

Psalms of Moses

The first psalm of Moses is not in the Book of Psalms, but in Exodus 15, where Moses leads the Israelites in the celebratory song, once they have successfully crossed the Red Sea and witnessed the drowning of the Egyptian army. It opens:

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.

The Lord is my strength my song; and he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

In the verses that follow, the specific incidents that prompted this celebration are listed, and God's almighty power over the enemy is praised.

In typically Eastern fashion, God is seen as the great, overpowering Strength of the Israelites, in contrast to the gods of the nations around, who cannot match the power of their God. Miriam and the women join the song with tambourines and dancing, echoing the chorus that Moses had used earlier:

Sing to the Lord,

for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider

he has hurled into the sea.

Then, even the Ten Commandments are given to us in poetic form. Moses was a gifted writer, "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." No wonder God chose him to record the Pentateuch and these psalms for us. These words have become the immortal Word of God to us and will remain so until Christ comes to wrap up our history.

Psalm 90:

Moses wrote several psalms, some of which found their way into the psalter, and others are scattered throughout the Pentateuch. Psalm 90 is ascribed to Moses, and Psalm 91 follows along in the same vein, so it was probably also written by Moses. There is some question about psalms 92 – 100, but they may very well be included under Moses' authorship, so I will treat them as such.

Moses, having been called to his ministry at eighty years of age, and was nearing one hundred twenty years when he composed many of his writings, was feeling his age, and he knew he had passed his best-before-date long before, but he was continuing in God's service to the end. Although God had informed him that,

because of his outburst of anger, he would not be able to enter the Promised Land with the Israelites whom he had led through the wilderness, he wanted to make sure that God's Covenant Law would not be forgotten by those that would follow and his people through forty years of wandering in the Wilderness of Sinai. They had all learned lessons in what it meant to follow God Almighty, and how to worship Him properly, and in anticipation of the Promise of the Covenant being fulfilled through them.

Verses 1 and 2 are a paean to God as Creator of all things, and to His divine Presence with His people through all generations.

In verse 3, Moses' thoughts turn to the frailty of life. He realizes that, whether man lives a short life or a long life, in God's eyes, those few years are as a blink of the eye. With God, time is not reckoned as it is with us. A thousand years is as but a day, compared with eternity. God knows the end from the beginning, so the various incidents along the way are melted into one whole event.

The famous passage about a normal lifespan being seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if strength allows, is found in verse 10. Even here, Moses is very aware of the foibles of old age and the weakness that accompanies the encroaching years. In the end, we all fly away in death.

Verse 13 is also well-known, for it is a prayer that we often raise up to our Father:

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

The verses to the end expand on that thought, uttering further prayers to God to make Himself practically known in our life, so that His beauty may be reflect through us, and that our works may be established through Him.

Psalm 91:

This seems to be a continuation of the previous psalm, which is attributed to Moses in the title, so I assume that Moses also wrote this, possibly even as a continuation of Psalm 90.

Verse 1 is a precious promise for all ages:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

Verse 2 is a personal testimony of the author:

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.

Verses 3 – 13 reflect the various blessings in store for those who put their trust in God – protection, removal of fear, strength in battle, refuge from harm.

Verses 11 and 12 are quoted by the Devil in the temptation of Christ:

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

And verse 13 reminds me of Mark 16:17 – 18, where it says:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

He concludes with another reminder of all that God will do for those that put their trust in Him. A long life with satisfaction is guaranteed those who are loved by the Lord. Truly a remarkable and memorable psalm for us all.

Psalm 92:

Psalms 92 – 100 may also have been written by Moses, so I will include them in my study.

Having instituted celebration of the Sabbath among the Israelites, Moses was in a good position to write a paean of praise to the worship of their Lord connected with it. He begins by:

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.

For you make me glad by your deeds, O Lord; I sing for joy at the works of your hands.

How great are your works, O Lord, how profound your thoughts.

Already in 1400 BC, there were relatively well-developed instruments, particularly stringed ones and wind ones, as well as percussion. The ten-stringed lyre was one that is often referred to in the Bible, and the harp was a cithera, a smaller instrument with fewer strings and portable. The lyre was often plucked with the fingers, like the modern harp, and the cithera with a plectrum. David probably played the cithera, while the ten-stringed lyre was likely stationary in the royal hall

or temple. Both were used in the worship of the Lord, along with rams horn shofars and brass trumpets. There may also have been a sackbut, which was an early version of a trombone, with one tube sliding over another to allow different overtones to be reached, much as in modern instruments with slides. Percussion existed in various forms, from bongo-like drums to gourds with hard kernels inside and tambourines, called tabrets. All of these and more were incorporated into the tabernacle worship instituted by Moses, so he was well informed about their sounds and uses. Moses wrote other songs, as well, so it is not surprising that he might have written some early psalms for the Hebrew psalter.

Moses then compares the directionless wanderings of those that do not acknowledge the Lord's presence in their lives with that of God's people. He rejoices in God's exalted position in their lives. In Moses' view, God demonstrates His care for His people in very practical ways: in temporal ways and as their shield in battle with surrounding enemies. He rejoices in the defeat of their enemies – possibly referring to the Amalekites earlier, or the defeat of Og, king of Bashan more recently. These victories gave the Israelites the courage to enter the Promised Land and fight with the various Canaanite tribes that were resident there.

