

Psalm 89

Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

Psalm 89:

Like Psalm 73, which opens the third book of the psalms, this psalm also struggles with a universal problem among believers.

Whereas Psalm 73 dealt with the prosperity of the wicked, Psalm 89 wrestles with the faithfulness of God to His promises.

In particular, the promise in view is that of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-16), which the psalm mentions early (verses 3-4), but later alleges that the LORD seems to have forgotten (verses 39-47), and a petition that God would once again remember His covenant (verses 48-51).

The third book of the psalms closes appropriately with a doxology (verse 52).

Verses 1-52:

The psalm describes the author's attempt to reconcile the seeming contradictions between his theology and the reality of his nation's conditions.

Through the first 37 verses, he rehearses what he knows to be theologically accurate: God has sovereignly chosen Israel to be His nation, and David's descendants to rule.

The last third of the psalm reflects the psalmist's exasperation that the nation had been ravaged and the Davidic monarchy had apparently come to a disgraceful end.

To his credit, the psalmist refuses to explain away his theology, but instead keeps the tension, hopefully to be resolved at a later time with the promised reestablishment of an earthly kingdom under one of David's descendants (compare Psalms 110, 132).

- I. God's Manifest Faithfulness to the Davidic Covenant (89:1-37).
 - A. God's Covenant Love (89:1-4);
 - B. God's Praiseworthiness (89:5-18);
 - C. God's Covenant with David (89:19-37).
- II. God's Apparent Neglect of the Davidic Covenant (89:38-52).
 - A. The Psalmist's Lament (89:38-45);
 - B. The Psalmist's Consternation (89:46-51);

C. The Doxology (89:52).

Title: "Ethan the Ezrahite":

Possibly the Levitical singer mentioned in (1 Chronicles 6:42 and 15:17, 19; see note on Psalm 88: Title).

Verses 1-4:

Though our expectations may be disappointed, yet God's promises are established in the heavens, in his eternal counsels.

They are out of the reach of those who oppose in hell and earth.

And faith in the boundless mercy and everlasting truth of God, may bring comfort even in the deepest trials.

Psalm 89:1 "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations."

Particularly how the "mercy" was manifested in the promise made to David.

The solemn covenant made with him in respect to the perpetuity of his throne.

The appointment of David to the throne was an act of mere mercy or favor, since he was not in the royal line, and had no claim to the crown.

It will be seen, also, that if it be supposed that the covenant with David, and the promise therein made to him, was intended to include the Messiah as descending from him.

There was a still higher reason for celebrating the "mercies" of God, inasmuch as all mercy to our world comes through him.

"Mercies of the LORD":

See note on Psalm 85:7; compare verses 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49.

"With my mouth":

Not merely in my heart, but with words. The meaning here is that he would make a record which might be used evermore as the language of praise.

"Will I make known thy faithfulness":

In the fulfillment of these promises.

He felt assured that they would be fulfilled.

Whatever appearances there might be to the contrary, the psalmist had no doubt that God would prove himself to be faithful and true (see the notes at Isa. 55:3), on the expression, "the sure mercies of David."

"To all generations": Margin, as in Hebrew, generation and generation. He would make a record which would carry down the remembrance of this faithfulness to all future ages.

What a sharp contrast to the gloom (of chapter 88 is chapter 89).

This begins with a determination of the psalmist to praise the LORD.

God's mercies never change.

The availability of those mercies in our lives are under our control.

The mercy of God continues forever.

The key word of this verse is possibly, "for ever".

Just as God's mercy is never ending, so should our praise be.

We should not be influenced by the circumstances around us with our praise.

The praise of our God's mercy should be continually in our mouth.

The world rejoices when everything is going good.

If we are to be different from the world, we'll praise God in the good times and in the lean times.

The psalmist is saying, that he will speak of the faithfulness of God to the generations after him.

Of course, he speaks to all generations after him through this written Word, the Bible.

Every Christian should do the same thing as the psalmist here.

We should determine in our heart to worship and praise God forever, in all kinds of circumstances.

Psalm 89:2 "For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens."

"Mercy shall be built up ... faithfulness":

The psalmist exults that the LORD Himself will guarantee the eternity of the Davidic dynasty (compare 2 Sam. 23:5).

