

Man of Sorrows

Jesus in the Psalms

Psalm 88

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I. Jesus in the Psalms (Lk 24:44-48; Col 2:16-17)

It is the *suffering* of our Christ which Psalm 88 prophesies. Heman the Ezrahite was most likely he who was David “*the king’s seer in the words of God*” (1 Chr 25:5). As David’s *seer*, he “*prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the Lord*” (25:3). He was one of those prophets who “*inquired and searched carefully... searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in [him] was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*” (1 Pet 1:10-11).

II. Man of Sorrows

Psalm 88 - A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Mahalath Leannoth.” A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite.

¹O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You. ²Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry. ³For my soul is full of troubles, And my life draws near to the grave. ⁴I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength, ⁵Adrift among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom You remember no more, And who are cut off from Your hand. ⁶You have laid me in the lowest pit, In darkness, in the depths. ⁷Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. *Selah* ⁸You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out; ⁹My eye wastes away because of affliction.

LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You. ¹⁰Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? *Selah* ¹¹Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction? ¹²Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

¹³But to You I have cried out, O LORD, And in the morning my prayer comes before You. ¹⁴LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? ¹⁵I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. ¹⁶Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off. ¹⁷They came around me all day long like water; They engulfed me altogether. ¹⁸Loved one and friend You have put far from me, And my acquaintances into darkness.

A. Crying out from the Darkness of Affliction (1-9a cf. Mt 26:36-38; Lk 22:52f)

Heman is crying out for deliverance from the darkness of affliction. In this cry, he is a type of our Lord Jesus. He is prophesying *the sufferings* of Christ. Jesus cried out to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, crying out in the agony of affliction as He faced the wrath of God for our sin.

³⁶Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” ³⁷And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.” (Matthew 26:36–38)

B. Crying out from the Darkness of Death (9b-12)

In these verses, Heman explains why God should answer his cry: how will Heman’s death serve God’s purposes? Can Heman praise God from the grave?

C. Crying out from the Darkness of Loneliness (13-18)

Though Heman has faced the darkness of affliction and death, he has not forgotten his God. In this too he serves as a type of Christ.

⁵²Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, “Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Lk 22:52-53)

III. A Primer on Lamentation

A. Lament in a Fallen World

Webster defines _____ as, “*Grief or sorrow expressed in complaints or cries; lamentation; a weeping.*” The article on “Lament Psalms” in *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* remarks:

“Lament psalms, comprising approximately one-third of the book of Psalms, are the most numerous category of psalms... Lament psalms are occasional poems, arising from a specific occasion in the life of the poet or his community. Common occasions for lament psalms are mockery or slander by personal enemies, warfare, disease, drought or the burden of sin and guilt.” (DBI, 484)

Lament psalms take seriously the reality of living in a _____ world. They dwell in the land of darkness. They recognize that things are not right. Evil exists.

B. Lament in a Moral World

Laments also rely upon a moral universe. Though laments dwell in the second part of the biblical story – the fall – they depend upon the first part – _____. The fall has disrupted God’s good creation. In a materialistic universe, why lament?

“Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear . . . There are no gods, no purposes, and no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That’s the end of me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will for humans, either . . .” (William Provine, Darwinism: Science or Naturalistic Philosophy?)

But this is not the world that the psalmist inhabits nor is it the world we inhabit. When injustice occurs, our hearts cry out for relief. While laments take seriously the fallen nature of the world, they also take seriously that the world was originally created _____. We recognize in our bones the dissonance between what the world is and what it should be.

It is precisely because Heman knows that God is the Lord and is in charge of the world that he is experiencing such pain. He is wrestling with the problem of evil. Yet he also knows that unless there is a just God who rules and governs all things, then there is no problem of evil at all – for there is no such thing as evil in an atheistic universe.

C. Lament in Christ’s World (Is 52:13-53:12)

In our psalm, Heman doesn’t yet have _____; he is in darkness; but he is crying out to the source of hope, God Himself. He wants to praise God – and reasons that God should deliver him so that he can do so (9-12). Though Heman is stuck in *the sufferings of Christ*, nevertheless he can still see *the glories to follow*. He knows the hope is there even though he cannot sense it. If you are like Heman, suffering affliction and grief, you are not alone; darkness is not your only companion; Jesus too is your companion in your suffering and His deliverance reminds you that there is hope.

IV. Conclusion