Moses was probably approaching 120 years of age when he wrote his Pentateuch and these psalms. In the concluding verses of Psalm 92, he reflects on God's presence with him through his many years. I recently had the privilege of witnessing the death of my 101-year-old father-in-law, who had walked with the Lord for nearly a century before God took him home, and I can bear testimony to the fact that these verses are true. My own 82 years seem as a drop in the bucket to that long life, but I can also testify to God's faithfulness even in old age, and fruitfulness doesn't have to diminish with our advancing age:

*The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.
They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'*

Amen!

Psalm 93:

In this short psalm, Moses exults in the majesty of his God. He is captivated by the fact that, over all of Creation God reigns; His throne is established long ago and is manifest in every detail of how Creation works. The seas react to His power, which is mightier than the thunderous roar of the breakers. This gives added importance

to His Law, which is established in holiness for endless days. The opening phrase is repeated in several psalms following; *The Lord reigns* opens this psalm, is alluded to in Psalm 96:10, and opens Psalms 97 and 99.

Psalm 94:

Here Moses reverts to imprecation, which David and other writers copy in later years. While we are not to exact vengeance on our enemies or those who wrong us, we can bring our thoughts to God, who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." Although this seems to go contrary to my Mennonite heritage, I guess that's what my forefathers must have done, too, when they were chased all over Europe, as they fled persecution for their faith.

He addresses God as the One who avenges:

*O Lord, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth.
Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve.*

He then lists all the ways in which these wicked people are oppressing God's people. The litany is very similar to what we hear and see on the news daily, as it is happening in Ukraine and Afghanistan right now. Evil leaders are thinking they can get away with their atrocities, but God is watching, and He it is that will avenge what is done to His people. We hear daily of those of faith clinging to their God in the midst of horror and destruction, and occasionally we hear of some deliverance that is unexplainable in any way, except to say that God intervened.

What is puzzling is that it is not always possible to attribute some good in a situation enveloping His people. Evil seems to rain on the just and the unjust alike sometimes. I guess it is how we deal with injustice and opposition that sets us apart, and how we deal with difficulty and atrocities. We are left to question as Moses did in verse 10:

*Does he who disciplines nations not punish?
Does he who teaches man lack knowledge?*

The God who knows the very thoughts of man will come and take charge once again, and Moses adds in verse 15:

Judgement will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

Moses reflects on the times he was in despair or his foot was slipping, and the Lord helped him, so he takes comfort in God's continuing presence. He ends with:

But the Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them.

Psalm 95:

Moses again feels the passion of his faith in the Lord his Protector, the One whose immeasurable power holds all Creation together, and whose Presence guides His people in security and worship. This attitude of praise and worship in song continues from Psalm 95 through 100.

He opens this psalm with another call to worship:

*Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation
Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*

He goes on with his paean of praise in listing the many things that make His God great:

*For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth,
And the mountain peaks belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

His heart overflows with devotion, and he calls on his fellow Israelites to worship God with him in verses 6 – 7:

*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

But then, Moses is reminded in his thoughts of the way in which his people had treated God's grace in the past, so he warns them of the consequences of not obeying his call to worship wholeheartedly, in verses 8 – 11:

*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.
For forty years I was angry with that generation;*

*I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.'
So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'*

Psalm 96:

The opening verses of this psalm are reflective of Moses' song as they looked back on the carnage remaining after God's people had made it to the far shore and the Egyptian's army was destroyed in the waters.

*Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all
gods.*

He continues by comparing his almighty God with the powerless gods of the nations around, ascribing appropriate praise and glory to God. He is mindful that Israel was called out by God to be a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation," and reminds them of their role in world missions. He calls on the nations around to heed the call to worship the true God. He then raises his view and calls on all of heaven to rejoice with him and worship God the Creator, who is coming to judge the earth in righteousness. Verse 10 repeats the phrase that has become somewhat common in these chapters:

Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.'

Psalm 97:

Moses opens with his by now favorite phrase:

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.

There is no doubt in his mind that the God who has just called the descendants of Israel as His people, through whom He will bless the entire world, is not just the God of the Israelites, but of all the nations of the earth. Gods were still thought of as local deities, protecting a particular group of people, and nations vied with one another in war, thinking that the superior god would demonstrate his/her power over the inferior one next door. The concept that there could be a God who was superior to all the gods was new to everyone. To Moses it was revealed that it was the Creator of all the earth who was to be Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

Verses 2 – 6 reflect on the various qualities that this God has, that make Him eligible to receive the worship of the nations. Verses 7 – 12 go further to denounce

the worship of other gods and the elevation of God as the Most High, to be exalted above all gods.

Man's response to this is simply:

Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.

Psalm 98:

Psalms 92, 95, 96, 98 and 100 all begin with some form of admonition to sing praises to the Lord. Moses was a man of song, and these psalms are a great testimony to this gift. It gives hope that we, too, can give appropriate praise to our Lord through song and poetry.

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things;
His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.*

Again, Moses reminds his people that this salvation is not only for them, but is meant for all the nations. This was not just some minor local god spouting off his/her power over the people his/her unseeing eyes beheld. It was the Creator of all things and the One who could topple any god that existed in their minds. He can also move aside any god we set up for ourselves, whether it be our own personality or that of another whom we worship.

His paean of praise is lifted once more in verses 4 – 9:

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music;
Make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
With trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn –
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.
Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy;
let the sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.*

Moses was a man of song and instruments. Everything that had breath, and everything created by God was to join in, whether it had an intelligent voice, or not.

Psalm 99 & 100:

I first thought that these two psalms belonged with those written by Moses, but on closer examination, I don't think so anymore. I think I will assign them to Asaph, but if they fail that test, the Sons of Korah.