

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 12/07/2014



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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Gen 46	2 Sam 20-21	Ps 90-92	Luke 8:49 – 9:50
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Israel's Journey to Egypt (Genesis 46-47)

Once again, God spoke to Israel (Jacob) to reassure him of His divine protection. Just as Joseph had recognized, God confirms that it was His plan all along to bring the family of Jacob to Egypt, where he would make of them a great nation. Only God knew everything He still had in store for Israel's descendants—events to be recorded in the book of Exodus.

In Genesis 45:28, Jacob expressed the desire that will make his life complete: to go to Egypt and see his son Joseph again. That is enough. Here, God comforts Jacob in a way that must have brought the deepest and greatest joy to him. God promises not only that Jacob's family would be made great in Egypt, but He confirms that Jacob's last hope will be fulfilled—he will most certainly see his long-lost son. The firstborn of Rachel will be by his side on the day of his death. Their reunion at last arrives and with many tears of rejoicing, Jacob's sorrow has finally ended, his life is fulfilled and he can face the day of his death in peace.

Jacob's life has been a long and painful struggle of reaping the seeds of corruption sown in his youth. His own sons had deceived him about what had happened to Joseph using the same items with which he himself had deceived his father Isaac to receive the birthright—a slain goat and a special coat. And for more than 20 years Jacob had believed the lie that Joseph was dead. Jacob told the Egyptian pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the years of my life" (47:9). So sad—and yet so true.

Jacob's life should be a lesson to us about reaping what we sow (see Galatians 6:7). Of course, all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). And we can be thankful that, upon our repentance, God will relieve us of some of the consequences of sin. But He won't remove *all* of them in this life—so that we may learn important lessons, as Jacob's story shows. His life, in the end, wasn't *all* bad. After all, he became a man whose name was changed to *Israel*, meaning "Prevailer with God" (Genesis 32:28). Though he was ready to die upon seeing Joseph, God gave Jacob 17 more years to spend with Joseph and the rest of his growing family (47:28). Indeed, in our next reading we will see Jacob state at the end of his life that God had "redeemed [him] from all evil" (48:16), at last finding happiness in his final years.

Still, it was a long and difficult road in getting there. But it didn't have to be—if Jacob hadn't sown the corrupt seed he did in earlier years. This lesson is "written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). If *we've* been sowing bad seed, the

answer is to stop now—asking God’s forgiveness— and to start, with His help, sowing *good* seed to reap a better tomorrow. The choice is ours to make.

Finally, Genesis 46 catalogs the names of all the members of the family of Israel that immigrated to Egypt. Once there, counting Joseph and his family, the total came to 70 persons. We know from the book of Exodus that this small group of people will grow to 600,000 men at the time of their deliverance from Egypt (12:37), which probably indicates a total population of two to three million people. Joseph settles his father’s family in the land of Goshen—the part of Egypt closest to Canaan and a land well-watered with rich soil and well furnished with pastures for their herds—where the family and its descendants will live until the time of the Exodus.

The Rebellion of Sheba (2 Samuel 20)

Whenever there are divisions among a people, inevitably someone will attempt to assert himself over others into a position of authority. Such is the case with the Benjamite Sheba. Taking advantage of the situation that exists in Israel, with the northern tribes in general rebellion (verse 2), Sheba calls for the army of Israel to follow him against Judah and the king.

David sends Amasa to gather the men of Judah before him. When he does not return in the prescribed time, David places Abishai over the men of Judah to pursue Sheba. Joab is serving under Abishai at this point.

Upon meeting Amasa, Joab kills him—his own cousin—with no established guilt. Joab’s self justification was probably based, in part, on the fact that Amasa had previously joined Absalom and had served as his general. Yet that crime was pardoned. And in the present situation, it is not known why Amasa was late. Joab didn’t even ask him! As we’ve seen, Joab is a man who continually takes matters into his own hands, sometimes breaking the law or violating direct orders in the process. Worse, Joab may have killed Amasa out of spite for taking his job—or as a political move to regain his position. Eventually these sins will catch up with him (1 Kings 1:5-6; 2:28-35).

