

Psalm 89 ¹

"A Plaintive Plea for God to Keep His Covenant with David"

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite. ²

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- A1 EXULTATION IN THE FAITHFULNESS OF YAHWEH BASED ON HIS ETERNAL COVENANT WITH DAVID 89:1-4**
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- C2 The source of praise – the assembly of angels: Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones.³

- C3 The comparison of praise
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 - E1 {6} For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD?
 - E2 Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD,
 - D2 Yahweh is feared among the angels 89:7
 - E1 {7} A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones,
 - E2 And awesome above all those who are around Him?
 - D3 Yahweh is mightier than His angelic armies: {8} O LORD God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty LORD?
 - D4 Yahweh is surrounded by faithfulness: Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

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- C1 His Sovereignty over the Sea 89:9-10
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 - E2 The west and the east: Tabor and Hermon ⁶ shout for joy at Your name.

- C3 His Sovereignty over Israel 89:13-18
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 - E2 The joyful exaltation of the obedient subjects 89:16
 - F1 Their continual joy in Yahweh's name: {16} In Your name they rejoice all the day,
 - F2 Their national and individual exaltation because of their dependence on Yahweh's righteousness: And by Your righteousness they are exalted.
 - E3 Ethan's acknowledgment of Israel's utter dependence upon Yahweh 89:17-18
 - F1 For triumph over enemies 89:17
 - G1 {17} For You are the glory of their strength,
 - G2 And by Your favor our horn is exalted.
 - F2 For national defense against enemies 89:18
 - G3 {18} For our shield belongs to the LORD,
 - G4 And our king to the Holy One of Israel.

A3 ETHAN'S EXEGESIS OF YAHWEH'S COVENANT WITH DAVID 89:19-37**B1 Yahweh's Choice of David 89:19-20**

- C1 The process of revelation concerning choice -- vision: {19} Once You spoke in vision⁸ to Your godly ones, 89:19
- C2 The statement of choice: And said, "I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.
- C3 The object of choice: {20} "I have found David My servant; 89:20
- C4 The process of choice -- anointing: With My holy oil I have anointed him,

B2 Yahweh's Support of David 89:21-25

- C1 With His hand and arm: {21} With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him. 89:21
- C2 By protecting him from his enemies 89:22-23
 - D1 {22} "The enemy will not deceive him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 89:22
 - D2 {23} "But I shall crush his adversaries before him, And strike those who hate him. 89:23
- C3 By His faithful, loyal love: {24} "My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, 89:24a
- C4 By exalting him 89:24b-25
 - D1 The basis of Yahweh's exaltation of him – in His own name: And in My name his horn will be exalted. 89:24b
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 - E1 From the Mediterranean Sea: {25} "I shall also set his hand¹⁰ on the sea
 - E2 To the River of Egypt and the Euphrates Rivers: And his right hand on the rivers.

B3 God's Intimate and Unique Relationship with David 89:26-27

- C1 David's perception of God as his Father and Savior: {26} "He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' 89:26
- C2 God's claiming of David as His son 89:27
 - D1 His firstborn: {27} "I also shall make him *My* firstborn,
 - D2 His greatest king: The highest of the kings of the earth.¹¹

B4 God's Eternal Commitment to David 89:28-37

- C1 His eternal loyal love: {28} "My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, 89:28
- C2 His confirmed covenant: And My covenant shall be confirmed to him.
- C3 His establishment of David's eternal operating dynasty 89:29
 - D1 {29} "So I will establish his descendants forever
 - D2 And his throne as the days of heaven.
- C4 His commitment to discipline David's wayward sons without abandoning His commitment to David 89:30-34
 - D1 The potential waywardness of David's sons 89:30-31
 - E1 {30} "If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, 89:30
 - E2 {31} If they violate My statutes And do not keep My commandments, 89:31
 - D2 The assurance of God's discipline: {32} Then I will punish their transgression with the rod And their iniquity with stripes. 89:32
 - D3 God's reassurance of His commitment to David 89:33-37
 - E1 Without abandoning His loyal love: {33} "But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. 89:33
 - E2 Without violating His covenant 89:34
 - F1 {34} "My covenant I will not violate,
 - F2 Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.
- C5 His reaffirmation of His covenant with David 89:35-37
 - D1 His oath: {35} "Once I have sworn by My holiness; 89:35
 - D2 His refusal to lie: I will not lie to David.

