

GOD'S PROMISES ARE SURE (Ps. 89)

The author of this Messianic psalm is Ethan ('enduring'), belonging to the tribe of Judah, one of the five talented musical sons of Zerah (an Ezrahite, the names of the five sons are mentioned in I Chron. 2:6, Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, Dara). A 'Maschil' is a teaching psalm, and in it Ethan is giving instructions concerning the implications of God's covenant with King David (II Sam. 7). He was also known as Jeduthun ("praise", I Chron. 25:1 ... Ethan + Jeduthun = 'enduring praise'). Many commentators reckon he outlived Solomon and witnessed the breakup of the Kingdom under King Rehoboam ... which would explain how he pleads with God for the nation on the grounds of the Davidic covenant. He was extremely intelligent, with a great reputation for wisdom, second only to Solomon (I Kings 4:31)

The psalm consists of two major sections, - firstly, God's faithfulness to His covenant with David (v. 1-37), and secondly, its present failure, but future fulfilment (v. 38-52). These two major sections are then further sub-divided.

First of all (v. 1-4), God's faithfulness to His covenant with David is acknowledged, **Ps. 89:1** Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite. I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. ² For *I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.* ³ *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant [II Sam. 7],* ⁴ *Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations [II Sam. 7:16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever].* Selah. ... Throughout the psalm, the psalmist's assurance is built upon God's word.

Secondly, God's attributes are described (v. 5-14), ⁵ And *the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints,* 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?* 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.* ⁸ *O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?* ⁹ *Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.* ¹⁰ *Thou hast broken Rahab [‘Egypt’] in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. ... [Ex. 15:4 Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. 5 The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone] ...* ¹¹ *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them.* ¹² *The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.* ¹³ *Thou hast a mighty arm [Ex. 15:16]: strong is thy hand [Ex. 15:9,12], and high is thy right hand [Ex. 15:6, twice].* ¹⁴ *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.*

Thirdly, the gladness of God's people is presented, ¹⁵ Blessed is the people that *know [present tense] the joyful sound [of the shofar ... the shofar is a ram's horn, and it relates to the ram caught in the bush which Abraham took and sacrificed in the place of his son Isaac]:*

they shall [future tense] walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. ¹⁶ In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. ¹⁷ For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour [pleasure, propitiation – the privilege of the sinner reconciled to God], our horn [strength, power] shall be exalted. ¹⁸ For the LORD is our defence [shield, buckler]; and the Holy One of Israel is our king.

Fourthly, the covenant with David is explained ... the background to this is II Samuel 7:5-17 where Nathan the prophet issued the covenant to David from God, ¹⁹ Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one [King David], and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty [David had proved himself to be mighty against Goliath, and also previously, I Sam. 17:37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine]; I have exalted one chosen out of the people [II Sam. 7:8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel]. ²⁰ I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: [I Sam. 16:12 Now (David) he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, (to Samuel) Arise, anoint him: for this is he. ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward] ²¹ With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him [II Sam. 5:12 And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake]. ²² The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. ²³ And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him [I Sam. 18:7 Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands]. ²⁴ But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn [strength, power, authority] be exalted. ²⁵ I will set his hand also in the sea [Mediterranean], and his right hand in the rivers [Euphrates] [i.e. from the west to the east] [Joshua 1:1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, ² Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast]. ... At this point, there is a development, ²⁶ He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation [cf. Ps. 18:2; 62:2,6; 95:1]. ... While David often referred to God as my God, and the rock of my salvation, nowhere in Scripture does he address God as 'Father' ... whereas Jesus does, e.g. Lk. 2:49 my Father's business? ... Jn. 10:30 I and my Father are one ... Jn. 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions. In other words, this is the Messianic prophecy, - prophesying concerning the Messiah, and this is further highlighted in the next verse ... ²⁷ Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth [Col. 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature]. ²⁸ My mercy will I keep for him for evermore [II Sam. 7:15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul], and my covenant shall stand fast with him [Is. 55:3 I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.]. ²⁹ His seed also will I

