

Since I preached on Psalm 89 just a year ago, I was tempted to pass over it here.

But last January we considered Psalm 89 in our study of the Lord’s Prayer.

And tonight we come to it in its context as the conclusion to Book 3 of the Psalter.

The themes of Book 3 all come together in Psalm 89:

the question “why has God cast us off?” (Psalms 74, 79, 80 and 88)

the vision of the heavenly council (Psalms 76, 82,

God’s righteousness and justice for the humble of the earth (Psalm 76, 82, 85)

his steadfast love and faithfulness (think of Psalms 85-86)

how God will exalt the horn of his servant, but cut off the horns of the wicked (Psalm 75)

going before his people to defeat their enemies (Psalm 81, 83)

God’s power over the seas, and the sea monsters (Psalm 74

Rahab and the reminder of God’s triumph over Egypt (Psalm 77, 78, 87),

God’s choice of David and how Israel’s future is bound up with him (Psalm 78, 80)

and the importance of walking uprightly before God (Psalm 84)

the fearsome power of Sheol (Psalms 86 and 88)

Every Psalm in Book 3 finds an echo in Psalm 89.

I am very tempted to think that Ethan the Ezrahite was in fact the editor of Book 3!

Someone might reply – yeah, well, Psalm 89 is just a long Psalm,

so of course it covers a lot of themes.

True – but Psalm 78 is even longer – and Psalm 78 does *not* include all of these themes.

Book 3 begins in Psalm 73 with a comment on how I nearly betrayed God’s people –

if I had said that the wicked prosper and envied the arrogant,

“I would have betrayed the generation of your children.” (73:15)

Psalm 89 closes book 3 with exactly the same problem:

the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer,

but this time demonstrating the *proper* way to handle this dilemma!

The God who is characterized by steadfast love and faithfulness

will surely be faithful to his covenant with David –

even though I don’t know how long it will be!

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

1. The LORD’s Covenant with David (v1-4)

Psalms 86 & 88

¹ *I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.*

² *For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”*

Psalm 89 begins with the language of Psalms 86 and 88,
remembering God's steadfast love and faithfulness –
and especially God's steadfast love and faithfulness to David.

In Psalms 86 and 88 the psalmist remembers *that* God has been faithful in the past.
Psalm 89 makes those remembrances explicit –
remembering the particular promises to David.

³*You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:*

⁴*I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations."*
Selah

This goes back to 2 Samuel 7 and God's covenant with David,
whereby the LORD promised that David's seed would sit on his throne forever.

Part two then explores the three parts of the created order (the heavens, the earth, and the seas)
to show examples of Yahweh's faithfulness.

2. The LORD of the Covenant (5-18)

a. The LORD in the Heavenly Council (v5-7) Psalms 76, 80, 82, 86

⁵*Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!*

⁶*For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,*

⁷*a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,
and awesome above all who are around him?*

Verses 5-7 start with how God rules the heavens.

Several Psalms in Book 3 have dealt with the heavenly council.

The heavenly council includes not only the angels,
but also the gods of the nations.

Of course, as verse 6 points out,

you should *never* compare Yahweh to the "heavenly beings."

The gods of the nations are mere creatures!

b. The LORD's Mighty Deeds, Righteousness & Justice, Steadfast Love & Faithfulness(v8-14) Psalms 74, 77, 78, 85, 86 87, 88

And verses 8-10 speak of how God rules the seas.

⁸*O LORD God of hosts,
who is mighty as you are, O LORD,
with your faithfulness all around you?*

⁹*You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.*

¹⁰*You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.*

Rahab was the name of a primeval sea monster.

We met Rahab in Psalm 87 as another name of Egypt
(Isaiah 30's "Rahab who sits still").

But as we saw several times in our series on Book 3 of the Psalms,
there were stories in Babylonian mythology of how Marduk
had slain the great sea monster, Tiamat.

Ethan here says, "NO, if anyone slew the great sea monster, it was Yahweh!"

But the connections that we have seen already in book 3
suggests that we should see Egypt behind the Rahab reference here as well.
After all, your *faithfulness* is demonstrated in the crushing of Rahab.
God had promised that he would crush the head of the seed of the serpent –
and that is what he does in the crushing of Rahab.

Verses 11-14 speak of how God rules the earth as well,
completing the summary of how God rules the heavens, the seas, and the earth –
in other words, all of creation.

¹¹ *The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.*

¹² *The north and the south, you have created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.*

¹³ *You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.*

Tabor and Hermon are an interesting pair.

Hermon makes sense.

It is 9100 feet in elevation – in the far north of the land –
and is truly the mightiest of mountains.

But Tabor is less impressive.

It is only 1843 feet high – and while it stands out in the valley of Jezreel,
it is dwarfed by other mountains in Israel.

