
A contemplation by Ethan, the Ezrahite.

PSALM 89: 1 I will sing of the loving kindness of the LORD forever. With my mouth, I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

The psalmist shows God's great mercy to the house of David, and the promises which he had given to it of support and perpetuity, vv. 1-37; complains that, notwithstanding these promises, the kingdom of Judah is overthrown, and the royal family nearly ruined, Psa 89:38-45; and earnestly prays for their restoration, Psa 89:46-52.

It is most probable that this Psalm was composed during the captivity. Of Ethan and Heman we have already seen something in the introduction to the preceding Psalm; see also the parallel places in the margin. The title should probably be translated, - To give instruction to Ethan the Ezrahite. The Chaldee has, "A good instruction, delivered by Abraham, who came from the east country." The Septuagint and Ethiopic have Nathan the Israelite; the Arabic has Nathan the Israelite.

The Psalm divides itself into two grand parts; the first extends, verses 1-37, in which the psalmist shows God's mercy to the house of David, and the promises which he has given to it of support and perpetuity. The second part begins with Psa 89:38, and ends with the Psalm; and in it the author complains that notwithstanding these promises, the kingdom of Judah is overthrown and the royal family ruined; and he entreats the Lord to remember his covenant made with that family, and restore them from their captivity.

Verse 1

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord - I will celebrate the mercy of God to the house of Jacob; the mercy that has been shown to our fathers from time immemorial.

To all generations - What I say concerning thy mercy and goodness, being inspired by thy Spirit, is not only true, but shall be preserved by the Divine providence for ever.

PSALM 89: 2 I indeed declare, "Love stands firm forever. You established the heavens. Your faithfulness is in them."

Verse 2

Mercy shall be built up for ever - God's goodness is the foundation on which his mercy rests; and from that source, and on that foundation, acts of mercy shall flow and be built up for ever and ever.

Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish - What thou hast promised to do to the children of men on earth, thou dost register in heaven, and thy promise shall never fail.

PSALM 89: 3 "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David, my servant,

Verse 3

I have made a covenant with my chosen - I have made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and renewed it with Moses and Joshua in reference to the Israelites in general: but I have made one with David in especial relation to himself and posterity, of whom, according to the flesh, the Christ is to come. And this is the covenant with David: -

PSALM 89: 4 'I will establish your seed forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'" Selah.

Verse 4

Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations - And this covenant had most incontestably Jesus Christ in view. This is the seed, or posterity, that should sit on the throne, and reign for ever and ever. David and his family are long since become extinct; none of his race has sat on the Jewish throne for more than two thousand years: but the Christ has reigned invariably since that time, and will reign till all his enemies are put under his feet; and to this the psalmist says Selah. It will be so, it is so; and it cannot be otherwise; for the Lord hath sworn that he shall have an everlasting kingdom, as he has an everlasting priesthood.

PSALM 89: 5 The heavens will praise your wonders, LORD; your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones.

Verse 5

The heavens shall praise thy wonders - The works that shall be wrought by this descendant of David shall be so plainly miraculous as shall prove their origin to be Divine: and both saints and angels shall join to celebrate his praises.

Thy faithfulness also - All thy promises shall be fulfilled; and particularly and supereminently those which respect the congregation of the saints - the assemblies of Christian believers.

PSALM 89: 6 For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

Verse 6

For who in the heaven - שַׁחַק shachak signifies the ethereal regions, all visible or unbounded space; the universe. Who is like Jesus? given in his human nature none of the sons of the mighty can be compared with him. He atones for the sin of the world, and saves to the uttermost all who come unto God through him.

This may also be considered a reproof to idolaters. Is there any among the heavenly hosts like to God? Even the most glorious of them were made by his hands. Can the stars, or the more distant planets, or the moon, or the sun, be likened unto God most high?