God cannot, and will not lie.

His faithfulness is not conditional.

It is absolute.

People on this earth make a promise to be faithful, and they may or may not keep their promise.

God is not like fickle man.

God will keep every promise He ever made.

You can see from the following verse, that God's mercy is caught up in the covenant He made with Abraham.

Luke 1:72 "To perform the mercy [promised] to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;"

We must be part of the covenant agreement to receive mercy from God.

Romans 9:15-16 "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." "So then [it is] not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."

This mercy has to do with all of Abraham's seed.

Christians are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

Just as salvation is offered to whosoever will, mercy is offered to those as well.

The bottom line is you must be of the household of God.

Verses 3-4:

Three key terms used in these two verses also recur throughout this psalm: "covenant" (89:28, 34, 39), "David my servant" (89:20), and "throne (89:14, 29, 36, 44).

God covenantal promises to David (2 Sam. chapter 7), were guaranteed by an irrevocable divine oath (89:28-37).

Psalm 89:3 "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant,"

"Covenant with my chosen":

The Davidic Covenant, culminating in Messiah's reign, was established (in 2 Samuel chapter 7; compare 1 Kings 8:23; 1 Chronicles Chapter 17; 2 Chronicles 21:7, Psalms 110; 132).

The covenant was in the form of a royal grant covenant as God, the Great King, chose David as His servant king.

In this type of covenant, the person with whom the LORD established the covenant could violate the terms of the covenant and the LORD would still be obligated to maintain the covenant.

God made a covenant with David forever.

This covenant included showing mercy and being faithful.

This is just a renewal of the covenant that was made with Abraham, which came through both Isaac, and Jacob.

Let's look at two verses from the New Testament on the chosen.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:"

1 Peter 2:9 "But ye [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:"

God's covenant is with those He has chosen, those who will be His children.

Not predestined to be His, but God foreknew who would choose to be His.

Psalm 89:4 "Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah."

"Seed ... establish for ever ... throne":

The covenant with David was extended to his descendants.

The throne promised guaranteed that the rightful heir to the throne would always be a descendant of David (compare verses 29, 36; see also 2 Sam. 7:13, 16, 18; Luke 1:31-33).

The genealogies of Jesus qualify Him for the throne (compare Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38).

The seed of David spoken of here, is in Jesus Christ.

The throne spoken of here, as well, is the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ who will be King of kings and Lord of Lords.

Jesus is Eternal King and His kingdom shall never end.

Just as Abraham did not receive the Promised Land in his lifetime, the kingdom that is spoken of here that is eternal, and will not be fulfilled fully until the Lord Jesus Christ sets up His everlasting kingdom.

Verses 5-14: The more God's works are known, the more they are admired.

And to praise the LORD, is to acknowledge him to be such a one that there is none like him.

Surely then we should feel and express reverence when we worship God.

But how little of this appears in our congregations, and how much cause have we to humble ourselves on this account!

That almighty power which smote Egypt, will scatter the enemies of the church, while all who trust in God's mercy will rejoice in his name; for mercy and truth direct all he does.

His counsels from eternity, and their consequences to eternity, are all justice and judgment.

Psalm 89:5 "And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints."

“Faithfulness”:

The word suggests constant and habitual actions, meaning here that God was reliable.

For God to violate this consistency of actions would be to violate His very nature (compare verses 1-2, 8, 24, 33, 49).

Not only do the angels in heaven sing praise about the mighty wonders of God, but saints of all ages are thankful for the faithfulness of God.

The congregation of the saints, possibly is speaking of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wonders of God are in heaven and earth, and are far too numerous to try to list.

You can look around you on earth, and on a clear night look into the heaven, and see just a few of these wonders.

Psalm 89:6 "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? [who] among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?"

“Sons of the mighty”:

Literally “sons of God”, i.e., angels.

The answer is no one.

Look with me at these next verses of Scripture.

Philippians 2:10 "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth;"

Colossians 1:16 "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether [they be] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:" "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

We can see, there is no question what this is speaking of.

We Christians are all sons of the Mighty, but we are not the Son of the Mighty.