- D3 The terms of His covenant with David – as faithful as the sun and the moon! 89:36-37
 - E1 The perpetuity of his descendants: {36} "His descendants shall endure forever 89:36a
 - E2 The perpetuity of his throne 89:36b-37a
 - F1 And his throne as the sun before Me. 89:36b
 - F2 {37} "It shall be established forever like the moon, 89:37a
 - E3 The faithfulness of the celestial testimony: And the witness in the sky is faithful." 89:37b

A4 ETHAN'S MOURNFUL PERPLEXITY OVER YAHWEH'S DISCIPLINE OF THE PRESENT ANOINTED DESCENDANT OF DAVID 89:38-51

B1 Ethan's Description of Yahweh's Opposition to His Anointed 89:38-44

- C1 His abandonment of His anointed 89:38-39
 - D1 Rejecting him: {38} But You have cast off and rejected, 89:38
 - D2 Wrathful against him: You have been full of wrath against Your anointed.
 - D3 Spurning his covenant: {39} You have spurned the covenant of Your servant; 89:39
 - D4 Profaning his crown: You have profaned his crown in the dust.
- C2 His sabotage of His anointed's defenses 89:40-41
 - D1 The description of the sabotage 89:40
 - E1 {40} You have broken down all his walls;
 - E2 You have brought his strongholds to ruin.
 - D2 The results of the sabotage 89:41
 - E1 {41} All who pass along the way plunder him;
 - E2 He has become a reproach to his neighbors.
- C3 His assistance of His anointed's adversaries 89:42
 - D1 Through exaltation: {42} You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries;
 - D2 Through exultation: You have made all his enemies rejoice.

- C4 His sabotage of His anointed's military personnel 89:43
 - D1 Overpowering his armament: {43} You also turn back the edge of his sword
 - D2 Defeating his soldiers: And have not made him stand in battle.
- C5 His tarnishing of His anointed's honor 89:44-45
 - D1 {44} You have made his splendor to cease
 - D2 And cast his throne to the ground. 89:44
 - D3 {45} You have shortened the days of his youth;
 - D4 You have covered him with shame. 89:45

B2 Ethan's Mournful Perplexity at Yahweh's Abandonment 89:46-51

- C1 How long will it last? {46} How long, O LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? 89:46
- C2 Will I see relief in my lifetime? 89:47-48
 - D1 {47} Remember what my span of life is; For what vanity You have created all the sons of men! 89:47
 - D2 {48} What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? 89:48
- C3 Where is Your loyal love which you swore to David? {49} Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, Which You swore to David in Your faithfulness? 89:49
- C4 Remember the reproach against Yourself 89:50-51
 - D1 We are Your servants: {50} Remember, O Lord, the reproach of Your servants; How I bear in my bosom *the reproach of* all the many peoples, 89:50
 - D2 They are Your enemies: {51} With which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, 89:51
 - D3 He is Your anointed: With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed.

A5 A CALL FOR ETERNAL BLESSINGS UPON YAHWEH: {52} Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen. 89:52

EXPANDED ANALYSIS OF PSALM 89

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1. Psalm 89 is a Royal Psalm. Royal Psalms are designated such not by their literary style, but because of their content. Royal Psalms have to do with the King. Psalm 89 is a Royal Psalm because it deals with the covenant God made with David, a covenant which now seems to have been abrogated.

2. Superscription to Psalm 89 - Ethan the Ezrahite: Solomon is depicted in 1 Kings 4:31 as being wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, evidently a man known for his great wisdom. What is the significance of "Ezrahite," and is this Ethan the same as that of 1 Chron. 15:17, whose father is said to be Kushaiah? Three facts we know for certain: (1) Ethan was musical (he authored this psalm). (2) He possessed great wisdom (1 Kings 4:31). (3) He was a man of great theological understanding, perception, and pathos, for his heart beat fervently for the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, the non-fulfillment of which in his own day he greatly mourned (Psalm 89:38-51), while at the same time never failing to praise God for His Sovereign rule from heaven (89:5-18; 52). (4) As to his precise date in history we cannot be certain. He may have been either a contemporary of Solomon or else of David or of both, for he knew of the Davidic covenant (89:1-4; 19-37) and was a basis of comparison for Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 4:31). On the other hand, the latter passage may indicate only that Ezra was a wise man within the range of knowledge of the writer of Kings, who lived as late as 560 B. C., witnessing as he did the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachin, king of Judah (1 Kings 25:27-30). We do know that when Ethan wrote this psalm, David, or more likely the Davidic descendant, was being humiliated, his crown had been thrown into the dust and profaned (89:39, 44), his kingdom was being overrun by adversaries (Psalm 89:40-43), and the king's life was in danger of ending prematurely (89:45). Ethan's psalm amounts to a prayer to God, asking Him, on the basis of His covenant with David, to restore the glory of the Davidic throne and kingdom. If Ethan is a contemporary of David, the historical setting of the psalm could be the coup of Absalom, during which David fled for his life (2 Sam. 15-18). If Ethan is not a contemporary of David, the historical setting would be a later Judean king whose empire was overrun by enemies or who participated in the exile. The following quotation is taken from Allen P. Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary [TBKC]*, introduction to Psalm 89. Significantly, his last sentence strikes at the heart of progressive dispensationalism.

