

Psalm 89: Davidic Dynasty



Psalm 89 (88) (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4.....32)

At a tragic time for the Davidic dynasty (see verse 38) – perhaps the death of Josiah in 609 (2Kings 23:28-30), or the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 – the psalmist expresses his faith in God’s mighty deeds as Creator and in the commitment made to David (verses 1-37). This leads into a prayer of supplication (verses 38-51).

The psalm seems also to be modelled on 2Samuel 7.

If the psalm was composed during the exile that followed on the capture of Jerusalem, it may draw for some of its cosmic imagery on the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian Hymn to Marduk, which speaks of cosmic sovereignty, enthronement, homage from other gods, and victory over the ocean Tiamat.

The words *hesed* (kindness) and *'emunah* (faithfulness/truth) recur throughout the psalm. The basis of faith and of trust is God's promise (covenant, verses 3, 28, 34 and 39).

God rules heaven and has promised that this power will be exercised on earth through his vassal king David (verses 3, 20, 35 and 49), the beneficiary of God's loving choice (verses 3, 28, 34 and 39) whose throne would continue through his descendants (verses 4, 14, 29, 36 and 44). The dynasty would be stable (verses 2, 4, 21 and 27) and would last for ever (verses 1, 2, 4, 28, 36 and 37).

The psalmist does not doubt God's faithfulness (verses 33-37). How long will it be, then, before the Lord intervenes on behalf of the Davidic king?(verse 46).

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord.

I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

I declare that your faithful love
is as established as the heavens.

You said: ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:

“I will establish your dynasty for ever.

I will ensure your throne throughout the ages”.’

‘Is not my house like this with God? For he has made
with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things
and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help
and my desire?’(2Samuel 23:5)

Part One. God's action in creation (89:5-18)

The heavens proclaim your wonders, Lord,
your faithfulness in the assembly of your holy ones.
For who in the skies can be compared to you?
Who is like you among the beings of heaven?
You are feared in the council of the holy,
great and awesome throughout the court.

The 'holy ones' refers to divine beings (see Job 5:1; 15:15; Deuteronomy 33:3; Zechariah 14:5). Psalm 82 reflects the same mentality. As monotheism strengthened the 'gods' were thought of more as 'angels' (compare the 'holy angels' of Luke 9:26).

Lord, powerful God, who is your equal?

You are clothed, Lord, in power and faithfulness.

You rule over the arrogance of the sea;
you tame its swelling waves.

It is hard to read verse 9 without thinking of Jesus calming the sea (Mark 4:39-41). Tradition tells us that the Gospel of Mark was inspired by Peter. The point of the Gospel story is to recall this statement of Psalm 89 (and a number of other passages), and to draw us to see God working in the ministry of Jesus to bring order to our chaotic world.

You pierced and crushed the sea monster.

You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

The heavens are yours; yours is the earth;

the world and all that is in it – you have established it all!

You created the north and the south.

Tabor and Hermon joyously acclaim your name.

Lord, You have a mighty arm
raised in triumph.

Justice and right judgment
are the foundation of your throne;
kindness and faithfulness
go before you.

‘It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness’(Proverbs 16:12).

‘Loyalty and faithfulness preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by righteousness’(Proverbs 20:28).

‘Take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.’
(Proverbs 25:5)

‘If a king judges the poor with equity, his throne will be established forever’(Proverbs 29:14).

We have been contemplating the lordship of YHWH in creation. Here we look at people's response.

How your people rejoice!

You summon us into the light.

Your name is our constant joy,

your justice is the subject of our boast.

For you are our glory and our strength.

It is through your grace that we are exalted.

For you, Lord, are our shield.

You, the Holy One of Israel, are our king.

‘Happy are the people to whom such blessings fall; happy are the people whose God is the Lord’(Psalm 144:15).

Part Two. God's action in history (89:19-37)

compare Psalm 2, Psalm 18:20-27 and Psalm 110

You spoke in a vision
of your faithful one, you said:
'I have set a royal crown on one who is mighty,
I have exalted a soldier from the troop.