But Tabor (in Hosea 5) is associated with the shrines of Israel's false worship.

The image apparently is that of the sites of the northern kingdom's idolatry
will become places of praise for Yahweh.

But all of this comes together in verse 14:

¹⁴ *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*

These same four virtues appeared in Psalms 85 and 86.

Ethan says here that these four virtues are at the center of who God is and what he does.
God's throne is founded on righteousness and justice.

This confession is important for understanding what will come later.

Because Ethan has some questions about how present reality
squares with these basic truths about who God is.

But he starts with this fundamental truth about God.

If God is righteous and just,

if steadfast love and faithfulness goes before the LORD of heaven, earth and sea,
then where I need to be is on my knees before this God!

c. The LORD's Blessed People (v15-18)

Psalms 75, 81, 84

And verses 15-18 then conclude part one

by pointing out that the people who know the festal shout are blessed –
those who walk in the light of God's face.

¹⁵*Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,*

¹⁶*who exult in your name all the day
and in your righteousness are exalted.*

¹⁷*For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favor our horn is exalted.*

¹⁸*For our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.*

What is the “festal shout”?

Remember that Israel would gather three times a year for the feasts.

“Blessed are the people who know the festal shout” –

refers to those who have come in pilgrimage to Jerusalem
(remember Psalms 42 and 84 – the songs of pilgrimage).

But Psalm 89 now speaks of the *end* of the festival –

those who, having come to the sanctuary, now walk in the light of Yahweh's face.

In other words, the priest has already blessed them:

“the LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

Psalm 89 reflects on the blessing that belongs to those
upon whom the light of God's countenance shines.

They exult in Yahweh's name “all the day” –

particularly the eighth day – the final day of the feast.

The worshiping community is the blessed community!

Why?

Because our king belongs to the Holy One of Israel!
(and if that was true for Israel in the OT – how much more is it true today,
when we can say with even greater confidence
that our king belongs to the Holy One of Israel!)

We are blessed because we have the LORD's anointed – the Meshiach –
as our king.

Of course, since we have already read this Psalm, and you know where this Psalm is going,
then you should feel the tension mounting!

We are the people of the LORD –
we have the LORD's anointed as our king –
but we're not being blessed.

In fact, we are being cursed.

And to understand why, verses 19-37 recount the story of the LORD's Servant David.

3. The LORD's Servant: David and His Sons (19-37)

Verses 19-37 then set forth part two – the covenant that God has established with David.

And this covenant starts with the earth (verses 19-24),
as God promises that David will not be outwitted by his foes.

And it moves to the seas in verse 25
as David will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the river –
ruling as God's vicegerent over the earth and the seas,
and even, in some sense, the heavens!

Notice in verses 19-29 that David's rule over the seas, earth, and heavens
mirrors that of the LORD –
since the Davidic king, after all, is the son of God.

Verse 19 takes us back in time....

a. The LORD's Faithfulness to David (19-29)

Psalms [72], 78, 80, 86

¹⁹ *Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said:*

"I have granted help to one who is mighty;

I have exalted one chosen from the people.

²⁰ *I have found David, my servant;*

with my holy oil I have anointed him,

²¹ *so that my hand shall be established with him;*

my arm also shall strengthen him.

²²*The enemy shall not outwit him;
the wicked shall not humble him.*

²³*I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.*

²⁴*My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.*

Again we see God's faithfulness and steadfast love to David.

The point here is that *God* is the one who establishes and exalts David.

And because this is God's work, David will triumph.

And whereas the praise of Yahweh started in the heavens,
and came down to the earth and the seas,
the description of David starts with the seas:

²⁵*I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.*

Even as God triumphs over the sea monsters,
so also David's hand is powerful over the seas and rivers.

²⁶*He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'*

Ultimately, why are these people so blessed?

Because their king is the son of God.

This was a common motif in the ancient world.

Every nation believed that its king was adopted by its god.

And at first, Psalm 89 appears to be simply one more version of the divine Son theme:

²⁷*And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.*

²⁸*My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.*

²⁹*I will establish his offspring forever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.*

Verses 27-29 show us that the Davidic king is said to be – and to do –
what Israel was supposed to be and to do.

All that God had promised to Israel has now been promised to David:

My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

I will establish his offspring forever and throne as the days of the heavens.

David does not rule the heavens – that is God's alone –

but David's throne is "as the days of the heavens"
and David is "the highest of the kings of the earth.

As we have seen repeatedly in recent months,
the nations are trying to become what Israel was supposed to be;
the kings of the earth are trying to become what David was supposed to be.

b. God's Faithfulness in Spite of David's Sons (30-37) Psalms 85, 86, 88

But it gets worse –

David's sons are trying to become what David was supposed to be –
only they are trying to do it without being the sort of person that David was!