Who among the sons of the mighty - Instead of אֱלִים elim, mighty ones, four of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. have אֵיל eil, strength: - sons of strength, strong persons. Several of the Versions seem to have read אֱלֹהִים Elohim, God, instead of אֱלִים elim, strong ones. So my old Psalter, following the Vulgate - For wha in the clowdes sal be evened to Lorde; like sal be to God in sons of God! which it paraphrases thus: "Emang al haly men nane may be evened to Ihu Crist: and nane may be like to hym in God's sons: for he is God's son be kynde, and thai through grace."

PSALM 89: 7 a very awesome God in the council of the holy ones, to be feared above all those who are around him?

Verse 7

God is greatly to be feared - In all religious assemblies the deepest reverence for God should rest upon the people. Where this does not prevail, there is no true worship. While some come with a proper Scriptural boldness to the throne of grace, there are others who come into the presence of God with a reprehensible, if not sinful, boldness.

PSALM 89: 8 LORD, God of Armies, who is a mighty one, like you? The LORD, your faithfulness is around you.

Verse 8

O Lord God of hosts - Thou who hast all armies at thy command, and canst serve thyself by every part of thy creation, whether animate or inanimate.

Who is a strong Lord - See Psa 89:6.

Thy faithfulness round about thee? - Or, more properly, thy faithfulness is round about thee. Thou still keepest thy promises in view. God's truth leads him to fulfill his promises: they stand round his throne as the faithful servants of an eastern monarch stand round their master, waiting for the moment of their dismissal to perform his will.

PSALM 89: 9 You rule the pride of the sea. When its waves rise up, you calm them.

Verse 9

Thou rulest the raging of the sea - Whoever has seen the sea in a storm, when its waves run what is called mountain high, must acknowledge that nothing but omnipotent power could rule its raging.

When the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them - Thou governest both its flux and reflux. Thou art the Author of storms and calms. There may be a reference here to the passage of the Red Sea, and the strong wind that agitated its waves at that time; as the next verse seems to indicate.

PSALM 89: 10 You have broken Rahab in pieces, like one of the slain. You have scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

Verse 10

Thou hast broken Rahab - Thou hast destroyed the power of Egypt, having overthrown the king and its people when they endeavored to prevent thy people from regaining their liberty.

As one that is slain - The whole clause in the original is, אתה דכאת כחלל רהב, attah dikkitha kechalal Rahab, "Thou, like a hero, hast broken down Egypt." Dr. Kennicott has largely proved that חלל chalal, which we render wounded, slain, etc., means a soldier, warrior, hero; and it is certain that this sense agrees better with it than the other in a great number of places. Mr. Berlin translates, Tu contrivisti ut cadaver Aegyptum; "Thou hast bruised down Egypt like a dead carcass." The whole strength of Egypt could avail nothing against thee. Thou didst trample them down as easily as if they had all been dead carcasses.

PSALM 89: 11 The heavens are yours. The earth also is yours; the world and its fullness. You have founded them.

Verse 11

The heavens are thine - Thou art the Governor of all things, and the Disposer of all events.

The world - The terraqueous globe.

And the fullness - All the generations of men. Thou hast founded them - thou hast made them, and dost sustain them.

After this verse, the Editio Princeps of the Hebrew Bible, printed at Soncini, 1488, adds: - לילה לך אף לילה לך, lailah lecha aph yom lecha ושמם מאור הכינות אתה, vashamesh maor hachinotha attah To thee is the day; also to thee is the night:

Thou hast prepared the light and the sun.

But these same words are found in Psa 74:16.

PSALM 89: 12 The north and the south, you have created them. Tabor and Hermon rejoice in your name.

Verse 12

The north and the south - It is generally supposed that by these four terms all the four quarters of the globe are intended. Tabor, a mountain of Galilee, was on the west of Mount Hermon, which was beyond Jordan, to the east of the source of that river.

PSALM 89: 13 You have a mighty arm. Your hand is strong, and your right hand is exalted.

PSALM 89: 14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Loving kindness and truth go before your face.