We belong to the Son of God. We have been bought and paid for with His precious blood.

Psalm 89:7 "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all [them that are] about him."

"Assembly of the saints":

This pictures a gathering of the angels around their sovereign LORD.

The assembly of the saints is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What has happened to our holy fear of God?

Where is there reverence?

The more we get to know God in His fullness, the more we will humbly reverence Him.

If God were to visit your church this Sunday, would He find you bowing humbly before Him?

There is a time for a Christian to be bold, but it is not in the presence of God.

We are to be bold in our witness to others.

We must not stand stiff-necked before our Lord.

Psalm 89:8 "O LORD God of hosts, who [is] a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"

Of all the hosts of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, and of all the heavenly hosts of angels.

Of all the armies in heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth.

"Who is a strong LORD like unto thee?"

He is Jah, or Jehovah.

And he alone is so, and is the Most High in all the earth (Psalm 83:18).

And there is none like him for his great power and strength, by which he has made the heavens and the earth, and upholds them in their being.

And by which he has redeemed his people.

Plucked them out of the hands of sin and Satan, and preserves them safe to his kingdom and glory (see Job 40:9).

"Or to thy faithfulness round about thee":

None so faithful as the LORD, none to be trusted as he, either angels or men.

Some understand it of the faithful ones that are about him, his trusty servants the angels, who stand round about him ready to do his will.

Or the glorified saints that are with him, the called, chosen, and faithful (see Psalm 103:19).

Or rather the words are to be read, "and thy faithfulness is round about thee"; and so the Targum, "and thy truth (or faithfulness), surrounds thee:"

Look all around him, and his faithfulness is everywhere to be seen.

To himself, and the perfections of his nature; to his Son, and agreements with him; and to his counsels of old, his purposes and decrees, and to his covenant and promises.

He is as it were clothed with faithfulness, and it appears in all the dispensations of his providence and grace.

Just the name of God used above, lets us know that He alone is God.

There is no other like Him.

We have spoken about not worshipping angels, even though they are heavenly spirits.

They are part of God's creation, and are not to be worshipped.

Not anything or anyone on this earth should be worshipped, because we were the created and not the Creator.

Once again, I will say we must not only make Jesus our Savior, but we must make Him our Lord as well.

He has supreme authority over all of His creation.

That creation includes everything.

Read of the creation (in Genesis chapter 1), and read who that Creator is (in John chapter 1).

Psalm 89:9 "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them."

The power, pride, and elation of it, when it swells, and foams, and rages, and becomes boisterous, and threatens vessels upon it with utter ruin and destruction.

But the LORD, who has it under his dominion and government, restrains it.

He has made and can manage it, and he only.

His power over it is seen in assigning it its place, and then ordering the waters of it to it when first made.

In placing the sand for its boundary by a perpetual decree, which it cannot pass.

By commanding the stormy wind to lift up its waves, and by making the storm a calm, and the waves to be still (see Psalm 107:25).

Instances of this were at the universal deluge, and at the Red sea.

"When the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them":

When the sea lifts up its waves, and both lift up their voice, and make a noise, and roar, the LORD hushes them, and makes them still and quiet.

As a parent its child when it cries, or a master his scholars, when they are noisy and tumultuous.

So Christ rebuked the wind, and checked the raging sea, and made it calm, when the ship in which he was with his disciples was covered with its waves.

And as this is mentioned here as an instance of the great power and strength of the Lord of hosts, so that was a proof and evidence of the true and proper divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 8:24).

All this may be understood, in a mystical sense, of the sea of this world, and the wicked inhabitants of it, who are as the troubled sea, and cannot rest, casting up mire and dirt, reproaching and blaspheming God and man.

And particularly of tyrannical princes and potentates, who are like the proud waters and raging waves of the sea.

But the LORD on high is mightier than they, and can and does restrain their wrath and rage, so that his people have nothing to fear from them (see Psalm 124:3).

This was proven beyond a shadow of doubt when Jesus spoke to the angry sea, and told it to be still, and it obeyed.

Mark 4:39 "And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

The He of course, is Jesus.

The winds and the waves obey His will.

Psalm 89:10 "Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm."

“Rahab”:

A figurative term for Egypt (see note on Psalm 87:4).

