

In Psalm 90:10 (ESV), Moses writes:

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

This verse often raises questions. Is Moses saying human beings can only live up to 70 or 80 years? If so, why do some people live well into their 90s or even past 100? And on the flip side, why do some die in their youth or even in infancy?

Let's explore what this passage truly means in its broader biblical context.

Understanding Psalm 90:10 – A General Observation, Not a Divine Limit

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, reflecting on the majesty of God and the frailty of human life. When Moses mentions 70 or 80 years, he is not establishing a divine law or limit but making a general observation. It is a description of the typical human lifespan, especially in his time. This is supported by historical and modern data—many people do live around

that range.

Importantly, this verse must be interpreted in light of other Scripture. Nowhere in the Bible does God decree that every person must live only up to 80 years. In fact, the Bible gives examples of individuals living both much longer and much shorter lives.

Long Lifespans in the Bible

In Genesis, we see extraordinarily long lifespans:

Methuselah lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27).

Noah lived 950 years (Genesis 9:29).

However, after the flood, God said:

My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.

Genesis 6:3 (ESV)

Many scholars understand this as God setting a general maximum age for humanity moving forward. Even so, this was not strictly enforced as a law but reflected a downward trend in human longevity over time.

Exceptions to the Norm

Some righteous individuals in modern times have lived well beyond 90. Scripture itself never suggests that long life is impossible—only that it's rare. Job 42:17 (ESV) says:

“And Job died, an old man, and full of days.”

On the other hand, many die young—sometimes in infancy or early adulthood. This is a painful reality that Scripture doesn't ignore. For example, King Josiah, one of the godliest kings of Judah, died at just 39 (2 Kings 22-23).

So why the variance?

God's Sovereignty Over Life and Death

Ultimately, God is sovereign over life and death.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 139:16 (ESV)

Each person's lifespan is known by God, and He has a purpose for every life, regardless of its length. This truth reassures us that early death is not necessarily punishment, nor is long life always a reward.

Eternity: The Greater Perspective

Whether we live 50, 70, or 100 years, our time on earth is temporary. James writes:

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

James 4:14 (ESV)

What truly matters is not how long we live, but how we live—whether our lives honor God and prepare us for eternity.

Jesus taught:

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Mark 8:36 (ESV)

Living a long life in sin is meaningless if it ends in eternal separation from God. On the other hand, a life—even a short one—lived in obedience to Christ is of immeasurable worth.

Conclusion: Live for What Lasts

We may not control the number of our days, but we can choose what we do with them. Scripture calls us to number our days and live wisely:

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12 (ESV)

Whether God gives us 40, 70, or 100 years, the call remains the same: to live for Him. Because after this brief life, we will all face eternity.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...

Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)

Let us not live for this world, but for the new heaven and new earth that await those who are in Christ.

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

Maranatha — Come, Lord Jesus.

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