Verse 14

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne - The throne - the government, of God, is founded in righteousness and judgment. He knows what is right; he sees what is right; he does what is right; and his judgments are ever according to righteousness. His decisions are all oracles, no one of them is ever reversed.

Mercy and truth shall go before thy face - These shall be the heralds that shall announce the coming of the Judge. His truth binds him to fulfill all his declarations; and his mercy shall be shown to all those who have fled for refuge to the hope that is set before them in the Gospel. See the notes on Psa 85:10, Psa 85:11.

PSALM 89: 15 Blessed are the people who learn to acclaim you. They walk in the light of your presence, LORD.

Verse 15

Blessed is the people - "O the blessednesses of that people (אשרי העם) (el ashrey haam) that know the joyful sound;" that are spared to hear the sound of the trumpet on the morning of the jubilee, which proclaims deliverance to the captives, and the restoration of all their forfeited estates. "They shall walk vigorously (יהלכון) (yehallechun) in the light of thy countenance" (באור פניך) (beor paneycha) - the full persuasion of the approbation of God their Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

PSALM 89: 16 In your name they rejoice all day. In your righteousness, they are exalted.

Verse 16

In thy name shall they rejoice - Or, "greatly exult," (יגילון) (yegilun); "all that day," (היום) (haiyom), the jubilee, referred to above.

And in thy righteousness - In the declaration of thy righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, Rom 3:25, Rom 3:26.

Shall they be exalted - They shall be justified freely from all things, be purified from all unrighteousness, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ here below, and at last be exalted to his right hand to reign with him for ever. The jubilee was a type of the Gospel, and under that type the psalmist here speaks of the glorious advent of the Lord Jesus, and the great happiness of believers in him. Let it be observed that the letters in the above Hebrew words called paragogic, as nun in יהלכון) (yehallechun, and יגילון) (yegilun, always increase and deepen the meaning of the words to which they are attached.

PSALM 89: 17 For you are the glory of their strength. In your favour, our horn will be exalted.

Verse 17

For thou art the glory of their strength - They are strong in faith, and give glory to thee, because they know that their strength cometh from the Lord of hosts.

And in thy favor our horn shall be exalted - Instead of תָרוּם tarum, "shall be exalted," תָרִים tarim, "thou shalt exalt," is the reading of several MSS.: but תָרוּם tarum, "shall be exalted," is supported by forty-four of Kennicott's MSS., and sixty of De Rossi's, as well as by several ancient editions, with the Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, and Arabic Versions. In the enjoyment of the Divine favor they shall grow more wise, more holy, more powerful, and, consequently, more happy.

PSALM 89: 18 For our shield belongs to the LORD; our king to the Holy One of Israel.

PSALM 89: 19 Then you spoke in vision to your saints, and said, "I have bestowed strength on the warrior. I have exalted a young man from the people.

Verse 19

Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one - Instead of חַסִידֶיךָ chasidecha, "thy holy one," חַסִידֵיךָ chasideycha, "thy holy ones," is the reading of sixty-three of Kennicott's and seventy-one of De Rossi's MSS., and a great number of editions besides.

If we take it in the singular, it most probably means Samuel, and refers to the revelation God gave to him relative to his appointment of David to be king in the stead of Saul. If we take it in the plural, it may mean not only Samuel, but also Nathan and Gad.

For what God revealed to Samuel relative to David, see 2Sam 7:5, etc.; 1Chr 11:2, 1Chr 11:3; and for what he said to Nathan on the same subject, see 1Chr 17:3, 1Chr 17:7-15. All the Versions have the word in the plural.

PSALM 89: 20 I have found David, my servant. I have anointed him with my holy oil,

Verse 20

I have found David my servant - This is the sum of what God had said in prophetic visions to his saints or holy persons, Samuel, Nathan, and Gad; see 1Sam 16:1, 1Sam 16:12. Here the psalmist begins to reason with God relative to David, his posterity, and the perpetuity of his kingdom; which promises appear now to have utterly failed, as the throne had been overturned, and all the people carried into captivity. But all these things may have reference to Christ and his kingdom; for we are assured that David was a type of the Messiah.

