

00-07-30a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Psalm 90. Psalm 90. It's amazing.

I've been 15 years out of the active duty Marine Corps and a number of years even out of the Reserve, but still my first instinct when I see a number like this is to say Psalm 9 or 0, which is a radio talk in the artillery. This is Psalm 90. This is the beginning of the fourth book.

As you may know, the 150 psalms that form the hymnal for Israel is subdivided into five sections. This is the first psalm in the fourth section, and it is subtitled, A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God. And of the various authors of the psalms, probably the least frequent is Moses.

There are only two or three that are from Moses' pen, but this is one of them. And it is a reminder to us of the timelessness of inspired scripture, the timelessness of the truth that God conveys, whether it is Moses, David, Asaph, or any of the other authors of scripture. The principles that are contained in these pages apply throughout human history.

Psalm 90 says, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn man to destruction and say, return, O children of men.

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood, they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up.

In the morning it flourishes and grows up. In the evening it is cut down and withers. For we have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins, in the light of your countenance. For all our days have passed away in your wrath. We finish our years like a sigh.

The days of our lives are 70 years and if by reason of strength they are 80 years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? For as the fear of you, so is your wrath.

So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long? Have compassion on your servants. O, satisfy us early with your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days in which you have afflicted us, the years in which we

have seen evil. Let your work appear to your servants and your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.

And establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. This is certainly a psalm worthy of Moses.

There are truths here that resonate throughout the pages of scripture. We think of the song of Solomon. We think of other places where there is this view from two different angles of human life.

On the one hand, we see its brevity, its ethereal nature. We are like a vapor in the early morning. One of the great things about getting up early in the morning and running, especially out in the country, is that often times as the light is just beginning to break and before the sun has come up and there is just enough light to see, there is a lot of times this mist, it's not a fog exactly, but it's I guess the source of the dew that's on the grass and so on that will be lingering in the rifts and depressions and over the ponds.

And as the sun begins to rise, that soon burns away and you see everything clearly. But that vapor is just there for a brief time. When it's the middle of the night, you can't see it because it's too dark and you just see it for a few minutes, maybe 15 or 20 minutes in the early morning.

And then as soon as it's really light enough to see, why that mist vanishes. The Bible compares our lives to that brief mist. We are often compared to flowers that bloom in the morning and are cut down in the evening, as here.

And so on the one hand you think, well, let's just eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. And it seems that there is nothing permanent. Moses here ties this particularly to being under divine discipline.

The thing that really makes life brief and that really makes it so momentary that it is of no account and of no value is when we are dwelling under discipline from God. Because in that mode is implied the fact that we are disobedient, we are apathetic, we are indifferent to the things of God. That's the only reason we would be under the wrath of God to begin with.

And the days that we spend in that status are wasted days. There is no eternal fruit. Those are days where we are being directed to turn, to change our minds, to repent and to begin to redeem the time.

So when he says in verse 7 that we have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified. You set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. For all our days have passed away in your wrath.

We finish our years like a sigh. He is talking about what has preceded. You turn man in

verse 3 to destruction and say return O children of men.

Why is it that mankind would dwell under God's anger and under his wrath? Why would he bring iniquities up and set them before his face? This is the status of the unrepentant sinner. And this is true of believers. When he uses the collective noun here, Moses has been a believer for decades.

He probably wrote these psalms and composed these prayers that we have recorded well into his third set of 40 years. Remember he was 40 when he left Egypt and went to dwell in Midian. He was 80 when he came back and delivered the people.

And he spent the next 40 years from his 80th to his 120th year shepherding the flock of Israel out in the wilderness while that generation died out. He stood up on Mount Pisgah and looked across at the promised land when he was 120 years old. So sometime between 80 and 120 he has had a lot of time and experience to reflect on the nature of life.

How much did he have to show for his various years? He could look at the people of Israel and see them dying one by one in the wilderness. Sometimes dying in plagues and dying in outbreaks of God's wrath with plagues of serpents and plagues of disease after eating the quail and so forth. So this can cause one to wax philosophical and to think about the larger issues of what is the meaning of life.

This is the question everyone asks themselves at one time or another. What is the point? Why am I getting up in the morning and living my day? Well, when we find ourselves in adversity, when we find ourselves in times of stress, it is an appropriate question to ask, is this testing from God? Is this the refining that we sang of this morning when we sang, how firm a foundation, especially the fourth verse when he says, the reason you are going through these trials is that I am removing your dross and refining your gold and heating the metal up so that those impurities float to the top and can be scooped away until the refiner can look down and see his own reflection. That is a process that takes place for believers who are responding to the heat.