This royal psalm is a prayer that God would honor the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:5-16). The psalm is attributed to "Ethan" (a Levite, 1 Chron. 15:17-18, and a wise person, 1 Kings 4:31) but the exact occasion of its writing is unknown. Various military defeats, such as the invasion of Judah by Shishak of Egypt (1 Kings 14:25) and the Babylonian Exile, have been suggested.

Faced with the perplexing problem of the affliction and defeat of the anointed Davidic king, the psalmist implored the Lord to remember His oath and end this disaster. Ethan sought to motivate the Lord to answer his prayer by rehearsing the covenant promises and the divine attributes on which they rest. So the psalm is a study in the age-old apparent conflict between the promises of a faithful, loving God, and the catastrophes that often occur.

Several key words used repeatedly show something of the psalm's emphasis: "love" (*hesed*), vv. 1-2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49), "faithfulness" (vv. 1-2, 5, 8, 33, 49), "throne" (of David; vv. 4, 14, 29, 36, 44), "David My servant" (vv. 3, 20; cf. v. 50), "anointed" (vv. 20, 38, 51), "covenant" (vv. 3, 28, 34, 39).

This psalm, because of its several references to the Davidic Covenant (vv. 3-4, 27-29, 35-37, 49), affirms that the Messiah, a descendant of David, will sit on David's throne and rule over Israel. This, taken literally, supports the position that Christ is not *now* sitting on David's throne in heaven but *will* rule on his throne on the earth (cf. comments on 2 Sam. 7:5-16).

3. 89:5 - holy ones: I am assuming, because of the succeeding context, that "holy ones" here refers to angels.

4. Ps 89:10 - Rahab: I believe Rahab originally referred to a real sea monster or sea serpent of enormous size, strength, and power. God, through His wind and waves, pounded this sea monster(s -- see Job 9:13) and killed it. Evidence of this victory was either witnessed by representatives of an ancient civilization at sea or the results of it were witnessed in view of the dead carcass(es) on shore. This marine creature, like most of the dinosaurs God created, is now extinct. For the Hebrews, God's victory over the monster Egypt in the Red Sea came to be viewed as the national reality of which God's ancient victory over Rahab was symbolical. In this passage it is possible that both

historical events are in view. All six references to Rahab are noted below.

Job 9:13 "God will not turn back His anger; Beneath Him crouch the helpers of **Rahab**. Roy Zuck (*TBKC*) explains Rahab as follows: "**Even the cohorts of Rahab** (cf. 26:12; Isa. 51:9) submit to God. This refers to the Babylonian creation myth in which Marduk defeated Tiamat (another name for Rahab, and for Leviathan; cf. Job 7:12) and then captured her helpers. Later Rahab became a nickname for Egypt (Pss. 87:4; 89:10; Isa. 30:7)." A more likely explanation is that God did indeed successfully battle a sea serpent or monster and its helpers. This legendary defeat is witnessed in the Scriptures, and even picked up in Babylonian myth, which was at least based on some semblance of reality. This historical event was picked up by the Hebrews and associated with God's miraculous victory over the proud, strong Egypt in the Red Sea. Thus, the elements of pride, strength (the lexical meaning of Rahab) a sea monster / dragon (see the references below), and Egypt, killed by God in the sea, are all combined.

Job 26:12-13 "He quieted the sea with His power, And by His understanding He shattered **Rahab**. {13}" By His breath the heavens are cleared; His hand has pierced the fleeing serpent. (Rahab is related to the sea and compared to the fleeing serpent (*nachash*)).