PSALM 89: 21 with whom my hand shall be established. My arm will also strengthen him.

PSALM 89: 22 No enemy will tax him. No wicked man will oppress him.

Verse 22

The enemy shall not exact upon him - None of his enemies shall be able to prevail against him. It is worthy of remark that David was never overthrown; he finally conquered every foe that rose up against him. Saul's persecution, Absalom's revolt, Sheba's conspiracy, and the struggle made by the partisans of the house of Saul after his death, only tended to call forth David's skill, courage, and prowess, and to seat him more firmly on his throne. The Philistines, the Ammonites, the Syrians, etc., united all their forces to crush him, but in vain: "God beat down all his foes before his face," and variously plagued those who opposed him, Psa 89:23.

PSALM 89: 23 I will beat down his adversaries before him, and strike those who hate him.

PSALM 89: 24 But my faithfulness and my loving kindness will be with him. In my name, his horn will be exalted.

PSALM 89: 25 I will set his hand also on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers.

Verse 25

I will set his hand also in the sea - This was literally fulfilled in David. Hand signifies power or authority; he set his hand on the sea in conquering the Philistines, and extending his empire along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, from Tyre to Pelusium. All the coasts of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabic Ocean, might be said to have been under his government, for they all paid tribute to him or his son Solomon.

His right hand in the rivers - First, the Euphrates: he subjected all Syria, and even a part of Mesopotamia; 2Sam 8:3; 1Chr 18:3. He also took Damascus, and consequently had his hand or authority over the river Chrysorrhoe, or Baraddi; and in his conquest of all Syria his hand must have been on the Orontes and other rivers in that region. But if this be considered as referring to the typical David, we see that He was never conquered; he never lost a battle; the hosts of hell pursued him in vain. Satan was discomfited, and all his enemies bruised under his feet. Even over death he triumphed; and as to his dominion, it has spread and is spreading over all the isles of the sea, and the continents of the world.

PSALM 89: 26 He will call to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation!'

PSALM 89: 27 I will also appoint him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

Verse 27

I will make him my first-born - I will deal with him as a father by his first-born son, to whom a double portion of possessions and honors belong. First-born. is not always to be understood literally in

Scripture. It often signifies simply a well-beloved, or best-beloved son; one preferred to all the rest, and distinguished by some eminent prerogative. Thus God calls Israel his son, his first-born, Exo 4:22. See also Sirach 36:12. And even Ephraim is called God's first-born, Jer 31:9. In the same sense it is sometimes applied even to Jesus Christ himself, to signify his supereminent dignity; not the eternal Sonship of his Divine nature, as inveterate prejudice and superficial thinking have supposed.

PSALM 89: 28 I will keep my loving kindness for him forever more. My covenant will stand firm with him.

PSALM 89: 29 I will also make his seed endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

Verse 29

His seed also will I make to endure for ever - This can apply only to the spiritual David. The posterity of David are long since extinct, or so blended with the remaining Jews as to be utterly indiscernible; but Jesus ever liveth, and his seed (Christians) are spread, and are spreading over all nations; and his throne is eternal. As to his manhood, he is of the house and lineage of David; the government is upon his shoulders, and of its increase there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and on his kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice, from henceforth even for ever. Isa 9:7.

PSALM 89: 30 If his children forsake my law, and don't walk in my ordinances;

Verse 30

If his children forsake my law - See the notes on 2Sam 7:13, where this and some of the following verses are explained.

PSALM 89: 31 if they break my statutes, and don't keep my commandments;

PSALM 89: 32 then I will punish their sin with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

PSALM 89: 33 But I will not completely take my loving kindness from him, nor allow my faithfulness to fail.

