

## Messianic Psalms Psalm 89

*[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

**“Please read Psalm 89 in the NKJV before studying this transcript.”**

Psalm 89 is a most interesting psalm. It is fairly long – 52 verses – but it repays a thoughtful reading through. Indeed, the heading of the Psalm states that this is a ‘Maschil’ of Ethan the Ezrahite. The Hebrew word ‘Maschil’, which the New King James version of the Bible translates as ‘a contemplation’, apparently means something along the lines of ‘instruction.’ ‘Contemplation’ is a good word – it tells us that it is worth reading and then pondering, or meditating on this psalm, so that we can gain an understanding of its message. What does it mean? What can we gain from it, that will help us in the week ahead? That is our challenge and aim for today, to get instruction and wisdom that will encourage and help us in our Christian pathway. What I hope we will see is that this psalm teaches us to have faith and to keep trusting in the unshakeable character of our God.

Let’s first start with a broad overview. There are several key themes in this psalm which I will outline now, and then we will look again at each of these in more detail.

One key theme is the character of God. The psalm tells us that He is merciful and faithful. He is the covenant-keeping God. In verse 14 we read,

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.”

God is righteous and just, and at the same time merciful and the embodiment of truth. This is exactly what we need! A God who is right, and does right, and yet shows mercy to us. If we stop to really think that through, we would not want God to be otherwise. That being so, verses 15 and 16 of our psalm follow on naturally:

“Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted.”

When we know that God is righteous and just, and that He is for us and merciful, we will rejoice, because it is good news.

A second theme in the psalm is the covenant that God made with King David, sometimes referred to in Bible commentaries as the Davidic covenant. We can read about this covenant in the second book of Samuel, chapter 7. As you may remember, David had wanted to build a temple for God. However, God had told David that he was not to build Him a temple – that would be a task for David’s son, Solomon. Instead, God said that He would build David a lasting house. It was a wonderful and amazing promise to David and to his descendants, and the terms of that covenant are rehearsed in this Psalm.

Thirdly, we have the theme of the utter perplexity of the psalmist, Ethan the Ezrahite, as he sees the covenant apparently broken, and tries to reconcile this with the promises that God had made to David. How was he to understand this confusing and discouraging situation?

Now with the light that the New Testament brings, we will see that the covenant has by no means been broken, but instead it is fulfilled in and by our Lord Jesus. This is what makes this psalm a so-called 'Messianic psalm', and it is also this theme that will lead us to some practical encouragement for today.

With these four key themes outlined, let's take a closer look at each one, starting with the theme of God's character. We could spend ages on this! (But I won't, as we have a fixed recording schedule!) This is a foundational theme. We need to know that someone is trustworthy if we are going to place our faith in them. God wants us to have faith in Him. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6 reminds that,

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

The Lord Jesus said in Mark chapter 11 verse 22,

"Have faith in God."

Now God is supremely trustworthy, and it is entirely reasonable to place our faith in Him. Let's see how this psalm emphasises that fact:

- Verses 6 – 10 tell us that no-one compares to God in His power. Verse 6 reads,

"For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?"

- Verses 11 – 12 remind us that He is the Creator. In verse 11 we read,

"The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all its fullness, You have founded them."

- In verse 14, which we have already considered, we see what God is like. Let's read it again:

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face."

- And then in verses 15 – 18, we see that God's power and God's character are given for His people, for their encouragement. Verse 17 states,

"For You are the glory of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted."

God is a God who is involved, a God who cares, and who desires a relationship with His people. He is no cold, distant deity, but a loving and personal God.

Our next theme was the wonderful details of the Davidic covenant. The essence of the covenant is given in verses 3 – 4, which I will read:

““I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'" Selah.”

What a wonderful and far-reaching promise this was! The covenant is then described in more detail in verses 19 – 37 of our psalm. It was an unconditional promise in the sense that God would not cast off David's seed, even if they disobeyed God and needed God's corrective punishment. Verses 34 – 37 make this very plain:

““My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: his seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky." Selah.”

When we come to verses 38 – 51, the psalmist contemplates the apparent observation that the Davidic covenant seems to have been broken. I do not know exactly what the occasion was that the psalmist was describing. The first book of Kings, chapter 4 and verse 31 tells us that King Solomon,

“Was wiser than all men--than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.”

So Ethan the Ezrahite was presumably a contemporary of King Solomon, and may have been one of his advisers. One commentator whom I read wondered if Ethan might have outlived Solomon and seen the break-up of the kingdom that occurred under Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

Whatever the circumstance was, what perplexity Ethan the psalmist has as we read verses 38 – 51! Ethan knows the character of God, and he knows the terms of the covenant that God made. Just a bit earlier we read the verses where God stated clearly that He would not lie to David, and that He would not break or change the promises that He had made. So how can Ethan make sense of this? In verses 49 – 51, he bemoans the fact that even God's enemies are casting reproach. And there appears to be no resolution ...

If we look at what happened to the kings of Israel and of Judah as recorded in the books of Kings and of Chronicles in the Old Testament, we see that what happened there fits in exactly with this psalm. So what has become of the covenant made with David?

This is where we need to think about our fourth theme, which is that the Lord Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to David. An analogy with the interpretation of another psalm can help us here. Perhaps you are familiar with Psalm 8, which starts as follows:

“O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth.”