Joab and his men come to “Abel of Beth Maacah” (2 Samuel 20:15), in northern Galilee four miles west of Dan, where Sheba is holed up. In seeking peace for her city, a wise woman dealing with Joab is able to convince her city to deliver the head of Sheba to Joab, thus resolving the conflict.

In the end, Joab ends up back over the army (verse 23).

The Gibeonites Avenged; Giants Destroyed (2 Samuel 21; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8)

God allows a famine in the land for three years during David’s reign because of the sins of Saul. Saul, in an incident not recorded elsewhere, had broken the sworn treaty Israel had made with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:16-20), thus violating the law of God (Numbers 30:1-2). In order to settle the matter with the Gibeonites, David agrees to give them seven of Saul’s descendants to be executed.

Yet why would David do such a thing? After all, Old Testament law is quite clear that a son is not to be punished for his father’s sins (Deuteronomy 24:16; compare 2 Kings 14:6; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 14-20). But since David is not condemned in the text, and since God honors the action by ending the famine (2 Samuel 21:14), David has apparently done the right thing. Perhaps the answer to this matter is hinted at in verse 1, which mentions Saul and his “bloodthirsty house.” The original King James has “bloody house” while the NIV has “blood-stained house.” Saul, then, was not the sole perpetrator in this case—so were others of his house. Thus, it would seem that the seven

men chosen had played some part in Saul's war against the Gibeonites, making them personally guilty. Therefore, it would appear that justice is served.

Saul's concubine Rizpah, mother of two of the men, "remained near the bodies, protecting them from scavengers, from the barley harvest to the early rains (late April to October)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 10). When David is later told of Rizpah's remarkable example of dedication and self-sacrifice, he is moved to gather the bones of those men and arrange for a decent burial. He also retrieves the bones of Saul and Jonathan from their burial place, brings them to Zelah, and buries them in the tomb of Saul's father, Kish (verses 11-14).

We then read about the killing of Goliath's relatives. Here, the account of Chronicles finally joins back up with the book of Samuel. Had we been reading only Chronicles, we may not have noticed the jump of many years between verses 3 and 4 of 1 Chronicles 20. Yet we would have skipped all the way from the conquest of Rabbah to this destruction of the giants— without any mention of David's great sin, the infighting within his house, the rebellion of Absalom, the rebellion of Sheba and the three-year famine. As stated before, it is evident that Chronicles was compiled with a different purpose in mind than Samuel and Kings—that purpose apparently being to show the positive side of the line of David for others to emulate and to point out tabernacle and temple worship as the focus of David's kingdom

“You Have Been Our Dwelling Place in All Generations” (Psalms 90-91)

We come now to Book IV of the Psalter, which, as pointed out in the Bible Reading Program's introduction to Psalms, appears to have originally been joined with Book V in a single collection. As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* notes, this section of the Psalter begins with Psalms 90-100, "a series of 11 psalms arranged within the frame 'you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations' (90:1) and 'his faithfulness continues through all generations'

(100:5)—a series that begins with prayer and ends with praise. The first two of these psalms (90-91) are thematically connected (point and counterpoint); the next three (92-94) form a trilogy that serves as a transition to the final thematic cluster (95-99). At the very middle, Ps 95 anticipates the four following psalms and adds a warning for the celebrants of Yahweh's reign that echoes the warning of Moses in Dt 6:13-18. Evidently the editors of the Psalter intended readers of this group of psalms to hear echoes of the voice of Moses as interceder (Ps 90) and as admonisher (95:8-11), through which ministries (shared also by Aaron and Samuel) Israel had been blessed under the reign of the Great King, Yahweh" (note on Psalms 90-100). We should also bear in mind that Books IV and V look forward to the coming reign of God over all the earth.

Psalm 90 is the only psalm attributed to Moses in the book of Psalms (although he wrote two other songs that we know of, found in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32). This attribution makes Psalm 90 the psalm of oldest recorded origin. It is "a prayer to the everlasting God to have compassion on his servants, who through the ages have known him to be their safe haven (v. 1; see also 91:9) but who also painfully experience his wrath because of their sin and his sentence of death that cuts short their lives—a plea that through this long night of his displeasure God will teach them true wisdom (see v. 12...) and, in the morning after, bless them in equal measure with expressions of his love so that joy may yet fill their days and the days of their children and their daily labors be blessed. This psalm has many links with Ps 39" (note on Psalm 90).