PSALM 89: 34 I will not break my covenant, nor alter what my lips have uttered.

Verse 34

My covenant will I not break - My determination to establish a spiritual kingdom, the head of which shall be Jesus, the son of David, shall never fail. My prophets have declared this, and I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth.

PSALM 89: 35 Once have I sworn by my holiness, I will not lie to David.

Verse 35

Once have I sworn - I have made one determination on this head, and have bound myself by my holiness; it is impossible that I should change, and there needs no second oath, the one already made is of endless obligation.

PSALM 89: 36 His seed will endure forever, his throne like the sun before me.

Verse 36

His throne as the son - Splendid and glorious! dispensing light, heat, life, and salvation to all mankind.

PSALM 89: 37 It will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." Selah.

Verse 37

As the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven - That is, as long as the sun and moon shall endure, as long as time shall last, his kingdom shall last among men. The moon appears to be termed a faithful witness here, because by her particularly time is measured. Her decrease and increase are especially observed by every nation, and by these time is generally estimated, especially among the eastern nations. So many moons is a man old; so many moons since such an event happened; and even their years are reckoned by lunations. This is the case with the Mohammedans to the present day. Or the rainbow may be intended; that sign which God has established in the cloud; that faithful witness of his that the earth shall no more be destroyed by water. As long therefore as the sun, the moon, and the rainbow appear in the heavens, so long shall the spiritual David reign, and his seed prosper and increase.

Selah - It is confirmed; it shall not fail.

PSALM 89: 38 But you have rejected and spurned. You have been angry with your anointed.

Verse 38

But thou hast cast off - Hitherto the psalmist has spoken of the covenant of God with David and his family, which led them to expect all manner of prosperity, and a perpetuity of the Jewish throne; now he shews what appears to him a failure of the promise, and what he calls in the next verse the making void the covenant of his servant. God cannot lie to David; how is it then that his crown is profaned, that it is cast down to the ground; the land being possessed by strangers, and the twelve tribes in the most disgraceful and oppressive captivity?

PSALM 89: 39 You have renounced the covenant of your servant. You have defiled his crown in the dust.

PSALM 89: 40 You have broken down all his hedges. You have brought his strongholds to ruin.

Verse 40

Thou hast broken down all his hedges - Thou hast permitted the land to be stripped of all defense; there is not even one strong place in the hands of thy people.

PSALM 89: 41 All who pass by the way rob him. He has become a reproach to his neighbours.

Verse 41

All that pass by the way spoil him - The land is in the condition of a vineyard, the hedge of which is broken down, so that they who pass by may pull the grapes, and dismantle or tear down the vines. The Chaldeans and the Assyrians began the ravage; the Samaritans on the one hand, and the Idumeans on the other, have completed it.

PSALM 89: 42 You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries. You have made all of his enemies rejoice.

Verse 42

Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries - Thou hast given them that strength which thou didst formerly give to thy own people; therefore these are depressed, those exalted.

PSALM 89: 43 Yes, you turn back the edge of his sword, and haven't supported him in battle.

Verse 43

Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword - The arms and military prowess of thy people are no longer of any use to them; Thou art against them, and therefore they are fallen. In what a perilous and hopeless situation must that soldier be who, while defending his life against his mortal foe, has his sword broken, or its edge turned; or, in modern warfare, whose gun misses fire! The Gauls, when invaded by the Romans, had no method of hardening iron; at every blow their swords bended, so that they were obliged, before they could strike again, to put them under their foot or over their knee, to straighten them; and in most cases, before this could be done, their better armed foe had taken away their life! The edge of their sword was turned, so that they could not stand in battle; and hence the Gauls were conquered by the Romans.

PSALM 89: 44 You have ended his splendour, and thrown his throne down to the ground.

Verse 44

Thou hast made his glory to cease - The kingly dignity is destroyed, and there is neither king nor throne remaining.