Is he referring to David's victory over Goliath, where David fought: 'that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand'(1Samuel 17:47)?

I have found in David a servant, Acts 13:22 1Samuel 16
and anointed him with my holy oil.

My hand will remain with him always
and my arm will strengthen him.

The enemy will not outwit him,
the wicked will not humble him.

I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who oppose him.

My faithfulness and kindness will escort him.
In my name he will be victorious.

I will extend his power from the Western Sea
as far east as the mighty Euphrates.

He will call to me: “You are my Father,
my God, my rock of safety!”

I will nominate him my firstborn, Revelation 1:5
the highest of the kings.”

‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’(Psalm 2:7).

‘I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to
me’(2Samuel 7:14).

‘Thus says YHWH: Israel is my first born son’(Exodus 4:22)

I will honour my pledge of love,
and my covenant with him will stand firm.
I will establish his line forever,
and his throne will endure like the heavens.

God's love is offered unconditionally. However, as the following verses indicate, God's love is not forced upon anyone. We are free to welcome it in faith, or to reject it. The consequences of rejection are now spelt out as though they are divine punishment. They are, however, the results of the abuse of human free will.

If his children forsake my law
and do not live according to my ordinances,
if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their guilt with scourges;
but I will not remove from him my love,
or be false to my faithfulness.

I will not violate my covenant,
or go back on the word I have spoken.
Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness
I will not fall short of what I have promised to David.

‘I will never break my covenant with you’(Judges 2:1).

Note the connection here between God’s kindness
and the covenant.

It is the hope expressed in these verses that led to the
longing for a Messiah, once the Davidic line had
come to an end after the destruction of Jerusalem (see
Jeremiah 33:15-21).

His line will continue forever,
his throne will endure before me like the sun.
It shall be established forever like the moon,
an enduring witness in the skies.'

Different Jewish groups had different ways of envisioning the promised Messiah. Jesus' disciples saw him as the fulfilment of these hopes.

Part Three. The throne has been torn down(89:38-45)

‘Thus says the Lord: I am going to break down what I have built, and pluck up what I have planted’(Jer 45:4).

‘Just as the Lord took delight in making you prosperous and numerous, so the Lord will take delight in bringing you to ruin and destruction. You shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to possess’(Deut 28:63).

‘If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good’(Joshua 24:20).

But now, O God, you have spurned and rejected him;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.

You have broken your covenant with your servant.

You have defiled his crown in the dust.

You have made a breach in his walls;
you have reduced his strongholds to ruins.

He is plundered by all who pass by.

He has become the taunt of his neighbours.

You have exalted the power of his foes.
You have given his enemies reason to rejoice.
You have blunted his sword,
you have not upheld him in battle.

You have removed the sceptre from his hand,
and hurled his throne to the ground.
You have cut short the days of his youth.
You have covered him with shame.

Part Four. A prayer (89:46-51)

How long, O Lord? Must you hide yourself forever?

How long will your wrath burn like fire?

‘He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; he has withdrawn his right hand from them in the face of the enemy; he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around’(Lamentations 2:3).

‘See, the name of the Lord comes from far away, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire’(Isaiah 30:27).

‘How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever?
Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?’(Psalm 79:5).

Remember me. How short is my life!

Do you create people for no reason?

Who can live and never die?

Who can escape the power of death?

Lord, where is the kindness you showed of old,
the faithfulness you swore to David?

See, Lord, how your servant is taunted;

how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples.

How your enemies taunt me, Lord,

mocking your anointed at every turn.

Blessed be the Lord for ever.

Amen. Amen.

Many of the expressions used in this psalm of the king are used in the New Testament of Jesus:

‘Christ’ (Matthew 16:16);

‘Chosen One’ (Luke 9:35);

‘Servant’ (Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30);

‘Anointed’ (Luke 4:8; Acts 10:38);

‘First born’ (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15,18; Revelation 1:5; Hebrews 1:6).

Paul, too, speaks of God's promises and faithfulness:

'Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy'(Romans 15:8-9).

'If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself'(2Timothy 2:11-13).