

PSALM 88

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Anguished Cry of one Smitten and Forsaken.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Urgent Prayer to be Heard. Stanzas II., III., IV., V., vers. 3, 4; 5; 6, 7; 8, 9, The Sufferer Pleads his Pitiabie Case. Stanza VI., vers. 10-12, The Incapacity of the Dead to know God's Mercies and Praise Him. Stanzas VII., VIII., vers. 13-15; 16-18, Prayer Renewed and Continued, with Further Pleadings urged.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—By Herman the Ezrahite.

- 1 Jehovah God of my salvation!
by day¹ I make outcry—[yea] in the night in thy presence²
- 2 Let my prayer come in before thee,
Incline thine ear to my piercing³ cry.
- 3 For sated with misfortune is my soul,
and my life at hades hath arrived:
- 4 I am reckoned with them who are going down to the pit,
I have become like a man without help.⁴
- 5 Among the dead am I free,⁵
like the slain who are lying in the grave,—
whom thou rememberest no longer,
since they away from thy hand are cut off.
- 6 Thou hast laid me in the lower pit,
in dark places in the gulfs:⁶
- 7 Upon me hath pressed down thy wrath,
and with all thy breakers hast thou caused humiliation.
- 8 Thou hast far removed my familiar friends from me,
thou hast made me an abomination unto them,—
shut up and I cannot come forth.

1. M.T. (prob. by losing a letter): "When."

2. "Read proably with very slight changes,—'Jehovah, my God, I cry for help by day, (and) in the night my calling is before thee'"—Dr.

3. Ml.: "ringing." "Yell"—Br.

4. "Without God"—Br.

5. "That is, adrift, cut off from Jehovah's remembrance"—O.G. Some read: "is my soul."

6. Or: "deeps." "Dense darkness" (transp. letters)—Br.

STUDIES IN PSALMS

- 9 Mine eye hath languished by reason of humiliation,
I have cried unto thee through every day;
I have spread out unto thee my palms:—
- 10 "For the dead wilt thou do a wonder,
or shall the shades arise give thee thanks?"
- 11 Shall thy kindness be told in the grave,
thy faithfulness in destruction!⁸
- 12 Shall a wonder of thine be made known in the dark,
and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"
- 13 But I unto thee Jehovah have cried for help,
and in the morning my prayer cometh to meet thee.
- 14 Why Jehovah rejectest thou my soul,
hidest thy face from me?
- 15 Humbled have I been and ready to breathe my last from my
youth up,
I have borne the terror of thee and am benumbed.⁹
- 16 Over me have passed thy bursts of burning anger,¹⁰
Thine alarms have exterminated me:
- 17 They have surrounded me like waters all the day,
they have come circling against me together.
- 18 Thou hast put far from me lover and companion,
my familiar friends are—darkness!¹¹

(CMM.) For the sons of korah.¹²

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 88

O Jehovah, God of my salvation, I have wept before You
day and night.

2 Now hear my prayers; oh, listen to my cry,

3 For my life is full of troubles, and death draws near.

4 They say my life is ebbing out—a hopeless case.

5 They have left me here to die, like those slain on battle-
fields, from whom Your mercies are removed.

6 You have thrust me down to the darkest depths.

7. Cp. 6:5 n.

8. Heb. *'abaddon*; only in Job 26:6, 28:22, 31:12; Ps. 88:11; Prov. 15:11, 27:20; "Place of ruin in Sheol for lost or ruined dead"—O.G.

9. "I must be distracted"—Del. "I endure, I am brought low, I am turned backward"—Br.

10. "Thy fires of wrath"—Del.

11. Some Cod. (w. Syr.): "restraint"—Gn.

12. See Intro, Chapter II., 3.

PSALM 88

7 Your wrath lies heavy on me; wave after wave engulfs me.

8 You have made my friends to loathe me, and they have gone away. I am in a trap with no way out.

9 My eyes grow dim with weeping. Each day I beg Your help; O Lord, I reach my pleading hands to You for mercy.

10 Soon it will be too late! Of what use are Your miracles when I am in the grave? How can I praise You then?

11 Can those in the grave declare Your lovingkindness? Can they proclaim Your faithfulness?

12 Can the darkness speak of Your miracles? Can anyone in the Land of Forgetfulness talk about Your help?

13 O Lord, I plead for my life and shall keep on pleading day by day.

14 O Jehovah, why have You thrown my life away? Why are You turning Your face from me, and looking the other way?

15 From my youth I have been sickly and ready to die. I stand helpless before Your terrors.

16 Your fierce wrath has overwhelmed me. Your terrors have cut me off.

17 They flow around me all day long.

18 Lover, friend, acquaintance—all are gone. There is only darkness everywhere.

EXPOSITION

This is the gloomiest psalm in the book, and one of the most touching; if not, also, one of the most encouraging—when all things are considered. It is an elaborate description of almost hopeless sorrow; but its spirit is peculiarly gentle and patient. It contains no reproaches of men, and no upbraidings of God. The sufferings portrayed are not traced to man's infliction, but exclusively to the Divine hand; and yet the psalmist does not speak against God, far less does he turn away from him. He still clings to him,—it may be with a slender hope, but with evident tenacity. His hope is inarticulate; for he does not once say what it is he hopes for. Evidently he wishes not to die; and yet the life he has been living appears, from his own description of it, to have been little better than a living death—from which he might not unnaturally have desired to be freed once for all. But no! he unmistakably clings to life; and,—on the principle that, while there is life there is hope, we may

STUDIES IN PSALMS

fairly infer that restoration to health is tacitly included in his longing.