PSALM 89: 45 You have shortened the days of his youth. You have covered him with shame. Selah.

Verse 45

The days of his youth hast thou shortened - Our kings have not reigned half their days, nor lived out half their lives. The four last kings of Judea reigned but a short time, and either died by the sword or in captivity.

Jehoahaz reigned only three months, and was led captive to Egypt, where he died. Jehoiakim reigned only eleven years, and was tributary to the Chaldeans, who put him to death, and cast his body into the common sewer. Jehoiachin reigned three months and ten days, and was led captive to Babylon, where he continued in prison to the time of Evilmerodach, who, though he loosed him from prison, never invested him with any power. Zedekiah, the last of all, had reigned only eleven years when he was taken, his eyes put out, was loaded with chains, and thus carried to Babylon. Most of these kings died a violent and premature death. Thus the days of their youth - of their power, dignity, and life, were shortened, and they themselves covered with shame. Selah; so it most incontestably is.

PSALM 89: 46 How long, LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? Will your wrath burn like fire?

Verse 46

How long, Lord? - The promise cannot utterly fail. When then, O Lord, wilt thou restore the kingdom to Israel?

PSALM 89: 47 Remember how short my time is! For what vanity have you created all the children of men!

Verse 47

How short my time is - If thou deliver not speedily, none of the present generations shall see thy salvation. Are all the remnants of our tribes created in vain? shall they never see happiness?

PSALM 89: 48 What man is he who shall live and not see death, who shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah.

Verse 48

What man is he that liveth - All men are mortal, and death is uncertain and no man, by wisdom, might, or riches, can deliver his life from the hand - the power, of death and the grave.

PSALM 89: 49 Lord, where are your former loving kindnesses, which you swore to David in your faithfulness?

Verse 49

Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses - Wilt thou not deal with us as thou didst with our fathers? Didst thou not swear unto David that thou wouldst distinguish him as thou didst them?

PSALM 89: 50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of your servants, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the mighty peoples,

Verse 50

I do bear in my bosom - Our enemies, knowing our confidence, having often heard our boast in thee, and now seeing our low and hopeless estate, mock us for our confidence, and blaspheme thee. This wounds my soul; I cannot bear to hear thy name blasphemed among the heathen. All these mighty people blaspheme the God of Jacob.

PSALM 89: 51 With which your enemies have mocked, LORD, with which they have mocked the footsteps of your anointed one.

Verse 51

They have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed - They search into the whole history of thy people; they trace it up to the earliest times; and they find we have been disobedient and rebellious; and on this account we suffer much, alas, deserved reproach. The Chaldee gives this clause a singular turn: "Thy enemies have reproached the slowness of the footsteps of the feet of thy Messiah, O Lord. We have trusted in him as our great Deliverer, and have been daily in expectation of his coming: but there is no deliverer, and our enemies mock our confidence." This expectation seems now wholly abandoned by the Jews: they have rejected the true Messiah, and the ground of their expectation of another is now cut off. When will they turn unto the Lord? When shall the veil be taken away from their hearts? "Bend by thy grace, O bend or break

The iron sinew in their neck!"

PSALM 89: 52 Blessed be the LORD forever more. Amen, and Amen.

Verse 52

Blessed be the Lord for evermore - Let him treat us as he will, his name deserves eternal praises: our affliction, though great, is less than we have deserved.

This verse concludes the Third Book of the Psalter; and, I think, has been added by a later hand, in order to make this distinction, as every Masoretic Bible has something of this kind at the end of each book. The verse is wanting in one of Kennicott's and one of De Rossi's MSS.; in another it is written without points, to show that it does not belong to the text, and in three others it is written separately from the text. It is found, however, in all the ancient Versions. The Chaldee finishes thus: "Blessed be the name of the Lord in this world. Amen and Amen. Blessed be the name of the Lord in the world to come. Amen and Amen." And the reader will find no difficulty to subscribe his Amen, so be it.