And we can be obedient and we can be faithful and find ourselves in times of stress and we say, well, this is suffering for growth. This is suffering for improvement. This is God's way of surfacing those hidden areas of weakness and sin and blindness that I need to be aware of.

God is plowing and digging the rocks up out of my soil and getting those hard, unresponsive parts of my soul into shape to be productive and fruitful. There are other times when we suffer and we experience adversity and it is God getting our attention and turning us and saying, as he says in verse 3, you turn man to destruction and say, return, O children of men. And this is a wake-up call.

Anytime we find ourselves in a situation other than blessing, we need to know what our status is. What is it telling us? Is this an opportunity for growth or is this a call to change our minds? And God will afflict us both through circumstances and also in our own souls. We can find ourselves maybe with no particular situation that we're facing, it isn't as though God has suddenly faced us with all kinds of bad circumstances.

Sometimes it is an inner challenge. We find ourselves depressed or we find ourselves questioning or we find our joy has left. We don't have joy in the day.

We don't have peace. We find our patience short and we just seem to have gotten out of the wrong side of the bed morning after morning. And this is also a time to reflect and to take stock and evaluate, examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith.

If we're not, then these things, whether they come externally or internally, are a call to turn, to return. And the fact that this is for believers, so often we think, well, God is challenging unbelievers to come to faith and come to salvation, but you will notice verse 3 says, return, O children of men. It's not turn for the first time, it's return to where you used to be.

You can't return to someplace unless you were already there once. I can't return to Canada. I've never been there.

I can't return to South Africa. Never hit that continent. Return, O children of men.

It talks about God's eternity. A thousand years in His sight are like yesterday when it's past and like a watch in the night. A watch was typically a four-hour period and most of us lose track of that much time when we fall asleep.

Even if you stay up until one or two in the morning, if you do fall asleep, you tend to wake up after a full sleep cycle, which is generally four hours. And for God, an entire millennium can be like the blink of an eye. It can be like the time that we're not even aware of.

He sees us in that stop-action photography where you see a flower. I've seen it where they take a bean and plant it in the soil and the root comes out. It always amazes me that the bean can respond to gravity and send the root downward and the plant up.

It never goes the other way where the root sticks out of the ground and the plant and its branches and leaves try to flourish down in the soil. To think of the design that God put into seeds where they can always figure out where to send the shoot and where to send the root. But as you see those in stop-action, it just seems to take place in a matter of seconds.

In ten seconds, it goes from being a seed to being a plant. You see the flowers bloom and then fade. In the morning, it flourishes and grows up.

In the evening, it is cut down and withers. We have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified. You've set our iniquities before you, our secret sins, in the light of your countenance.

Our days are passing away in your wrath. We finish our years like a sigh. Seventy years, eighty years, they may boast only labor and sorrow.

It's soon cut off and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? As is the fear of you, so is your wrath. So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

This is the alternative to living a life of seventy or even eighty years that is fruitless and has no eternal weight attached to it. Teach us to number our days, to realize that each day is an opportunity. Each day that we wake up is a clean slate.

It's a chance to start fresh, to take stock and to turn at God's reproof or to continue in the direction that we have established of faith and obedience. What is the point of the day? When you wake up in the morning and you say, Well, what do I want to accomplish today? Well, verse 12 says, if we number that day and say, This is a day that I'm going to ask God to redeem on my behalf. It's a day when we gain a heart of wisdom.

And we don't gain a heart of wisdom in the solitude of Bible study. We don't gain a heart of wisdom during the time that we're listening to the teaching of the Word of God. Or even during the time that we reflect and meditate alone.

God has put us in a world of circumstances. He's given us responsibilities and challenges and the necessity to support ourselves and sustain ourselves and to engage in the tasks of mundane life. And it is the pouring of divine truth into the physical mundane world of our existence where we gain a heart of wisdom.

I would not want to have my appendix removed by a doctor who had done nothing but read medical textbooks. Even if he had watched videos. Even if he was the product of an internet education and had seen video clips on his computer screen of how to take out an appendix.

I don't want someone who just has the theoretical knowledge and has taken it in at the academic level. I want someone who has had his hands in all kinds of different people's abdomens and has taken out big appendixes and small appendixes and inflamed appendixes and mildly infected appendixes and has coped with emergencies and knows what to do if he accidentally cuts the wrong thing or pierces the bowel or whatever. I want somebody that has practical experience.