Rahab here, is speaking of Egypt.

Not only did the LORD destroy the false gods of Egypt in the 10 plagues, but the army of Egypt was drowned in the Red sea.

The Right Hand of God and His Holy Arm are the one you and I call Jesus.

Psalm 89:11 "The heavens [are] thine, the earth also [is] thine: [as for] the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them."

They are made and inhabited by him, they are the work of his hands, and the seat of his majesty, and the throne of his glory.

The angels of heaven are his, his creatures and servants.

The several heavens are his, the airy, starry, and third heaven.

The place and state of the blessed and glorified saints is of his preparing and giving.

"The earth also is thine":

The whole terraqueous globe, and all that is in it, being made, preserved, and continued by him.

And by him given to the sons of men (Psalm 116:15).

"As for the world, and the fulness thereof":

The habitable world, and all that dwell therein.

All the children of men, the beasts of the field, and cattle on a thousand hills, and the provisions for them all.

Which is the goodness of the LORD, the earth is full of all of these and are all the LORD's (see Psalm 24:1).

"Thou hast founded them":

The world, and the inhabitants of it.

The earth is founded upon the seas, and the world upon nothing.

And the inhabitants are wonderfully preserved and continued by the power and providence of God (see Psalm 24:2).

The heaven and the earth belong to their Creator.

They were created by the Word of God.

He is Creator and Protector of His creation.

Psalm 89:12 "The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name."

"Tabor and Hermon":

Mountains in Israel pictured joining in praise with the rest of creation.

The Creator of this universe, has made order in it.

That is why we have a north and a south.

Tabor and Hermon are both mountains in Israel.

These 2 mountains are on opposite sides of the Jordan.

Tabor is on the west, and Hermon on the east.

The same God that established a north and south, established an east and west.

Psalm 89:13 "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, [and] high is thy right hand."

"Thou hast a mighty arm":

Margin, as in Hebrew, "an arm with might."

That meaning, Thou hast great power – the arm being the instrument by which we accomplish our purposes.

"Strong is thy hand":

The hand, too, is an instrument by which we execute our plans.

Hence, God is so often represented as having delivered his people with a strong hand.

"And high is thy right hand":

It is by the right hand particularly that we carry out our purposes.

We lift it high when we are about to strike with force.

All this is expressive of the divine omnipotence.

Psalm 89:14 "Justice and judgment [are] the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face."

The seat and throne on which he sits.

All the administrations of his kingly power in the government of the world, in the salvation of his people, and also in the punishment of his enemies, being according to the strict rules of justice and judgment.

Or "the preparation of thy throne"; all that the LORD does according to the counsel of his will.

And these counsels were of old, and were formed in strict justice and judgment, and were a preparation for his future government in providence and grace.

Or "the establishment of thy throne".

The throne of an earthly king is established by righteousness; and so the throne of God, and of Christ, is ordered and established with justice and judgment in the exercise of righteousness for evermore (Proverbs 16:12).

"Mercy and truth shall go before thy face":

Be and appear wherever he is; all his ways are mercy and truth (Psalm 25:10).

"Mercy" in pardoning and saving sinners that come unto him by Christ; and "truth" in performing all his purposes and promises.

And these make the joyful sound next mentioned.

The following Scriptures tell us for sure, who is the Just One.

Acts 3:14 "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;"

Acts 7:52 "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:"

This leaves no doubt that this too, is the one you and I call Jesus Christ.

Only mercy and truth can pave the way to God for any of us.

We cannot stand before the Judge in our own right.

We must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ (our Merciful God). He is Truth.

Verses 15-18:

Happy are those who so know the joyful sound of the gospel as to obey it.

Who experience its power upon their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

Though believers are nothing in themselves, yet having all in Christ Jesus, they may rejoice in his name.

May the Lord enable us to do so.

The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people; whereas unbelief dispirits ourselves and discourages others.

Though it steals upon us under a semblance of humility, yet it is the very essence of pride.

Christ is the Holy One of Israel; and in him was that peculiar people more blessed than in any other blessing.

The “joyful sound” refers to the shout God’s people uttered when they saw Him lifted up.

It could be translated, “Happy are the people who have learned to praise you”.

Our horn” means “our strength”.

Psalm 89:15 "Blessed [is] the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance."

“The joyful sound”:

Refers to a cheer, a shout of joyful homage to God (compare Psalms 33:3, 47:5, 95:1, 98:4, 100:1; see note on Psalm 66:1).

Notice the singular verb that is used with people here.

We are blessed, one at a time.

We are saved one at a time.

The Lord will light the path for us, but we must walk in His Light.

Ephesians 5:8 "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now [are ye] light in the Lord: walk as children of light:"

What do you suppose the joyful sound is?

Could it be what is in this next Scripture?

Ephesians 5:19 "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;"

The joyful sound could also be the trumpet blowing, calling all believers to Jesus.

Psalm 89:16 "In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

That know the joyful sound, and walk in the light of God's countenance, as they have much reason to do.

These will "rejoice" in the Lord himself, for his "name" is himself; in the perfections of his nature, as displayed in redemption and salvation by Christ.

In him as the God of all grace, as their covenant God and Father in Christ, and also the God of their salvation.

And they will rejoice in Christ, in his name, in which is salvation, and therefore precious.

In his person, blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and fitness.

And that "all the day" long, continually.

There is always reason, ground, and matter for rejoicing in Christ, though it is sometimes interrupted by sin, temptation, and desertion (see Phil. 4:4).

"And in thy righteousness shall they be exalted":

From a low estate of sin and misery to a high estate of grace and glory.

From a state of condemnation and death to a state of justification of life.

From being beggars on the dunghill, to sit among princes, and to inherit the throne of glory.

Such as are clothed with the righteousness of the Son of God are exalted to great honor, as to be admitted into the presence of the King of kings in raiment of needlework, to stand at his right hand in gold of Ophir.

And to live and reign with him for evermore in his kingdom and glory.

All believers in Christ have been given the authority to use the name of Jesus.

It is the power in this name that makes them rejoice.

The Christian is exalted to Sonship in the righteousness of Jesus, that He has provided for them.

Psalm 89:17 "For thou [art] the glory of their strength: and in thy favor our horn shall be exalted."

“Our horn shall be exalted”:

(see note on Psalm 75:4; compare verse 24).

We must remember that the horn means strength, or power.

Our strength is in our Lord.

The power we have is in the name of Jesus.

Psalm 89:18 "For the LORD [is] our defense; and the Holy One of Israel [is] our king."

“For the LORD is our defense”:

The shield: A metaphor for the king (see note on Psalm 84:9).

When we belong to Jesus, He is our defense.

The Holy One of Israel, is Jesus Christ our Lord.

He is coming back to reign on the earth as KING.

Psalm 89 Questions

1. What does this Psalm begin with the psalmist determined to do?
2. How long do the mercies of God continue?
3. What should not influence us in our praises?
4. How does this psalmist speak to all generations after him?
5. God's faithfulness is not _____.
6. God's mercy is caught up in the covenant He made with _____.
7. We must be part of what to receive the mercy of God.
8. Who are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise?
9. What is the bottom line in all of this?
10. Who has God made covenant with?
11. What is this covenant agreement a renewal of?
12. God hath chosen you from the beginning to receive salvation through what?

13. Is this predestination? Explain.
14. Who is the seed of David, spoken of in verse 4?
15. When will this throne to all generations be set up?
16. Who is the congregation of saints?
17. Who, in the heavens, can be compared to the LORD?
18. What does Colossians 1:16 tell us that He made?
19. Who are the sons of the Mighty?
20. Where is God to be greatly feared?
21. Why should you not worship angels?
22. Where are 2 places you can read about the creation?
23. What does Mark 4:39 tell us Jesus has authority over?
24. Who is Rahab in verse 10?
25. Who is the Holy Arm of God?
26. The heaven and the earth were created by whom?
27. What are Tabor and Harmon?
28. What Scriptures tell us that Jesus is the Just One?
29. Why is a singular verb used with a plural subject in verse 15?
30. What are 2 things the joyful sound, in verse 15 could be?
31. How are believers in Christ exalted?
32. What does the horn symbolize?
33. Who is the Holy One of Israel?