Psa 87:4 "I shall mention **Rahab** and Babylon among those who know Me; Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.'" (Rahab is one of a series of nations. On the basis of Isa. 30:7, Rahab here is likely a reference to Egypt.)

Psa 89:10 You Yourself crushed **Rahab** like one who is slain; You scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.

Isa 30:7 Even Egypt, whose help is vain and empty. Therefore, I have called her "**Rahab** who has been exterminated." (Rahab is clearly identified with Egypt.)

Isa 51:9-10 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not You who cut **Rahab** in pieces, Who pierced the dragon? {10} Was it not You who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a pathway For the redeemed to cross over? (Rahab is, in 51:9, associated with a dragon (*tanniyn*), or sea monster; in 51:10 with the exodus through the Red Sea, where the "monster" Egypt was slain.)

5. 89:12 - south: yamiyn (Strong's #3225) literally means the right or stronger, more dexterous hand (or eye) of a person, but in the context of directions, it refers to the south. (See Strong's def.)

6. 39:12 - Tabor, Hermon: Geographically, Tabor is on the west of the Jordan, Hermon on the East. (See Keil and Delitzsch.) Both mountains lie to the north of the Sea of Galilee.

7. 89:14 - throne: While Yahweh's throne is exalted in righteousness, Ethan's sad complaint is that the throne of the Davidic king of Israel on earth is sadly vanquished, apparently to the point at which the king can no longer even sit on it! Psa 89:44 "You have made his splendor to cease And cast his **throne** to the ground." This passage alone defeats the views of the Progressive Dispensationalists, who insist that the throne in heaven on which Jesus is now seated is David's throne. There is a clear distinction between the heavenly throne and the earthly throne. The throne of David is on the earth, and the throne of the Ultimate Sovereign is in heaven. The conditions that existed in Psalm 89, with the throne of Israel's king in humiliation are nearly identical to the conditions that exist in the Third Millennium, A.D. today – except that they are even worse today! Though Israel exists as a nation, she has no king at all, much less a Davidic king. Israel stands in disrepute and disfavor internationally, and she is constantly being harassed by her Philistine (Palestinian) neighbors, who have infiltrated her borders to such an extent that they occupy old Jerusalem and have planted an idolatrous mosque on the temple mount! Clearly Jesus is not sitting on David's throne. If He were, then the conditions that exist today would already have been remedied!

8. 89:19 - vision: Perhaps a double reference to God's initial choice of David through Samuel (1 Sam. 16:1-12) and His revelation of the Davidic Covenant to the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7:4-17). (See also K & D, Vol. 5, Psalms 84-150, p. 39.)

9. 89:25 - extent: David's kingdom never extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the River of Egypt to the Euphrates River, nor did Solomon's (see Allen Ross, comment on Gen. 15:18; and Eugene H. Merrill, comment on 2 Chron. 9:26, *TBKC*). This suggests that ultimately, David's greatest Son, Jesus of Nazareth, is in view during His yet coming Kingdom. K & D opine that, by using the indefinite "rivers" instead of "the river of Egypt" to "the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18), the psalmist is referring to world-wide dominion (Psalm 84-150, p. 40). While Jesus, Son of David, will indeed reign over the entire earth (Zech. 14:9), the present writer believes this

particular passage only posits the Israeli boundaries promised in Gen. 15:18 and 2 Chron. 9:26. See also the note on Ps. 89:27.

10. 89:25 - hand (on the sea): Since, in the latter part of this verse the right hand is mentioned specifically, this instance may well euphemistically refer to the left hand, which, in African / Asian cultures even today, is the hand used for personal sanitation

11. 89:27 - firstborn, highest: Nowhere in the original terms of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7) was David labeled God's "firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." This additional revelation here in Psalm 89 suggests that David's ultimate son, Jesus of Nazareth, will fulfill this prophecy in His yet-coming Kingdom. On the other hand, there may be a dual fulfillment (in both David and Jesus), inasmuch as David is seen, in certain O. T. passages that describe the future kingdom, as being resurrected and reigning, presumably as a vice-regent under Jesus (Jer 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos. 3:5). That Jesus is certainly in view may be determined from such passages as John 3:16, where Jesus is labeled God's "only begotten" Son (AV); Matt. 3:17 and Mark 9:7 ("beloved Son"); and Luke 9:35 ("My Son, My Chosen One"); and passages such as Rev. 17:14 and Rev. 19:16, where Jesus is described as "King of kings." See also footnote 9 on 89:25.