In the same way, God gives us practical experience in the application of these things. There are a lot of churches that have a great teaching tradition and the people within them are sold on the idea of Bible study, verse by verse, book by book, isagogic

categories, exegesis and so forth. But if that truth does not go into the day, the day that is going to be evil unless we do something conscious about it and seek to redeem it, it is in the day that we buy up the time.

It's in the day that we gain a heart of wisdom because that wisdom, we've studied that word in the past, that is the word that means the practical outworking of your knowledge. It's knowledge applied in experience. He has talked in the first 10 or 11 verses here about the consequences of living under divine wrath and disapproval, the purpose of which is to turn us.

He says, return, O Lord, and have compassion on your servants. How long will it be, he asks, right in the middle of that verse. How long? Well, what determines how long God's wrath persists and when he comes and has compassion on us? It's our choice.

It's our reaction. It's our response to discipline. Discipline is not punitive in its purpose.

Its purpose is not just to inflict pain as a consequence of sin. It is to turn us. It has a productive end, not just a punitive end.

He says, satisfy us early with your mercy. Let it be sooner rather than later that we begin to again experience God's mercy so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. If this psalm had stopped after verse 11 or even verse 12, we would think, well, man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

As it says over in Job, our days are few and tedious like Jacob says. My days have been few and full of trouble and have not attained to the days of my fathers, remember Jacob told Pharaoh. Well, that would be the tenor of this psalm if it stopped.

But Moses says here, when the Lord returns and has compassion on his servants, he says, satisfy us early with your mercy so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. It is possible to convert even in the midst of trying circumstances and oppression from without and within. We can have rejoicing and gladness all of our days.

The days that we're numbering, the days when we're seeking to gain a heart of wisdom, in that process, we can be glad and rejoice because we know that we're in the fight. I've been thinking about this. I physically kind of got off the working out routine that had been a part of my pattern of life for so many years and it just gradually kind of eroded away.

My good friend that I used to run with moved halfway across the continent. It's all his fault, I think, that I stopped running to begin with. I will tell him so next time I talk to him.

But when you start back and you say, well, I've got to get back to that. That's good stewardship of my physical plan is to stay in some kind of reasonable shape. Your brain can't live for long in a decrepit body.

But in the course of trying to get in shape and working out and so forth, it's painful. And you can decide what your reaction is going to be to that pain and that weariness and the pulling and stretching and tearing that is a part of building yourself back up. You can walk around being miserable all day long and say, oh boy, I can hardly wait for tomorrow in a sarcastic way.

Or you can realize that even though you're enduring pain and even though you feel bad, it is for a good purpose. And it's a mark of the fact that you're in the struggle. There's probably less than 10% of the American population that makes any effort to maintain their physical well-being.

And they talk about all the health problems that are a part of this country's culture now, heart disease and so forth, and it's because we've become very sedentary. We're not out there plowing and planting and clearing land and picking up rocks and all the things that used to be a normal part of everyday life. People had to do everything by hand.

Now we ride in a car, we sit in a chair, we come home and sit in a chair. Our physical activity is a fraction of what used to be a part of normal everyday life. People don't have to walk very far, they don't have to carry much, don't have to engage in much at all.

So to seek to go against the tide of the sedentary life is going to involve some discomfort and some pain, and it's a mental challenge as well as a physical challenge. But if you look at it and say, you know, this means I'm... this pain I feel, this discomfort, means I'm swimming against the tide here. I'm not going to be a victim of my culture and my setting and my circumstances.

I'm going to maintain the stewardship of my body that God has charged me with. Well, you can rejoice. You can say, you know, this is a good thing.

This means I'm making progress. I'm doing something to... and we can do the same thing in the spiritual realm. We can rejoice and be glad all our days, even when we're still in the midst of the struggle because the fact that we know we're in a struggle, that we sense the warfare with the principalities and powers and rulers and with our own sinful nature, awareness of that is a good thing.

How many believers are going through life unaware that there is a struggle? They feel no pain in their religion. They feel no pain in the area of the Spirit because they're not in the fight. If you're in the fight, you're going to get flesh wounds.

You're going to take some hits. There's going to be conflict and struggle, and that's a good thing. We can rejoice and be glad because we know what's going on.

We know where we are and what the purpose is. And so even in the midst of adversity, even when we look at our own failures that are shameful and humiliating, we recognize that at least we see that. We are seeking to turn.

We're seeking to be built up. We know where our weak areas are, and that's the area where we're striving to improve and we're trying to take advantage of God's power. Verse 15, Make us glad according to the days in which you have afflicted us.

