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Psalm 88

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Psalm 88.

Topics.

- God of my salvation; I cry before you my life draws near to Sheol.
- Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I am shut in I cannot escape.
- Is your love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
- Why do you hide your face from me? I suffer your terrors.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION

Psalms are songs and prayers offered to God by the nation Israel, they cover the range of human emotion, expressing praise, faith, victory, sorrow, despair, depression, frustration and the troubled heart of a mourner. They contrast the righteous with the wicked, and include the wisdom and the treasure of God's word. Psalms were written at the beginning of the 15th century BC and probably collected in their final form in the 3rd century.

BOOK THREE (PSALM 73-89)

PSALM 88:1-2

1

A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. To the Choirmaster: According to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

O LORD, God of my Salvation; incline Your Ear to My Cry!

- **Psalm 88:1-2:** O LORD, God of my salvation; I cry out day and night before you. ²Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry!

This prayer of Heman sounds very much like a prayer Job would make or anybody that is suffering extremely painful and continual sickness and sorrow. How many times have the faithful been so sick and in pain and not been able to find any escape, this is exactly how Heman feels (remember they could not go down to the nearest chemist and buy pain killers). This is an amazingly honest prayer this man is in so much pain and cannot find anything that helps him and because of this he feels that God has forsaken him.

PSALM 88:3-6

O God of My Salvation; I Cry, My life draws Near to Sheol.

- **Psalm 88:3-6:** For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. ⁴I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, ⁵like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. ⁶You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.

My life draws near to Sheol: (v3) Sheol is the Hebrew word for grave. These verses imply that Heman, is either in his old age and near death or at least feels that he is close to death.

The pit: refers to a huge hole in the ground that people are buried in sometimes an area within this massive pit where the dead bodies lie is called the grave. During the Old Testament it was common for twenty-thousand men to be killed on a battle field in one day. To prevent disease, and wild animals and birds eating the decaying corpses they would be buried in a mass grave. The same thing is done today when there is a plague or too many bodies and not enough men to bury them all in separate graves, this mass grave was called a pit. When the Scripture speaks of the pit as a bad place it implies that it is only the ungodly that are buried there. The Bible talks a lot about the uncircumcised and those who have fought with weapons of war and the chief people and nations of the earth being in the pit (sometimes personified as being alive and walking around within it) in contrast to the faithful who belong to Christ being referred to as sleeping in Christ (because their death is only temporary). There are many Scriptures that use the word pit and all refer to different aspects of a grave and not one of them teach or even imply everlasting torment.

Eternal torment: the teaching that those who are judged unworthy of eternal life go to a place of fiery flames called hell where they are not only cruelly and brutally tortured by evil eternal creatures called demons, but their bodies are also burned by fiery flames so that they suffer the worst of all agonies for all eternity is not only a gross misunderstanding of Scripture but is also a gross misrepresentation of God's character, since it portrays Him as an extremely sadistic God, especially when it is considered that even those in the secular world would not inflict such brutal and cruel torture on a human for their entire life let alone for all eternity. Added to this John tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8) (1 John 4:16). This horrific doctrine of hell was no-doubt perpetuated in the early years of the church by religious leaders to scare the naïve into the church and has been adopted and perpetuated by their followers from generation to generation through tradition and religious institutions and organisations. Eternal life or eternal death (i.e., utter and total extinction) is the two choices the Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation. For further information see the titles:

- Hell or the Grave (Final destination of Humans).
- The Lake of Fire.
- The Pit in the Old and New Testament.
- All titles are in Death (ON WEBSITE MENU).

PSALM 88:7-9

Every Day I call upon You, O LORD; I Cannot Escape.

- **Psalm 88:7-9:** Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. *Selah* ⁸You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; ⁹my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.

It is interesting to notice that even though Heman loved God he considered that his troubles were a result of God's wrath being upon him (v7). It mattered not to the faithful of the Old Testament what their circumstance were (good or bad) God was always the praise of their heart and God's Spirit and love was what sustained them and what they most sought after. God's love dwelling within their heart and mind was their greatest treasure. Whether they were full of joy; in despair and depression; surrounded by their enemies or lying on their bed suffering the pain of sickness or facing death they always spoke honestly to God of how they felt as Heman is doing in this prayer. Even though suffering rather than become bitter and resentful the following verses show that Heman sought God even more:

- I cry out day and night before you (v1).
- I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you (v13).

PSALM 88:10-12

Is Your Love Declared in the Grave, or Faithfulness in Abaddon?