The translation of verse 3 is disputed. Where the KJV and NKJV have "destruction," other modern versions have "dust." The word here literally denotes "powder," though it can have the sense of "being crushed" or, as a footnote in the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh says, "contrition" (being broken and humbled). Paired with the word

“return” in the next line, the idea in the KJV and NKJV seems to be that God has punished people for sin, bringing them to destruction or humbling, and then commands them to “Return” (to Him), this being the Old Testament term for “Repent.” Just as God would here be telling the people to return to Him in verse 3, Moses in verse 13 asks God to “Return” to His people—not in repentance but in attentive care. Yet those who advocate the word “dust” in verse 3 see the pairing with “return” as meaning that God commands mortal human beings to return to dust (i.e., to the ground), recalling the curse of Genesis 3:19. Moreover, this is seen to fit better with the imagery of people quickly perishing in the verses that follow (Psalm 90:4-6). It should be noted, however, that Moses used a very different word for dust in Genesis 3. And the context of quickly perishing could just as well mean, “Repent, for you don’t have much time.”

Life can sometimes seem long to people—like they have plenty of time to do whatever they will do. But a human lifetime, indeed, as long a time as human beings have been around, is only a very short period in God’s eternal perspective. Moses says that a thousand years (just over the longest time that anyone had ever lived, perhaps hearkening back to Adam, Methuselah and Noah, who lived to be 930, 969 and 950 respectively) are gone as yesterday (a single day) to God—or as an even shorter period of time, a watch in the night having been about four hours in the Old Testament period (verse 4). Early rabbinic tradition came to view this verse, juxtaposed with God’s Sabbath command about resting from daily toil, as meaning that the thousands of years of human history are represented by the days of the week—6,000 years of man’s sin and futile toil followed by a 1,000-year Sabbath of God’s rule. The apostle Peter appears to have been referring to Psalm 90:4 when He wrote of Christ’s coming at the end of human history: “But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise” (2 Peter 3:8-9).

The NIV apparently gives the correct sense of the beginning of verse 5 in Psalm 90: “You sweep men away in the sleep of death.” The latter part of the verse and verse 6 compare human life to grass springing up in the morning and, in the heat of the sun, withering by the end of the day. This should not be construed literally to mean that grass lives only one day— though it sometimes does live only a few days in the Middle Eastern deserts. This is rather a figurative picture, keeping with the imagery of human life as beginning and ending within a single “day.”

Verse 8 is a reminder that God sees all of our sins—even our secret ones. We may hide things from other people, but we can’t hide them from God—and His perspective is the one that ultimately counts.

In verse 9 Moses laments, “All our days pass away under your wrath” (NIV)—so that “we finish our years like a sigh.” In its note on verse 7, *The Nelson Study Bible* states regarding being consumed by God’s anger and wrath: “The allusion is to the anger of God against the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness (see Num. 13; 14). An entire generation spent their lives wandering in the wilderness because of their unbelief and rebellion.” Other commentators, however, suggest that the context is not the wilderness experience of Israel but life outside the Garden of Eden. “If fellowship with God could be pictured as life lived together in a Garden, then it was sin that had excluded humanity from such a wonderful life (Gen. 3:22-24). Accordingly man now lives outside the Garden under the wrath of God” (George Knight, *Psalms*, comments on Psalm 90).

The latter idea here seems to fit better with the age limits Moses cites in verse 10. He presents a typical human life span as 70 years and points out that it may be extended to 80 if someone’s physical constitution permits. This is not to cap human life at 80, but it does seem to label 80 as being a rather old age for people. Yet consider that Moses himself was already 80 at the time of the Exodus. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, he lived to be 120—and his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, were even older when they died around that time. It seems odd that at such an age, looking back over the years of wilderness wandering, Moses would be saying that life might be stretched to 80. This fact would seem to support Moses having written this psalm closer to the time of the Exodus,

when he perhaps did not expect to live to be 120—so that, as mentioned above, God’s judgment in the psalm would refer to the whole of human experience since the Garden of Eden rather than merely Israel’s years of wandering.

