revelation and His Spirit, can we see a better way and follow it.

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Psalm 119:17-18 Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word. Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.

Psalm 119:33-40 Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way. Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You. Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments are good. Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me in Your righteousness.

You see all the things he is asking God to do for him so that he can live well. But he needed God to do those things to give him the push that he needed down the right way.

Let us finally go to verse 105, the one that we probably learned early in our conversion.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

We need to keep being infused with God's Word, as we go along our lives, so that our paths will be lit so we will know the way to go, so we will see the obstacles that we need to go around or over or through, so that we will make it all the way to the end of the path in His Kingdom.

Finally, let us go to Titus chapter 2. It is kind of a New Testament way of looking at this.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

It took the grace of God to send Jesus Christ here to open the way to help us to do what is good and right because otherwise we would not. He opened up the way to the Kingdom of God as a hope, as a goal, that we can go with Jesus Christ to that end and

live eternally with Him.

Back in Psalm 90:12, the second thing that we need to figure out is what exactly is ‘to number our days.’ I have used a few different phrases. But ‘number’ simply means ‘to count.’ It is very similar to what was used back in the book of Numbers (they took a census; they counted the people). So the primary understanding is that God has to train us to have a godly perspective on our remaining time. We will not have a godly perspective if God does not train us to look at it in the proper way.

But it goes beyond this. It also means, not just count, but it means ‘to reckon’ or also ‘to appoint.’ In terms of it meaning ‘to reckon,’ it implies considering all the constituent parts of a thing in making up the whole. So you need to see more than just the big picture; you need to see all the parts and how they work together. God has to teach us to do that. He has to teach us to see all the constituent parts. We have to see all the commandments. We have to see all the principles. We have to see everything that goes in to being a righteous, holy person to get to the Kingdom of God.

God has to teach us all these various parts so that we can have the right perspective on our lives. God needs to teach us how to consider and utilize all the various aspects of our lives in becoming wise. It is not one size fits all. It is not even just one set of exercises that we all go through. It is varied. It is complex. We all go through different ways. But there is only one God, one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and one goal. But we all have our own little idiosyncrasies and God has to teach us to reckon all those little parts and pieces so that we can make up the whole in time.

It also means ‘to appoint.’ That implies dedicating or setting apart something for a specific use. So, let us say, you are a general out on the battlefield and you need to take a castle. You know that this particular job, in taking the castle (going up, let us say, to the gate and forcing your way up maybe a stairway or something), is going to be very dangerous to do. So you say, “Alright, men, line up here. I’m going to take every tenth man, and you’re going to be the ones that storm the castle here at this very dangerous point.” And it is called the forlorn hope because when you take those ten percent of your men, you are considering that they are probably all going to die in the attempt. So numbering those men, taking one out of every ten, dedicates them to that particular task.

What we are seeing in this word ‘number’ is that it can be applied to this idea of numbering our days. When we raise this idea to a divine level, it means that God has put His sovereign control and appointed us to a specific task to do and we need to understand that we have been taught and appointed to do this—that we are a special

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

crew and that we are going to be used by God. A part of the use is to learn how to prioritize our time—how to make the most of our lives.

I was going to go to the book of Jonah but I will not go there. I will just explain. In Jonah, God appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. Later on, in chapter 4, He appointed a gourd to grow over him and He sent the worm and He sent a hot wind. All of those things were numbered or prepared or appointed by God for a specific task. They are to go to a specific place and do a specific thing.

So, if we put all this back into Psalm 90:12, Moses is saying that God needs to teach us how to dedicate our remaining days to the pursuit of godly wisdom. If God did not teach us this, we would not put the right emphasis on the right syllable, as it were. We would do things wrong. We would put things in different priorities. So God has to teach us to appoint or dedicate our time and efforts in a proper way.

Let us go on to the next thing about the goal: “That we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Moses is speaking about a process—a process of learning, of growing, and ultimately, of becoming. He implies that wisdom comes as a result (a fruit, you might say) of having a godly perspective on our day of salvation. The time that we have been given, that it comes as a result of considering and utilizing all the parts of our lives in a godly way and all the parts of what He teaches us, utilizing them to make the most of it, and it comes as a result of dedicating ourselves and our time to God’s goal for us. We have to have all of these things together so that we can ultimately be what He wants us to be.

Now this is where the fall festivals come into play. This process that we have been talking about—this teaching us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom—is to bring us into His Kingdom. The process is to help us learn to rule with Christ during the Millennium. This process is to teach us, or to prepare us, to live with God throughout eternity. All of these things have their focus on what we are learning in these fall festivals.

God wants us to gain a heart of wisdom because He wants us to help Him and be with Him forever. It is a great, awesome, wonderful goal! But He has to give us what we need and then we need to respond, so that we can work together to get to this point. That is the fulfillment of the holy days.

And, of course, as I mentioned before, verse 17 hints at this glorious future: “Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” Ultimately, what this implies is that we are going to have the beauty of God, meaning, we shall be God. We shall be a part of His family. We will be just like Him (I John 3:2: We will see Him as He is). And then, of

Psalms: Book Four (Part One) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

course, the praise “establish the work of our hands” also has to do with forever, that it will be established for all time.

I will just go to this one scripture and then I will stop. I will just have to leave the summary psalm to another time. Ephesians 5—where there is a similar idea that Paul brings out. Maybe he got it from Psalm 90, I do not know, but it is kind of put in more understandable words for us as we go forward. Paul writes:

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

So Moses—and Paul, centuries later—is beseeching God to teach us to conform to His work, to conform to His plan, to conform to His goal and all His purposes. He tells us we have to be circumspect. We cannot be focused on just one little thing and have tunnel vision.

You understand what ‘circumspect’ means. ‘Circum’ means ‘around,’ ‘spect’ means ‘to see’ or ‘to view.’ So if you are circumspect, you are looking all around. You are looking at the whole picture. You are looking all around you. You are keeping your mind open. I do not mean this in a bad way, but you are keeping your eyes open about all that is going around you and how it affects your life, how it affects your relationship with God. He wants you to redeem the time. He wants you to see how much time you have and how best you use it, because the days are evil. And as the days get more evil, we know we are getting closer. Paul says elsewhere: “We know that it is closer now than when we were first converted.”

So we need to get on the stick. But we also need to have this view all around us and what is going on, and make sure that we are not unwise in our choices. We need to make sure that we make the very best choices with the godly wisdom or godly understanding and knowledge that God has given us so that we can apply it in godly wisdom, (and as it says here in verse 17) so we can understand what the will of the Lord is.

We have got to keep our eyes open. We have got to keep all these things in play that we have learned—all these things that have been revealed to us—and we need to make good use of all of those things so that we can make the proper decisions going forward and be there in His Kingdom.