Now this is an oxymoron if there ever was one. Make us glad according to your spankings. Make us glad according to the number of lashes we get on the back.

You know, it's a hard thing to look at your child and have to discipline them. On the one hand, you know that they've malfunctioned, but you can make all kinds of excuses in your mind. On the other hand, the Bible says foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.

The rod will drive it far from them. It says that... I like that one. I can't remember the reference.

It's over in Proverbs. It says you can discipline your child and he will not die because that's the first thing you think is I'm going to do some terrible permanent damage. But when you look at this, make us glad according to the days you have afflicted us.

God's discipline will make us glad in the end. And I think all of us can look back over our lives and see places where God has corrected, rebuked, and instructed us in righteousness. And it was painful at the time, but we've learned something from it that makes us glad.

I'm glad I went through plebe year at the Naval Academy. I'm glad I was raised by a father who understood the importance of strict discipline. I'm glad for the things that were hard and difficult in my life because they have shaped me and molded me into something I could never have been just trying to do it on my own.

And that's what Moses says here. Make us glad according to the days you have afflicted us. The years in which we have seen Ra'ah.

And that's Ra'ah with the evil in it. That's the bad things, the negative experiences. Moses spent 40 years in Midian.

Moses spent another 40 years watching his people drop one by one in the wilderness. But he says make us glad according to those years. Let your work appear to your servants rather than just seeing the physical and what's visible to the naked eye.

Let your work appear to your servants and your glory to their children. And Moses is thinking, this generation is dying in the wilderness, but look at this next generation. They're learning as they go through.

The children had to suffer along with their parents. They had to watch their parents die and grow old without ever having received the promise, without ever entering the

promised land. And recognize that it was because of their faithlessness, their continual complaining and moaning and groaning.

They couldn't find the faith in God to see what could not be seen with the naked eye. And so they dropped in the wilderness. But the generation of children that sees that discipline and says, I'm not going to make that mistake, they're going to walk across the Jordan on dry ground.

They're going to see the heap of 12 stones that Joshua will gather from the center of the river Jordan and heap up on the far side. And whenever your children ask you, what is this pile of stones? God delivered us with a mighty hand. God sustained us for 40 years.

God brought us into the promised land. It was difficult. It was a hard time.

Let your work appear to your servants and your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. He's talked about in the first part that it's the discipline from God.

It's the wrath and anger of God. Our iniquities are before Him. Our secret sins are in the light of His countenance.

But now He says, let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. It's a refining. Bringing those things up where God can see them.

He's looking for His reflection on the surface of the metal. And as He removes that dross and removes those things that are not pure and not lasting, He's going to get closer and closer to seeing His own image in us. Establish the work of our hands for us.

And He repeats that as the closing thought of this psalm. Establish the work of our hands. It is possible to have the work of your hands last.

We're not just a fleeting vapor. We're not just a grass that grows in the morning or a flower that is cut down and withers in the evening. We can redeem the time.

We can produce something eternal. Something that reflects the eternal glory of God each and every day. If we learn to number our days, if we learn to see what their potential is, and even in the midst of trial, if we know why we're here, we know what the purpose is, we have set our priority upon gaining a heart of wisdom, we can prevail in the midst of a fallen generation and an evil age.

So this psalm is an acknowledgement that things are difficult and that we're in an evil world with a fallen nature, but there's great potential when we lay hold of the power of God, when we acknowledge Him and respond to His leading. And that's important as we return now back to our study in Genesis 49, because the news that Jacob gives his sons isn't entirely happy. This is his deathbed blessing on his sons.

You would expect, oh, my son, may you be prosperous. May your cribs always be full of fresh corn and may your flocks and herds multiply and may your descendants be like the sands of the sea. May you dwell in dew-sprinkled valleys of prosperity.

May the grapevines be heavy with grapes for you and this, that, and the other. This would be the blessing you would expect. Here's your old father fixing to check out and this is his parting oracle portraying your future destiny.

And you'd be looking for good news. That's why they call it a blessing. But what does Jacob say about his sons? Let's read this blessing all the way through beginning at verse 2. We saw this last time.

Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. The note of formality is sounded here. Jacob talks about himself in the third person, doesn't he? He doesn't say, gather together and hear, oh my sons, and listen to me.

He says, listen to Israel your father. This is a formal call to hear this oracle and it is a reminder that God is speaking in and through Jacob at this time. This is an inspired oracle.