What is his affliction? Almost certainly, it is leprosy. With this agrees his separation from his *friends*, which he most bitterly feels; and his assertion that he has become to them an *abomination*. His separation from his friends involves confinement: he is *shut up*, and *cannot, must not, go forth*. This separation moreover is complete. They treat him *as dead*—are every day expecting to hear of his decease. They hold no communication with him. His leprosy is of long standing: it has plagued him *from his youth up*. Yet it seems to have fluctuated in intensity; coming back on him like surging *fire*, like returning *breakers*, by their violence ready to dash him in pieces. Connecting—as he does and as was commonly done in his day, especially in this disease—his affliction with the punitive hand of God, he terms the renewed onsets of his trouble *bursts of Divine anger*. They are alarming, from them there is no escape. Full many a time he has given himself up for lost—has, to his feeling, been *exterminated*. He is at *death's door* now: he has anticipated being dead—being in *hades*—nay being in the *lower hades*: among those cast off and down into the *lower pit of hades*, among the especial objects of Divine *indignation*.

And yet he prays. He has been accustomed to pray every day; and especially of a morning: *in the morning my prayer regularly cometh to meet thee*—on thine approach in the daylight. And though, as regularly as he prays, he is rejected, still he prays.

And truly he has prayed to some purpose—to better purpose than he knows. This we have already seen in his restraining himself from reproaching either man or God; but we have yet to see it in the tenor of his prayer as he stands before Jehovah with uplifted palms (vers. 10-12). He prays against Death: but why? What is the predominating motive pervading these six sustained interrogatories? *Why* does he pray against death? Self may run through all—this was inevitable; but self never once comes to the surface: it is Jehovah, his perfections and works; the fear that Jehovah should lack his due praise; these are the sentiments which animate these questions. They take for granted that such grounds for praise exist: that Jehovah is a *doer of wonders*, one who deserves *thanks*; a God of *kindness* and *faithfulness* and *righteousness*, manifested in such acts as can be enumerated and remembered. The psalmist clearly craves to take part in such thanks and praise. He may even

PSALM 88

be credited with a hope of adding to the sum of reasons for such praise by his own improved and brightened history. At all events, this is the sustained feeling which inspires this series of interrogations. He may be right, or he may be wrong, in assuming that such praise cannot be given by *the dead*—by *the shades*—*in the grave, in destruction, in the dark, in the land of forgetfulness*. At least, that is the view he entertains,—the groundwork of his conclusions; and he is anxious that his God should not be robbed of the praise due to him. And, therefore, on all grounds—because he incriminates neither man nor God for his lifelong sufferings, and also because he desires God to be praised—we conclude that he has not prayed in vain.

Probably he was not wholly wrong in assuming that God can gather no harvest of praise from the dead; that is, from the dead so long as they continue dead. What he needed was, to have "life and incorruption brought to light"—to have the prospect of Resurrection introduced into his thoughts, and therewith the conception of a revival of memory and a resumption of praise. Whether, to us who live after "life and incorruption" have been disclosed in Christ, there comes a double relief,—not only the prospect of an end to the hades state and light at the end, but a decided lessening of the intermediate gloom, is an interesting question. It is hard to think that those ancient saints, so favourably commended to our respect as this great sufferer, were wholly wrong. They may have been nearly right as far as they were able to go. Right: if they thought of death only as a suspense of active memory and of public praise; the which, combined, do not amount to a final cessation of being,—an extreme view which few if any saints of old entertained, certainly as regards such as revered God. But always deficient: so long as they failed to grasp the prospect of a complete restoration to life, and therewith the revival of active memory and the resumption of the delightful duty of public praise. It is suggested that, along lines such as these, a complete harmonisation of Old Testament and New may, after the vacillation and oscillation of centuries, be reasonably expected to come. Meantime it is permitted us to hope, that this ancient psalmist, who suffered so much and knew so little, has already become conscious of Messiah's triumph over death, and has the prospect—if not yet the realisation—of sharing therein. So chastened a sufferer as Heman the Ezrahite will assuredly "stand in his lot at the end of the days."

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "This is one of the gloomiest psalms in the book, and one of the most touching; if not, also, one of the most encouraging"—how can this be?
2. Why is it thought the affliction of the writer is leprosy?
3. *Why* does the psalmist pray against death?
4. Is it not true that the dead cannot or do not praise God? How is it that such is stated here?
5. What hope was there for this sufferer?

PSALM 89

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Covenant with David Contrasted with the
Present Dishonour of David's Heir.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, The Keynotes of the psalm—Jehovah's Kindness and Faithfulness. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, Brief Summary of Jehovah's Covenant with David. Stanzas III.-VII., vers. 5-14, The Character, Court Works and Dominion of the Covenant God. Stanza VIII., IX., vers. 15-18, The Happy Estate of the Covenant People. Stanzas X.-XIX., vers. 19-37, The Provisions of the Covenant, Poetically and Prophetically Amplified. Stanzas XX.-XXIII., vers. 38-45, The Dishonour Permitted to David's Heir Pathetically Described. Stanzas XXIV., XXV., vers. 46-51, Remonstrance against the Continuance of this Dishonour, urged by the Shortness and Vanity of Life, the Certainty of Death, the Memory of Former Kindnesses, and the Unanswerable Insults heaped on David's Heir—Jehovah's Anointed.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—By Ethan the Ezrahite.

- 1 The kindness of Jehovah to the ages let me sing,
to generation after generation let me make known thy
faithfulness with my mouth.
- 2 For I have said¹ "To the ages shall kindness be built up,
the heavens—thou wilt establish thy faithfulness therein."
- 3 "I have solemnised a covenant for my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant:

1. Some cod. (w. Sep., Vul.): "thou saidst"—Gn. Following this reading, some begin the Divine speech here, with the necessary changes.