

Psalms 88:0 ¶ A Song *or* Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite.

It would seem that the author of this psalm is Heman the Ezrahite, more than likely one of the three chief musicians designated by David, though that cannot be proven by scripture. After looking at the Hebrew, I think "Mahalath Leannoth" identifies the tune to which it is to be sung. A "maschil" is a poem of instruction.

After reading through this psalm, it is hard to see how it can be instructive. I would equate it with the book of Job, except that the psalmist expresses no hope or sense that he felt that God had heard him. Maybe it was meant to be a bookend to the next psalm authored by Ethan the Ezrahite (same family?) which is a great psalm of praise.

I think the most significant truth in this psalm is that the psalmist knows that God is the answer to his need.

Spurgeon notes that "the sorrows of one saint are lessons to others," and I think there is some truth to that for those that know the surrounding circumstances.

Psalms 88:1 ¶ O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day *and* night before thee:

Psalms 88:2 Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;

Psalms 88:3 For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

The psalmist makes clear from the outset that he is a man of faith; he knows God as his Savior. He knows that God is his only hope. He notes that he has prayed day and night for the LORD to hear his prayer. His soul is greatly troubled, and he feels he is at the point of death.

Psalms 88:4 I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man *that hath* no strength:

Psalms 88:5 Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.

The psalmist feels helpless and that he is just as good as dead. He feels that God has abandoned him.

We are often tempted to feel abandoned when God doesn't answer our prayers according to our expectation and/or timing. It is easy for us to forget that God's ways are beyond our understanding when we are in despair...but I believe He allows us to get to that point for a reason that He intends to turn to good according to His promise. He just wants us to keep the faith and trust Him no matter what. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Hebrews 13:5 "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Psalms 88:6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

Psalms 88:7 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted *me* with all thy waves. Selah.

The psalmist is convinced that his affliction is a direct result of God's hand against him, though he expresses no repentance for wrongdoing or any feelings of guilt. Verse 14 will affirm that he doesn't understand why God's hand would be against him. He compares his troubles to waves that flow one after another upon the shore.

Wise observation from Spurgeon: "...if faith could but be allowed to speak she would remind the depressed spirit that it is better to fall into the hand of the Lord than into the hands of man, and moreover she would tell the despondent heart that God never placed a Joseph in a pit without drawing him up again to fill a throne; that he never caused a horror of great darkness to fall upon an Abraham without revealing his covenant to him; and never cast even a Jonah into the deeps without preparing the means to land him safely on dry land. Alas, when under deep depression the mind forgets all this, and is only conscious of its unutterable misery...."

Selah – a pause, an opportunity for meditation

Psalms 88:8 Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: *I am* shut up, and I cannot come forth.

Not only does he feel that God has abandoned him, his friends and loved ones have abandoned him in disgust. Maybe he is suffering from a disease that disfigures and repulses people. He feels trapped in his condition with no way out.

Psalms 88:9 Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.

The NLT: *"My eyes are blinded by my tears. Each day I beg for your help, O LORD; I lift my pleading hands to you for mercy."*

There have been times when I could certainly empathize with these thoughts. In spite of his deep despair, his persistence in prayer shows that the psalmist hasn't completely given up hope that God will answer his prayers.

Psalms 88:10 ¶ Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise *and* praise thee? Selah.

Psalms 88:11 Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? *or* thy faithfulness in destruction?

Psalms 88:12 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

The psalmist is basically saying that once he dies, he will no longer be able to praise God and witness to His faithfulness, lovingkindness and righteousness. This reminded me of the words of Hezekiah from my study of Isaiah.

Isaiah 38:18–19 “For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.”

Selah – a pause, an opportunity for meditation

Psalms 88:13 But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.

The psalmist notes that he begins each day seeking God’s face in prayer. He knows God is there despite the fact that his prayer has not been answered.

Psalms 88:14 Lord, why castest thou off my soul? *why* hidest thou thy face from me?

The psalmist cannot understand why God is not answering his prayers. This indicates that he is unaware of having done something deserving of God’s judgment.

I think we can all identify with the psalmist in this regard at times.

Psalms 88:15 I *am* afflicted and ready to die from *my* youth up: *while* I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.

Sadly, the psalmist seems to have suffered from his affliction since he was a young man. It makes me think of a chronic illness that gets increasingly worse over time.

“Thy terrors” expresses a mindset that considers God as the source of his affliction and despair.

Sadly, so many people who reject God do so because of perceived injustice at their own suffering or that of loved ones. They don’t realize that sin is the true source of all disease. Had man not sinned, disease would never have entered the picture. It is true that God allows man to suffer the ongoing consequences of sin. For those that place their faith in and love Him, however, He has promised to work all things for good (as stated earlier). We may not ever know in this lifetime how that good is worked out, but we can be confident that He is faithful to His word.

Psalms 119:89 “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.”

Proverbs 30:5 “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.”

Isaiah 40:8 “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”

John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

Psalms 88:16 Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.

Psalms 88:17 They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together.

CJB: *"Your fierce anger has overwhelmed me, your terrors have shriveled me up. They surge around me all day like a flood, from all sides they close in on me."*

Self-explanatory. The psalmist sees no hope in sight.

Psalms 88:18 Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, *and* mine acquaintance into darkness.

The psalm ends on a note of deep despair. The psalmist feels totally abandoned by God, loved ones and friends.

Interesting to note is that though in deep despair, Heman, like Job, does not accuse God of wrongdoing even though he doesn't understand why God's hand is against him. As the psalm ends, he is still talking to God in prayer.