In any case, Moses’ point in verse 10 is that human life is brief and that, even if it’s longer than usual, it’s still filled with labor and sorrow. It brings to mind Jacob’s statement to the Egyptian pharaoh: “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage” (Genesis 47:9).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states that the beginning of Psalm 90:11 is meant in the sense of a “strong affirmation: ‘Nobody knows the power of your anger!’” The rest of the verse apparently means that the fear of God is justified because of what His wrath can result in. The point is that man should live carefully, with awe and respect for God, fearing to disobey Him. Moses in verse 12 asks God to “teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” The idea here, the central point of the psalm for our sakes, is that we come to recognize how short our time is, to value the time we have so as to use it wisely (compare Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 4:5).

In Psalm 90:13, Moses pleads with God to return—meaning, as mentioned earlier, to revisit His servants with help and care. He interjects with the question common to laments, “How long?” (verse 13)—how long will it be until God does what he is asking. When will God return and satisfy us with His unfailing love so that we may be glad and rejoice? (verse 14). Moses asks that God make us glad in proportion to the affliction He has laid on us in this life (verse 15). In fact, He will ultimately go far beyond that. For as the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:18, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Moses prays that God’s beauty (verse 17), the wonderful vision of His work and glory (verse 16), would be upon us, giving our lives and work a sense of continuity and meaning. His loving intervention for us establishes true value and purpose for life. “Frail, limited, and sinful as man is, the love of God can transform what is weak to His own glory” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 17).

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, in its introductory note on Psalm 90, states: “So that the melancholy depiction of the human state here might not stand alone, the editors of the Psalter have followed it immediately with a psalm that speaks in counterpoint of the happy condition of those who ‘dwell in the shelter of the Most High’ (91:1 [compare 90:1]) and ‘make the Most High {their} dwelling’ (91:9; see also 92:13). To isolate Ps 90 from this context is to distort its intended function in the Psalter collection. See also Ps 103.”

Psalm 91 is without attribution in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. The Greek Septuagint version adds a superscription saying that the psalm is “of David.” We should note a thematic connection between the previous psalm and this one. Psalm 90 begins with the words, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations” (verse 1). This psalm begins, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (91:1; compare verse 9). *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible* refers to Psalm 91 as “a glowing testimony to the security of those who trust in God—set beside Ps 90 as a counterpoint to the dismal depiction of the human condition found there” (note on Psalm 91).

The first two verses present four different designations for God: *Elyown* (“Most High”); *Shaddai* (“Almighty” though perhaps meaning All-Nourishing or All-Sufficient as the root *shad* means “breast”); *Yahweh* (translated “the Lord” but meaning “He Is That He Is,” signifying Eternal, Ever-living or Self-Existent); and *Elohi* (“My God” or “My Strong One”). These distinctions communicate various aspects of God’s nature. Note in verse 14 that God sets on high those who have known His name—not referring to Hebrew pronunciation but to understanding who He is and what He is all about, which His names help to reveal.

Dwelling “in the secret place of the Most High” (verse 1) recalls David’s words in Psalms 27:5 and 31:20, which mention God hiding His people in the secret place of His presence within His tabernacle or pavilion. Abiding “under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1) is related to verse 4: “And He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.” This is a figurative picture of God as a mother bird sheltering its young—imagery found elsewhere in David’s psalms (61:4; 63:7). As noted before, the word for “wings” can also denote “skirts” or the borders of a garment—with the imagery of a man taking a woman under his wing as symbolic of marriage (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Ruth). It is likely that parent-child and husband-wife metaphors are being blended in these various references to show the great care God has in protecting His people—as the imagery is also blended with the idea of God being the defensive refuge and fortress of His people (compare 61:3-4; 91:2, 4). Psalm 91:3 says God will deliver His people “from the snare of the fowler” — that is, traps laid by bird catchers (see also 124:7)—again comparing God’s people to young birds.

The psalmist goes on to explain various ways that God’s people will be kept from harm. It is important to focus on this and hold tight to the scriptural promises here. However, we must recognize that while God’s people have His certain promise of protection, this does not mean that no harm of any kind will ever come to them in this life. Note verse 7, where thousands will fall around you but you yourself as a servant of God will not be touched. This has often been the experience of God’s people, just as declared here. But the verse does not say that God’s people will *never* be touched by peril or death. Verse 10 should be understood in the context of verse 7—that when many around God’s people fall, they will be spared. Here, too, it is not stated that no calamity will *ever* befall those who serve God. The psalm itself points out that they will experience trouble in life (verse 15). Consider what happened to Job, David, Paul and others—and even to Yeshua Messiah, the quintessential righteous person.