And so the use of the third person here emphasizes that. Going from Jacob to Israel, this is both the human weakness and the divinely strengthened Jacob that we see here. He says in verse 3, You are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity and the excellency of power.

Unstable as water, you shall not excel because you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it. He went up to my couch. Simeon and Levi are brothers.

Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council. Let not my honor be united to their assembly.

For in their anger they slew a man and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger for it is fierce and their wrath for it is cruel. I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's children shall bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion.

And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh comes. And to him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes.

His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk. Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea. He shall become a haven for ships and his border shall adjoin Sidon.

Issachar is a strong donkey lying down between two burdens. He saw that rest was good and that the land was pleasant. He bowed his shoulder to bear a burden and became a band of slaves.

It's not too happy thought for Issachar, is it? Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward. I have waited for your salvation, O Lord." Jacob gets the idea that in the midst of delivering this oracle, he's not too happy maybe.

He has to remind himself that God does have deliverance. Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. Bread from Asher shall be rich and he shall yield royal dainties.

Naphtali is a deer let loose. He uses beautiful words. Naphtali kind of gets short shrift, you would think.

Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well. His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him, but his bow remained in strength and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

From there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. By the God of your Father who will help you and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb, the blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he shall devour the prey and at night he shall divide the spoil. All these are the twelve tribes of Israel and this is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them.

He blessed each one according to his own blessing. Well, obviously, in the content of this blessing there is a lot to come to understand and we'll find that it's easier when we straighten out some of the translation. There's some very difficult Hebrew here because of the fact, you know, that even in narrative Hebrew and in the oracles of the prophets and so on, there is a difference.

Narrative is one thing. Poetry and elevated language is another. And when an oracle is being delivered, when poetry is being given, this is our problem in some of the Psalms, just as in English when you look at a poem, a lot of times there's a lot more going on

that's implied and suggested and we have special vocabulary.

You can use the word or, like O-E-R, or the ramparts we watched were so valiantly streaming. If you just think about the words of the national anthem, it started out as a poem. O say can you see by the dawn's early light What so proudly we hailed At the twilight's last gleaming For that whole set of four lines You don't know what he's talking about yet.

He says, well, in the dawn's light, the sun is coming up, can you see what we watched over the walls gallantly streaming? And then he goes on to say, whose broad stripes and bright stars perilous fight. You know, you've got all this poetic language and you can't really figure out he's talking about the flag until you get well down into the poem. And he uses language like or, this O-E-R and the V is missing.

Well, the same thing happens in Hebrew. So when you get to poetry, you've got a really much greater challenge compounded by the fact that we don't have contemporaneous secular Hebrew literature to compare this with. We have to go to similar cultures that had a cognate language like Akkadian or Assyrian or Arabic or some of the other old Semitic languages to try to figure out some of these words.

So I say all of that to say that when we change up the translation here a little bit, it's because good men will come to different conclusions about this. It's not as certain. You can't nail down and say with 100% certainty, this is what Jacob was saying.

This is the meaning of the word that he used. It's poetic. And there are lots and lots of word plays in here.

And there are conscious and designed ambiguities. It's supposed to not be a single meaning. It's supposed to suggest and evoke several ideas with a single word.

And there might be a homonym or a similar word that is also in view. So we'll watch for that as we go through these passages. Let's begin with the blessing that Jacob gives to his firstborn Reuben.

And that's what he tells him. He says, Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity and the excellence of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel because you went up to your father's bed.

Then you defiled it. He went up to my couch. Well, this statement about Reuben has two parts, doesn't it? First of all, it talks about his privileges as the firstborn and his status as the firstborn.

And he calls him his firstborn. It's the word bekor, which in Hebrew is B-E-C-H-O-R. And the firstborn is a concept that we've encountered quite often in Genesis.

It's mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. We can see the privileges that are attached to it in Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 15 through 17. We visited this recently in talking about the blessing to Joseph and his sons.

Deuteronomy 21, 15. If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have both born him children, both the unloved and the loved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, it shall be on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the beloved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has.

Why? For he is the beginning of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his. And that phrase in verse 17, the beginning of his strength, is exactly the same phrase that Jacob uses of Reuben.

You are the beginning of my strength. You may even know the Hebrew for this phrase. The Hebrew name for the book we are studying, Genesis, is Be-Rashit.

Be means in, and Rashit is beginning. The root of that is Rosh, which means head. So in the beginning, Be-Rashit.

And here, this is Rashit Oni, the beginning of my strength. And On is the word for strength, with the e on the end, the little yod. That means my strength.