Ethan describes the Davidic covenant as having a rather important condition!

Yes, it is true that God will fulfill the covenant –

"I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.

I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips."

God is faithful!

But because God is faithful – because he shows *hesed* (steadfast love),
therefore he will also punish transgressors!

If God is righteous and just,
if God shows steadfast love and mercy,
then verses 30-32 should remind us to take heed!

³⁰ *If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my rules,
³¹if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
³²then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with stripes,
³³but I will not remove from him my steadfast love
or be false to my faithfulness.
³⁴I will not violate my covenant
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.*

God's faithfulness is evident in his discipline of David's sons!

The sons of David were supposed to be faithful shepherds.

They were supposed to reflect the steadfast love of God to Israel.

But if they rebel, God will punish them.

And yet, there is still a future for David – because of God's faithfulness!

³⁵ *Once for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.*

³⁶ *His offspring shall endure forever,*

his throne as long as the sun before me.
³⁷*Like the moon it shall be established forever,
a faithful witness in the skies."*

Selah

So far we have a standard summary of OT covenant theology.

4. But Now You Have Renounced the Covenant (38-45) Psalms 74, 80, 85, 86, 88

But verses 38-39 suggest that Ethan thinks that everything has gone horribly wrong.
And verses 40-45 detail how far this discipline has gone.

³⁸*But now you have cast off and rejected;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.*
³⁹*You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
you have defiled his crown in the dust.*
⁴⁰*You have breached all his walls;
you have laid his strongholds in ruins.*
⁴¹*All who pass by plunder him;
he has become the scorn of his neighbors.*
⁴²*You have exalted the right hand of his foes;
you have made all his enemies rejoice.*
⁴³*You have also turned back the edge of his sword,
and you have not made him stand in battle.*
⁴⁴*You have made his splendor to cease
and cast his throne to the ground.*
⁴⁵*You have cut short the days of his youth;
you have covered him with shame.*

Selah

The walls of Jerusalem have been breached.
All who pass by plunder him.
You have exalted the right hand of his foes.
You have made his splendor to cease.
You have covered him with shame.

This is *not* the way things should be.
You look around you today, and what do you see?
The church is not looking like the church should!
Things are not the way they should be!

Ethan the Ezrahite is not the Davidic King.
He is not the Son of God.
And yet he grieves and sorrows for the plight of the house of David
as though it is the most important thing in the world...

because it *was the most important thing in the world.*

After all, what happens to the Davidic king will determine what happens to the people of God.

5. LORD, Where Is Your Steadfast Love? (v46-52)

Psalms 78, 79, 85, 86, 88

And so Ethan asks:

⁴⁶ *How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?*

How long will your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁷ *Remember how short my time is!*

For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

⁴⁸ *What man can live and never see death?*

Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?

Selah

Many of the Psalms we have sung over the course of our study of Book 3
have highlighted the terrifying power of Sheol –
the all-consuming power of the grave.
What man can live and never see death?

I cannot help but think of Lazarus –
and Jesus standing outside the tomb,
saying to Martha,
“I am the resurrection and the life,
the one who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and the one who lives and believes in me shall never die.
Do you believe this?”

If anyone but Jesus had said this it would have been a cruel joke.
Her brother was dead!

And Jesus is now saying if anyone believes in me he shall never die.

It almost sounds like Jesus is saying,

If he had *really* believed me he never would have died!

But Jesus is deadly serious when he says this.

What man can live and never see death?

The one who lives and believes in me will never die.

⁴⁹ *Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?*

I remember what you said, O Lord.

What happened?

Why are you letting this happen?

Why is the world coming crashing down around me?

What happened to your promises?

But as we have seen so often in the Psalms,

the Psalmist does not shake his fist at God.

There is no crazed raging against the LORD.

There is, instead, a longing, a pleading – rooted in the conviction that God is faithful:

⁵⁰ *Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked,
and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,*

⁵¹ *with which your enemies mock, O LORD,
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.*

Ethan cannot bear to hear how the LORD's anointed is mocked.

Remember, O LORD!

Book 3 ends with an unanswered question:

“Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (89:49)

Remember how short my time is!

Remember that we die.

It is a question that will only be answered there at Lazarus's tomb –

“the one who lives and believes in me will never die.”

Of course, in another sense, it didn't really get answered there –

because while Lazarus was raised,

Lazarus would die again!

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then the raising of Lazarus *would have been* a cruel joke!

But because Jesus *was* raised from the dead,

we now have the answer to Ethan's question.

Where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

It is there – at the empty tomb – where our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead!

⁵² *Blessed be the LORD forever!*

Amen and Amen.