

Psalm 90:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Analysis

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. This opening verse of Psalm 90, the only psalm attributed to Moses, establishes God's eternal faithfulness across all human generations. Against the backdrop of human mortality and brevity developed throughout the psalm, verse 1 anchors hope in God's unchanging character and perpetual availability as refuge for His people.

"Lord" (אֱלֹהִים/Adonai) uses the title meaning Master, Sovereign, Lord—emphasizing God's authority and lordship. While the personal covenant name Yahweh appears later (v.13), the psalm opens with Adonai, establishing God's sovereign rule over all creation and all time. This is the Master of the universe, not merely a tribal deity or local god.

"Thou hast been" (הָיָת/hayita) uses the perfect tense, indicating completed past action with ongoing effects. God has been and continues to be—His faithfulness isn't merely historical but extends into present and future. This verb connects all generations: what God was to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He remains to present believers and will be to future generations.

"Our dwelling place" (מַיּוֹם/ma'on) means habitation, refuge, shelter, home. Ma'on suggests security, comfort, and permanence. While Israel wandered for forty years without permanent home, God Himself was their dwelling place—more stable than any physical structure, more enduring than any earthly city. Deuteronomy 33:27 declares: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

"In all generations" (בְּדֹר וּבְדֹר /bedor vador) literally reads "in generation and generation"—the repetition emphasizing continuity across all human history. While individual lives are brief (the psalm's later verses emphasize human transience), God's faithfulness spans all generations. Abraham's God is Isaac's God is Jacob's God is Moses's God is David's God is our God. Each generation finds God to be the same faithful refuge.

This verse sets up the psalm's central tension: human brevity versus divine eternality. Verses 3-12 emphasize human frailty, short lifespan, and swift passing. Against this mortality, God's eternal faithfulness provides the only solid ground. The psalm moves from this confidence (v.1-2) through lament over human transience (v.3-12) to petition for God's mercy and blessing (v.13-17).

Historical Context

Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses, making it the oldest psalm chronologically if the attribution is historical. Moses led Israel through forty years of wilderness wandering, watching an entire generation die due to unbelief (Numbers 14:26-35). This psalm's emphasis on human mortality, the brevity of life (seventy or eighty years at most), and God as dwelling place when Israel had no physical home reflects Moses's unique perspective.

The generation that left Egypt perished in the wilderness. Moses himself would die before entering Canaan due to his sin at Meribah (Numbers 20:12). The psalm's somber reflection on human mortality and divine anger likely stems from watching hundreds of thousands die in the desert—divine judgment on rebellion. Yet throughout, God remained faithful, providing manna, water, protection, and guidance. He was their dwelling place despite their homelessness.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples measured identity and security through land, cities, and permanent structures. Egypt had cities, monuments, and temples spanning centuries. Nomadic existence was viewed as inferior, temporary, and insecure. Yet Moses declares that God Himself serves as dwelling place—more permanent than Pharaoh's monuments, more secure than any city. This radical claim established that relationship with God, not geographical location or political power, provides

ultimate security.

For Israel throughout history—in exile, under foreign domination, scattered in diaspora—this verse provided hope. When Jerusalem fell to Babylon, when Romans destroyed the temple, when Jews were expelled from homeland, God remained their dwelling place. Modern Israel's motto could be this verse: though scattered for two millennia, God preserved the people.

For the church, this foreshadows truth that God Himself, through Christ and the Spirit, becomes believers' dwelling place. John 15:4: "Abide in me, and I in you." Ephesians 3:17: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." God's dwelling in us and our dwelling in Him fulfills what Moses glimpsed—unshakeable security in relationship with eternal God regardless of earthly circumstances.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God as 'our dwelling place' change your perspective on earthly security, geographical location, and material possessions?
2. What specific examples from your life or family history demonstrate God's faithfulness across generations?
3. How does Moses's experience—leading a generation that died in wilderness yet trusting God as dwelling place—inform your faith during seasons of discipline, delay, or apparent lack of progress?

Interlinear Text

אָדָן־
Lord thou hast been our dwelling place
H136 H4583

לְכָנָה יְמִינָה אֶת־תָּהָר
H859 H1961 H0 generations
H1755

יָדָר:
generations
H1755

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 33:27 (Parallel theme): The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

Psalms 71:3 (Parallel theme): Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.

1 John 4:16 (Parallel theme): And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Psalms 91:1 (Parallel theme): He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Ezekiel 11:16 (References Lord): Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.

Psalms 89:1 (References Lord): I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.

Psalms 91:9 (References Lord): Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;

John 6:56 (Parallel theme): He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

Isaiah 8:14 (Parallel theme): And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 33:1 (Parallel theme): And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.

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