So he says, you are my firstborn, you are my bakor, and the Rashit Oni, the beginning of my strength. Now this has significance for us because that which started out being first and strongest doesn't wind up prevailing. We have many scriptures that talk about this.

The race is not to the swift. The battle is not to the strong. God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.

The last shall be first. We've seen several firstborn sons already miss out on the divine blessings that were theirs by right of birth. Psalm 78-51 is another passage where we find this phrase of the firstborn talking about the exodus, the deliverance from bondage in Egypt.

God cast on the Egyptians, in verse 49 of Psalm 78, the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble by sending angels of destruction among them. He made a path for His anger. He did not spare their soul from death, but gave their life over to the plague and destroyed all the firstborn of Egypt, the first of their strength in the tents of Ham.

And so you have these same terms used there. Behor for firstborn, and the Rashit Oni, the beginning of their strength in the tents of Ham. But He made His own people go forth like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

And that same idea is also in the very same context as over in Psalm 105-36 where once again you have the firstborn termed the beginning of strength. Well, you can begin in strength. You can begin with all of the advantages, but that does not determine.

People that talk about predestination and so forth seem to overlook the fact that the Bible time and again points out that people can begin well. They can begin as heir to all things. They can begin with strength and all the advantages and lose it by their decisions.

So the second concept, the first one again was the privileges and the status of the firstborn for Reuben. But what happens? He is also accountable for what he does with that status and that position. And in the area of accountability, Reuben falls down.

He started out, 3B there says, he is the excellence of dignity and the excellency of power. Excellency of dignity, excellency of power. These words are used of God in some contexts.

For example, Job 13.11, this word when it says excellency of dignity, this is majesty, excellency of majesty. It's the regal awe that one can inspire because of their position. When you look at Job 13.11, this is used of the Lord God Himself.

Will not His excellence make you afraid and the dread of Him fall upon you? This is talking about man before God. You can't speak wickedly for God. You can't talk deceitfully for Him.

You can't show partiality or contend for Him. Will it be well when He searches you out? Can you mock Him as one mocks a man? He will surely rebuke you if you secretly show partiality. Will not His majesty, His excellency make you afraid and the dread of Him fall upon you? Your platitudes are proverbs of ashes.

Your defenses are defenses of clay. The power of the presence is in view here. And Jacob says of Reuben, you are excellency of dignity and excellency of power.

And both of these words are used elsewhere of God, also used of man. If you turn to Psalm 62, verse 4, we find this awe-inspiring presence idea used of man. How long will you attack a man? You shall be slain, all of you, like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.

They only consult to cast him down from his high position. They delight in lies. They bless with their mouths, but they curse inwardly.

Talking about people attacking the one who is in a high position. And that high position is the same word that's translated dignity or majesty here. It's the high position that you occupy.

You've been assigned a place in the first rank. This is Reuben's possession. It's

fascinating because we have here excellency of dignity, excellency of power.

And that word is repeated, and it's a very rare word that's translated excellency. It means outstanding. Reuben is outstanding in this presence.

You know there are people in the military, they call it command presence, where you can enter a room and you're instantly the dominant personality within it. When you're a part of a group, if you're in a jury, you're the one that people are going to turn to to be the foreman. When you're in a group standing around looking at a situation, you're the one that takes the lead and finds a way to solve the problem.

You set the tone, and you determine the course of action. You just have a natural gift of leadership that inspires respect and followership among those who are around you. This is something the military loves to find in officers.

Someone who's a natural leader. Reuben has that as an advantage. He was born with it.

He has excellency of dignity and excellency of power. Not only can he inspire leadership, but he's got the strength and the power to carry it out. It reminds me of David's oldest brother.

Remember when Samuel came to anoint the next king of Israel? God led him to the household of Jesse, and he was looking, and when he saw the eldest brother, he thought, this is surely the one. Because he had these same gifts of the firstborn. And yet, it devolves all the way down to David because it's not enough to start out with all of these things.

It's what you do with what you have. This is where Reuben fails. This is where Reuben loses his opportunity.

Why? Well, we're going to pause here and take our break and come back and find out. But there is a very profound concept here in verse 4 that we want to take time to explore. What is the conclusion that we draw just from what we've seen so far with Reuben? The Lord Jesus Christ is God's only begotten, the firstborn among many brethren.

And we have the opportunity to share in all of the things that come to Him, but it's an opportunity. It's not a given. We are not all overcomers.

We become overcomers through faith. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

And it is not enough to rest in the security of our salvation. We have a responsibility. We're accountable for the things that we've been given.