This psalm then goes on to expound the wonder of why God would show so much interest in man, and why He has placed man in such an exalted position. Let's read verses 3 – 8 of Psalm 8:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen--even

the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.”

All this sounds rather like the wonderful dominion that was originally given to Adam and Eve, but we know only too well that they lost the power of it. Not all things are under our feet – we only have to think about the mention of ‘evil beasts’ in the Bible to realise that everything is not quite as Psalm 8 puts it. But when we read Hebrews chapter 2 in the New Testament, we see that this Psalm is quoted and applied to the Lord Jesus. What Adam lost, the Lord Jesus more than regained. He is the ‘last Adam’, and we are blessed in Him. Whereas the first man failed, the second man, the Man Christ Jesus, wonderfully succeeded, and we are brought into the results of His success in sheer grace. Adam and Eve fell when they sinned, but the Lord Jesus has redeemed men and women, and in Him we more than regain what Adam lost. Whereas Psalm 8 might appear to start with Adam’s original position, it moves seamlessly to end with the Lord Jesus.

Now we have the same idea in Psalm 89 that we are studying today. It would seem that the covenant with David has been irretrievably broken. But this is not so. The Lord Jesus is the true Son of David, to Whom the covenant applies. Let us consider a few verses that shows us why this is so.

Verse 4 of our psalm states,

“Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.”

Now let us listen to what the angel Gabriel said to Mary about our Lord Jesus, as recorded in Luke’s Gospel chapter 1, verses 32 – 33:

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. “

We can see how the promise made to David was truly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

Let us see also how the Lord Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of David, in Revelation chapter 22 verse 16:

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Similarly, in Revelation chapter 3 and verse 7, where the Lord Jesus is addressing the church at Philadelphia, He says,

“These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.”

The great promises about David’s descendants and the glory of his kingdom really apply to the Lord Jesus.

The covenant with David has not been broken after all! Israel will yet be restored and blessed, and the Lord Jesus Himself has restored and will restore the kingdom to an even greater honour and glory than could have been imagined.

Let us pause and think about the wonder of this. Why is it that the Lord Jesus restores, repairs and elevates what we, as human beings, have lost and destroyed? It is because He loves His Father and wants to glorify Him, and because He loves us and wants to bless us. In short, we can simply say, it is because that is what He is like. How wonderful that this is so!

Now we can put all of these themes together and think about how they can encourage us practically. What will we gain from thinking about this psalm?

One thing that I thought of was this: the psalm shows us what we should do when we know that God has promised something, and yet it appears not to be so. Now I don't mean just anything that we want, but rather something that God has definitely promised in His word, the Scriptures. Let's think about a couple of examples. For instance, let's read what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians in his first letter to them, chapter 15 and verse 58:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

“Your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” But sometimes it might seem as if it was! It is easy to get discouraged and disheartened, and to think, ‘There is so little, or apparently no fruit for my labours. I'm busy ploughing on with what I believe that God has given me to do, and yet I'm not seeing any results. I wonder if it is really worth it.’ Well, the Scripture says, “Your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Maybe you won't see results now, or for a long time, but when you see the Lord Jesus face to face, you will know that it had not been in vain. There is a great verse in John's Gospel chapter 10, where the Lord Jesus says in verse 35, “The Scripture cannot be broken.” This has often helped me. If God has given us a promise in the Scripture, then we can be sure that He will fulfill it. The covenant with David appeared to be broken, but we can see from the New Testament that it wasn't. And so by analogy we can have confidence in all of God's promises.

Let's think about another example. At the end of his letter, Jude writes in verse 24,

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”

Is it possible that I will be presented faultless? That God will have exceeding joy? I am conscious of so many failings, day to day. Even speaking about this psalm right is one thing, but when tomorrow comes, will I demonstrate the faith in God's promises that I am encouraging you and I to show? I know I can't trust myself and I will need to ask God to help me, to practice what I am preaching, otherwise I will certainly fail. But yet we can have confidence – not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in God. There is a great verse in Psalm 138 which says:

“The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands “(Psalm 138 verse 8).

God will not forsake the work of His hands. If He has saved us through the work of the Lord Jesus, He will see to it that His purposes are fulfilled.

Even though Ethan the Ezrahite could not reconcile what God had promised in the Davidic covenant with what he observed, he finished his psalm with a blessing:

“Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen.”

It's as if he can't explain the situation, but he is going to trust God anyway. By writing this psalm, he has told God about his perplexity. And that is a good thing to do! The Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4 verse 6,

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

We can always tell God about it when we don't understand what is going on. But we have a great privilege that Ethan the Ezrahite did not have, which is the teaching of the New Testament. In the New Testament we can see that the Lord Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, and that it had not been broken after all. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1 verse 20 sums it up very nicely:

“For all the promises of God in Him [that is, in the Lord Jesus] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”

I hope that this consideration of Psalm 89 will be a help and encouragement to you, and indeed to myself also. We have seen how it is a Messianic psalm, in that its deep and true fulfillment is in the Lord Jesus, who is the true Son of David. And we have also seen how that fulfillment is, in fact, a practical encouragement for us today, in our actual situations at the moment. There are so many things that have happened, and that are happening, and that will happen, that can make us feel down. Speaking about the salvation of Israel in Romans chapter 9 verse 6, Paul says,

“But it is not as though the word of God has failed “ (ESV),

and the same thing is true for us today! It is not as though the Word of God has failed. So let's be encouraged!

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today message on Psalm 89, talk number T1273.

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