

Psalms 90:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

Analysis

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. This verse concludes the lament section (v.7-9), summarizing human existence under divine wrath. Life is characterized by swift passing and ultimate futility—days consumed by wrath, years passing like a briefly told story. The verse's somber tone reflects Moses's experience watching an entire generation perish in the wilderness under God's judgment.

"For all our days are passed away" (כל ימינו פנו/ki khol-yameinu fanu) uses panah (to turn, turn away, pass away, decline). Kol (all) emphasizes totality—not some days but ALL days pass away. The perfect tense indicates completed action: our days ARE passed, already declining, already turning toward their end from the moment they begin. Each day that passes is one fewer remaining, life constantly diminishing like sand in an hourglass.

"In thy wrath" (בְּעָבְרָתֶךָ/be'evratekha) locates all life within the sphere of divine anger. Evrah (wrath, fury, overflow of anger) suggests overwhelming divine displeasure. This isn't occasional divine anger for specific sins but the constant condition of life under the curse—existence lived in the atmosphere of God's wrath against sin. Until reconciled through Christ, humanity lives its entire existence under divine displeasure.

"We spend our years" (כל ימינו killinu shanenu) uses kalah again (cf. v.7—"consumed"). Shanah (year) represents measured time, the units in which we

count our lives. We spend/exhaust/consume our years—they're used up, depleted, finished. Life is expenditure of limited resource until nothing remains.

"As a tale that is told" (הַנּוֹתֵרַת/kemo-hegeh) uses hegeh (meditation, murmuring, musing, sigh, thought). The phrase likely means a sigh, a thought, a fleeting meditation—something that passes quickly and leaves no lasting trace. Like a story told and forgotten, a thought that flits through consciousness and disappears, a sigh that escapes and dissipates—so human life passes swiftly and leaves little mark. James 4:14 echoes: "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Historical Context

Moses watched 600,000+ men (plus women and children) die over forty years—perhaps 2-3 million people perishing in the wilderness. Their years were literally spent under God's wrath for rebellion at Kadesh (Numbers 14:26-35). Lives that could have entered Canaan were instead consumed in desert wandering, dying without seeing promise fulfilled. Their story passed quickly—a generation born in Egypt, freed at Exodus, wandered forty years, died in wilderness. A tale told briefly, then over.

Ecclesiastes extensively develops this theme of life's futility under the curse. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Solomon catalogs human endeavors—wisdom, pleasure, labor, wealth—all ultimately meaningless apart from God. Life "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes's recurring phrase) lived in the atmosphere of the curse is like a tale told—briefly recounted, quickly forgotten, leaving no enduring significance.

Only in Christ does life gain meaning. Romans 5:9 promises: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Believers no longer spend days under wrath but under grace. Life becomes not a meaningless tale but a story written into God's eternal redemptive narrative, gaining significance through participation in His purposes.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that unredeemed life is spent entirely 'in thy wrath' intensify gratitude for Christ's deliverance from wrath?
2. What makes life without God like 'a tale that is told'—briefly recounted and quickly forgotten—and how does Christ provide lasting significance?
3. How should awareness that all days are 'passed away' motivate urgency in pursuing God's purposes and sharing the gospel with others still under wrath?

Interlinear Text

שָׁנֶת יְמִינָה	כִּל יְמִינָה	בְּעֹבֶדֶת תְּ	גַּם אֵ	מִינָה	כִּל	כִּי
H3588	H3605	For all our days	are passed away	in thy wrath	we spend	our years
		H3117	H6437	H5678	H3615	H8141

שָׁנֶת כִּמְנוּ
as a tale

H3644 H1899

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 78:33 (Parallel theme): Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.