make to endure for ever [through the covenant, fulfilled perfectly in Christ], and his throne as the days of heaven eternal]. Notice, though, the warning, ³⁰ If his children [the Jews] forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; ³¹ If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; ³² Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. ³³ Nevertheless my lovingkindness [hesed] will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. ³⁴ My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips [... God will not cast aside Israel, under any circumstances, also cf. Rom. 11]. ³⁵ Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. ³⁶ His seed [masculine singular noun] shall endure [third person masculine singular] for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. ³⁷ It shall be established [exalted] for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah. ... If they would be *unfaithful*, for the sake of the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God would continue to honour and keep His word, and to correct their error He would send His Son [His seed] to be their salvation, Mt. 1:21 thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. ... Selah.

So, the opening section and its sub-sections relating to God's faithfulness to the Davidic covenant are presented in the first thirty-seven verses of Ps. 89. The second section runs from v. 38-52 and deals with the failure of the twelve tribes of Israel, who under Rehoboam, had broken up into two kingdoms. The psalmist then prophesied better days ahead. This second section is divided into three sub-sections.

Firstly, here is how bad it was, ³⁸ But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. ... All the privileges which had previously been enjoyed during David's reign were 'slipping' for their nation was in danger of crumbling ... and it was their own fault, *thou hast*. ... ³⁹ Thou hast made void the covenant [God's promises, God's law] of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground [they took their privileges for granted]. ⁴⁰ Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. ... Not the enemy, but '*thou hast*' ... ⁴¹ All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours. ⁴² Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. ⁴³ Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle. ⁴⁴ Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. ⁴⁵ The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. For those generations, all privileges were gone. Selah.

But the second sub-section begins with a question, for even though these were dark times, the people of Israel never stopped being God's people because of His promise to Abraham, and so they pleaded, ⁴⁶ How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire? ... They had been here before, Ps. 79:5 How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? ... Ps. 13:1 How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? ... Ps. 80:4 O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? ... Ps. 89:47 Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? ⁴⁸ What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave [sheol]? Selah. ⁴⁹

Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth [*covenant*]? **50** Remember, Lord, the *reproach* [*scorn, taunts*] of thy servants [*the ridicule thrown at them*]; how I do bear in my bosom the *reproach* [*insults*] of all the mighty people; **51** Wherewith thine enemies have *reproached*, O LORD; wherewith they have *reproached* [*opposers*] the footsteps of *thine anointed*. ... The anointed One is the Lord Jesus. Out of all the peoples and nations, God sent Him to the people of Israel but they rejected Him, - they scorned, taunted, ridiculed, insulted, opposed, - Him. They would have nothing to do with Him, and they foolishly uttered their own self-condemnation, **Mt. 27:25** Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. ... Such devastating words ... as Paul described, for they **Rom. 11:7** were blinded **8** (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. **9** And David saith ... **10** Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. ... They wouldn't rejected the Saviour, and as a consequence, the Lord had hidden Himself from them, (v.46), **Jn. 1:11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

That is not the end though for the Lord will bring them to the place where they will ultimately glory in Him, **52** Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen. ... God never gives up on His people, otherwise the nation of Israel would have gone the way of the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Hittites, Perizzites, and all the rest of the nations of the Middle East who have disappeared. Instead, He promised, **Rom. 11:25** blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. **26** And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: **27** For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins [*quoting from Ps. 14:7; Is. 59:20; Is. 27:9*]. **28** ... as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes [*because of the covenants*]. ... God won't let *them* go, and neither will He let go those Gentiles He has grafted in, as Paul explains, **Rom. 11:30** as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief.

So, the Jews are to bless the Lord for evermore ... and someday they will when the shutters over their eyes will be removed, and the Jew and the Gentile will be one together in Christ, **Eph. 2:14** For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us ... **16** that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross ... *God's promises are sure*, and that is what behind this psalm, even from the beginning, **Ps. 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.