- **Psalm 88:10-12:** Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? *Selah* ¹¹Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? ¹²Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Abaddon: (destruction in KJV) comes from the Hebrew word (*'abaddown*) and means perishing and destruction.

In the land of forgetfulness: refers to the grave.

Heman accuses God of filling him full of terrors, horror, fear and destroying him with His dreadful assaults while he is helpless and is powerless to escape his enemies that surround him all day long and because of this he asks the LORD to listen to the cry of his prayer.

NOTICE: Heman does not take it for granted the LORD will be listening. Obviously, God hears all prayers, but this expression is an expression of courtesy and carries the idea, "LORD accept my prayer." Again we see the honest cry of Heman's heart before God, he is basically telling God if He destroys him to the grave, he cannot stand up (since he's dead) to praise the LORD, or declare his faithfulness and love, and God can't make His wonders known to him anymore so why does God forsake him to death rather than care for him and deliver him from his troubles.

PSALM 88:13-18

Why do you Hide your Face from Me? I Suffer your Terrors.

- **Psalm 88:13-18:** But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. ¹⁴O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? ¹⁵Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. ¹⁶Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. ¹⁷They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together. ¹⁸You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.

Heman says, He has been near to death, afflicted and suffered terrors from his youth up (v15) it seems that he had some kind of ailment, illness or sickness that perhaps inflicted him at various periods and various levels of time throughout his life and that is at the time of writing this Psalm afflicting him far more than it has in the past. He is not only in deep depression, despair and feeble, but also full of troubles and those he most loves are shunning him, because of all this sorrow he feels he has no way out and that God has forgotten him. The words, "Your wrath has swept over me" (v16) and "You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me" (v18) show that Heman sees that all his trouble and all his sickness is a result of God's wrath toward him. Yet he seeks God in prayer saying if He lets him die how can he praise him from the grave and tell of His steadfast love and faithfulness (v10-12). It mattered not to the faithful of the Old and New Testament (who had great faith) whether their circumstance were (good or bad) God was always the praise of their heart and God's Spirit and love was what sustained them and what they most sought after, His love dwelling within their heart and mind was their greatest treasure. Whether they were prospering and full of joy; in despair and depression; surrounded by his enemies; suffering persecution: lying on their bed suffering the pain of sickness or facing death they always

spoke honestly to God of how they truly felt. Due to misguided teachings some Christians have this idea that if they have super faith, they should never feel any negative emotion or have any negative experience, but this thinking is not in harmony with the lives of the faithful prophets and kings of Israel. Psalms make this very clear especially David's Psalms and God said of David that he was a man after His own heart. (1 Samuel 13:14) (Acts 13:22). Feelings and emotions are not faith. Faith is not dependent on how we feel. Faith is belief, it is independent of emotions, faith may produce feelings, but faith is not the feeling that it is producing.

A person can be full of joy and yet have very little faith, while another may be in great distress or despair and yet have great faith, because faith is independent of joy or despair, faith may produce joy, but joy is not faith we can all be constantly connected to God by faith regardless of how we are feeling in our emotions. Many of the Old Testament faithful complained and moaned before God they expressed their true feelings, emotions and thoughts (good and bad) and prayed for a positive outcome, but underneath all of their complaining was a deep seated faith in God that no matter what does befall them they will continue to trust in the LORD and rest in the confidence that they will not be cast down to eternal destruction, but raised to eternal glory and everlasting happiness. Until that glorious day they trusted that the LORD would continue to uphold them, strengthen them and comfort them by His Spirit, His love and His grace. Job and Habakkuk are good examples of such great faith. Even though Job suffered great affliction his attitude was:

- Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him (Job 13:15).

Habakkuk said, "His body trembles at the power of the LORD and he feels weak and feeble because of the enemies who are coming to invade his land," and then ends his prayer with the following great words of faith.

- Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. (Hab. 3:17-19).

The great men and women of old made God their fortress and refuge, by making Him their greatest love, their best thought and the passion of their heart and mind and by resting in the knowledge that should everything fail in their life they would be raised to eternal glory where everlasting happiness dwells.

Heman's prayer is not answered it ends on the following two questions:

- LORD, why do you cast my soul away? (v14).
- Why do you hide your face from me? (v14).

Sometimes there is no answer it is certain Job did not understand his extreme suffering until it was past, but as horrific as it was he remained faithful through it. The author of Ecclesiastes wrote:

- I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. (Eccles. 8:17).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