Verses 11-12 say that God has commissioned His angels with protecting His people—that they will carry you through life “lest you dash your foot against a stone.” So do God’s people never stub their toes? That is not what is meant here. It does *not* say, “...so that you will *never* dash your foot against a stone.” Rather, the point is that God’s angels often intervene to protect us, sometimes even from seemingly minor harm. In the monumental confrontation between Yeshua and Satan prior to the start of Yeshua’s ministry, the devil resorted to quoting Scripture, twisting it to suit his aims. And he chose these verses among others to make his challenge. He told Yeshua to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple because Psalm 91:11-12 promised that God’s angels would be there to catch Him (Matthew 4:5-6). Yeshua countered, “It is also written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (verse 7, NIV)—quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, referring to the negative sense of challenging God’s grace. Clearly God’s promise of protection does not mean that we may arrogantly presume on His favor through trying to set the terms of how He must intervene for us (by deliberately placing ourselves in harm’s way).

Besides helping us to better understand Psalm 91, Yeshua’s response teaches us something else about comprehending the Bible in general by His words “it is *also* written.” We should not base our understanding of a biblical subject on just one or a few verses when there are others that bear on the matter. Rather, we are to consider all of the verses that bear on a matter and deduce the truth from the whole of pertinent Scripture.

With all this in perspective, let’s notice more specifically what Psalm 91 tells us. Verse 3 does not say that we will never fall into an enemy trap or experience deadly illness. Yet we can take confidence that God says here that He will *deliver* us from these. Sometimes this means keeping us from them (perhaps most of the time), but it may mean rescuing us after a period of affliction. And at times ultimate deliverance—salvation—is in view. Even if we should die, God will later resurrect us to be utterly impervious to harm, just as He is.

Verses 5-6 do not say that we will never experience terrifying situations, disease or devastation though He often spares us from these. But when these do come, confidence in God’s care and His overall plan will help us to not “be

afraid”—that is, to not live in fear. Even this does not mean that we will never go through doubting moments of worry and fright. Rather, the idea is that, if we earnestly seek God, our lives will not be characterized by fear but by faith (compare 94:19).

In the concluding verses, God Himself speaks within the words of the psalm (91:14-16). Verse 15 assures us that He will answer our prayers and that, whatever troubles do befall us, He will be *with* us in them—helping us to endure them. Moreover, we see again here that God will deliver us (verses 14-15), if not immediately then over time—and certainly when we are later resurrected to be in His Kingdom. “Long life” and “salvation” in the final verse applies most fully to that future time. God often does bless His people with longevity and deliverance in this life, but consider that Yeshua Messiah, the most righteous person to ever live, died at age 33. The ultimate long and satisfying life is that which is still to come—in contrast to the brevity and sorrow of life today as presented in Psalm 90.

Luke 8:49-9:50

Yeshua continues with His wondrous healing of the people. He raises a ruler’s daughter from the dead. He ordered them to tell no one.

And having called His twelve taught ones together, He gave them power and authority over all demons, and to heal diseases.

He sent them out. He said: “Take nothing at all for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money – neither have two undergarments.”

They were to stay in a house that showed them hospitality, but leave and brush the dust off their feet of those villages who refused to hear the Good News.

We then read the account of the death of Yochanon the Immerser at the hand of Herodes.

Yeshua feeds the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Yeshua asks His disciples, “who do men say that I am.” This is when Peter replies, “The Messiah of Elohim.” He warned them to tell no one for the Son of Adam had to suffer much, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised the third day.”

Yeshua takes with Him Peter, John, and Jacob and went up to a mountain to pray. The three witnessed Yeshua transforming in His skin and garments and speaking with Moses and Eliyahu and they spoke to Yeshua about His coming death.

Yeshua warned His disciples to speak of this to no one. When they returned, Yeshua is called upon to heal a man’s son who was demon possessed and who could not be healed by the Apostles. Yeshua healed him and cast out the demon.

