

Psalms 90:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep:
in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

Analysis

Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. This verse develops the theme of human transience through three vivid metaphors: flood, sleep, and grass. Each image emphasizes the swift, inevitable, and overwhelming nature of death that sweeps away mortal life. Moses uses natural imagery familiar to his audience to illustrate theological truth about mortality under divine judgment.

"Thou carriest them away as with a flood" (זֶרַמְתָּם שֶׁנָּה יִהְיוּ/zeram tam shenah yihiyu) uses zaram (to pour out, flood, overwhelm). The imagery is of sudden, irresistible waters sweeping people away—they cannot resist, cannot escape, cannot hold ground against the torrent. Death comes like a flood that overwhelms all human resistance. Noah's flood (Genesis 6-8) demonstrated this literally—human life swept away en masse by divine judgment through water. Here the metaphor applies to mortality itself: each generation is swept away by death's unstoppable flood.

"They are as a sleep" (שֶׁנָּה יִהְיוּ/shenah yihiyu) compares death to sleep—both involve unconsciousness, cessation of activity, and apparent rest. Yet this "sleep" is forced, not voluntary. Shenah can mean sleep or year, creating wordplay. Whether read as sleep or years, the point is the same: human life passes swiftly and unconsciously, like sleeping through time. This anticipates New Testament imagery of death as sleep (John 11:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14), though with hope of resurrection awakening.

"In the morning they are like grass which groweth up" (בִּבְקֹר כְּחִצִּיר יַחְלֹף/baboqer kechatzir yachalof) introduces the grass metaphor developed in verse 6. Chatzir (grass, vegetation) represents ephemeral life. Chalaf means to sprout, spring up, flourish. Morning grass appears fresh, green, vital—full of life and promise. Yet as verse 6 develops, evening brings withering. The metaphor emphasizes the brevity between flourishing and fading, morning vigor and evening death.

Historical Context

The flood imagery would resonate powerfully with Israelites who knew the Exodus/Red Sea account and Noah's flood. Both demonstrated God's sovereign power over waters and human life. In ancient Near Eastern climate, flash floods in wadis (dry riverbeds) could suddenly sweep away travelers—a real danger illustrating life's precariousness.

The grass metaphor reflects agricultural reality in Israel's semi-arid climate. Grass springs up quickly after winter rains but withers when summer heat arrives. Isaiah 40:6-8 uses identical imagery: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Peter quotes this (1 Peter 1:24-25) to contrast human transience with God's eternal word.

James 1:10-11 applies the metaphor to rich and poor alike: "The rich man... shall pass away... For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth." All human glory, wealth, and achievement are as temporary as grass—flourishing briefly then withering permanently.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do the three metaphors—flood, sleep, grass—each uniquely contribute to understanding human mortality's different aspects?
2. What comfort or warning does the comparison of death to sleep provide, especially in light of resurrection hope?
3. How should the grass metaphor affect our perspective on achievements, possessions, and pursuits that seem permanent but are actually ephemeral?

Interlinear Text

וְכַתְּמָם	שָׁנָה	יְהִי וְ	בֹּקֶר
Thou carriest them away as with a flood	they are as a sleep	H1961	in the morning
H2229	H8142		H1242
כְּחֹצֵר	יִתְלַף:		
they are like grass	which groweth up		
H2682	H2498		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 40:6 (Parallel theme): The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field:

Psalms 73:20 (Parallel theme): As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

Job 22:16 (Parallel theme): Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood:

1 Peter 1:24 (Parallel theme): For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: