

LESSON 13

PSALMS 88; 89

PSALM 88: IN THE PIT OF SUFFERING

The psalm, as a continuous individual lament, contains no change in theme or mood. It never ascends to the pinnacle of confident faith. It begins with the writer crying out to God for help, and it ends with his circumstance still shrouded in darkness.

This believer has no place to turn but to God. His condition reminds us that in some circumstances, all we can do is pray. When we are past human help and hope, we can still tell God about our problems and ask for His consolation and response. The solution, if there is going to be one, lies in His hands. He may choose to wait on giving His answer so that we will find strength in just being in His presence and talking over our burdens with Him.

1. How does this speaker describe his struggles?
2. Although this psalm has no resolution, how can we see the depth of the speaker's faith?
3. What does he ask God to do?
4. Why does the psalmist think he is suffering?
5. Why does this psalm end without a response from God?

PSALM 89: LOOKING FOR GOD'S LOVINGKINDNESS

With this psalm, Book III of the Book of Psalms ends. Its unique characteristics sets it apart from the preceding psalms.

The writer's overarching theme is how God has dealt with His people. Flowing from that broad theme is a review of what God is like. The big question of the prayer is this, "If God is faithful and full of lovingkindness, why does He

not bring the desperate situation of His people to an end?”

The psalm’s genre is hard to identify; it seems to be a mixture of types. It begins with jubilant praise, continues as a teaching psalm, and winds up as a lament.

Since the psalm implies a prediction of Christ (see Lk. 1:51 and Acts 13:22), we are justified in including it in the list of messianic psalms. In addition, we can call the psalm a royal psalm because its depiction of God’s faithfulness requires a recitation of God’s promises to the king. The royal psalms may discuss the topics of the earthly king, God as King, the coming of the messianic King, or a combination of two or all of these.

Three truths regarding Israel’s king are related. The psalm pictures the king as God’s adopted son (vv. 26, 27). It says that he was given the promise of the continuance of his kingdom forever (vv. 1–4). It portrays him as being endowed with God’s righteousness and justice in order to govern God’s people (v. 14).

The idealism presented in the royal psalms for the earthly king no doubt contains messianic implications. The perfect qualities attributed to the king could have only partially been fulfilled by the Davidic kings.

The covenant God had made with David is introduced as the underlying basis for the appeal that is made in the prayer. God said that His kingdom would endure forever (vv. 1–4, 19–37), yet it is as if the writer has observed a breach in the covenant (vv. 38–45). God has allowed the kingdom to be overcome and to fall. Thus a detailed reflection on His promise to David constitutes the foundation of the psalmist’s request.

Considerable time has elapsed between the days of David and the writing of this psalm (vv. 19, 49). The walls of Jerusalem have been broken down, and its strongholds have been reduced to ruins (v. 40). The king has been dethroned and treated shamefully (vv. 44, 45). The time of the captivity of Jehoiachin (597 B.C.; 2 Kings 24:10–16), of Zedekiah, and of the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.; 2 Kings 25:1–21) seems to best fit the setting of the psalm. After the kingdom crumbled, the righteous souls who yearned for its restoration must have prayed earnestly for its resurrection.

6. What makes this psalm so different from the others?
7. Where do you see messianic implications in this psalm?
8. Why do you think Book III closes with this particular psalm?
9. Why does the writer say the people are no longer blessed?
10. How does he describe God’s blessings?

11. How would you describe God's blessings in your life?
12. What praises does the psalmist give to God?