



Great is Your Faithfulness!

Psalm 89

Dr. Deane J. Woods

AN interesting topic came up in a recent conversation this writer had with a colleague who also loves Israel and her people. For some time he had been thinking about the subject of 'David's house lies in ruins'. As it happened, the next article in our present series of 'Messiah in the Psalms' pertained to his musings and cogitations, so we shared our thoughts openly. What follows is the written result of those profitable verbal hours together.

Psalm 89 emphasises God's faithfulness to His covenant promises to David, notwithstanding a time when historical evidence seemingly pointed to the contrary. The sequel my colleague and friend, Kevin Vigus, appends to this primary article highlights the present chronological hiatus in which Israel currently finds herself without a king on the Davidic throne. This sad time-gap will certainly be rectified. The Messiah, Jesus, will return to rule from David's throne in Jerusalem. God revealed this through His prophets.

Furthermore, this will be in accordance with His covenant love revealed in Psalm 89 which heralds His promise with clarion calls: God is faithful! – faithful to Israel and her people, and to all who will trust Him. This faithfulness is revealed in Psalm 89 in terms of four God-given assurances:

I. God is faithful in Character: Let's PRAISE Him! (vv 1-18)

In this *Maschil* (a contemplative/exhortative teaching) psalm, Ethan the Ezrahite goes to great lengths to highlight God's covenant promises to David revealed in the Nathan oracle of 2 Samuel 7:4-16ff. In particular, he speaks of this in terms of God's mercy (Hebrew *chesed*, meaning His covenant love, steadfast love,

unfailing love and therefore, faithfulness). This is consistent with His character and is therefore forever true and unchanging. Seven times he uses this term: verses 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33 and 49 – truly, a central motif!

Ethan does not identify the historical background that occasioned the writing of this psalm. However, it is clear from verses 38 through 45 that there was no one on David's throne at that particular time. Some commentators have suggested the psalm reflects a kingless time during the Babylonian exile, rather than the situation described in 1 Chronicles 12 regarding the Shishak/Egyptian invasion in the

Ethan sang of this remembrance of the Davidic covenant promises, and noted significantly that they were forever. He wanted to make this known to all generations (v 1), just as Asaph purposed to do in Psalm 78:1-6 regarding the praises of the LORD. Transgenerational proclamations and teachings are fundamental when it comes to spiritual truth and godly heritage! Spiritual foundations underpin society, as Psalm 11:7 and 33:8-9 teach so clearly!

God's character is the foundational reason for Ethan's praise. He is "the Holy One of Israel" (v 18), the mighty LORD who rules heaven and earth (vv 5-10), for He is the creator and founder of them all (v 11). Furthermore, righteousness

and justice are the foundation of His throne (v 14; cf. 16), while mercy (*chesed*) and truth go before His face (v 14b). No wonder the psalmist sings of His mercies, for in the covenant promise with David, mercy (*chesed*) will be built up forever (vv 1, 2 and 3).

Herein we find three application lessons: First, God's promise to Israel of the rightful king to sit on the Davidic throne

is assured, for it is based on His immutable character and irrevocable covenant promise. Second, this truth must be communicated to all succeeding generations to give them the same assurance at whatever time of need they might encounter. Third, true praise is always based on the reality of knowing God and His unfailing character, epitomised in His covenant love (*chesed*).

II. God is faithful to His Covenant: Let's TRUST Him! (vv 19-29)

While David is clearly in view in this section of the psalm, there are also very strong messianic overtones in the terms used in reference to him. Consider these poignant designations concerning the Shepherd King: He was



time of Rehoboam. If this latter scenario is the background of this psalm, then Ethan is the person referred to in 1 Kings 4:31 in regard to Solomon and his wisdom.

Whatever the historical occasion, the psalm repeatedly makes the point that God is faithful, and will remain so! (See vv 1, 2, 5, 8, 14, 33, 49). Though Ethan will die and not live to see the covenant fulfilled, he has no doubt whatsoever that it will be fulfilled. God is a God of absolute faithfulness and He will be faithful to His covenant with David. So Ethan closes the Psalm on a note of praise! (See v 52). The burden of the NT, of course, is that the covenant will be fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah (Lk 1:26-33, 68-79).

divinely chosen, appointed and anointed (vv 19-20). God will strengthen and enable Him to accomplish his ministry (v 21). His enemies will not be victorious over him (vv 22-23), for God's faithfulness and mercy shall be with him and his horn (house/descendants) will be exalted (v 24). Strikingly, the anointed one will cry to God, the rock of His salvation, and He will make him His firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (v 27).

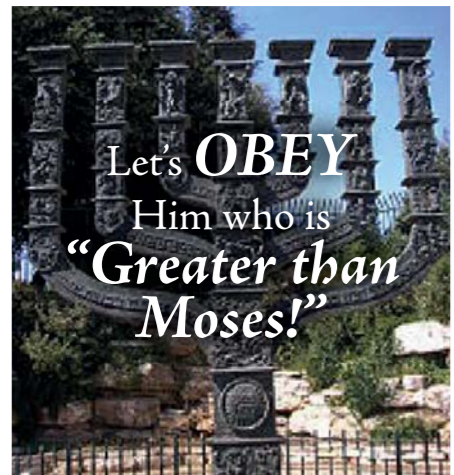
All this is based on God's mercy (*chesed*) that will keep him forever, and His covenant will cause his seed to be forever, together with his throne continuing as the days of heaven!

Such designations and terminologies point prophetically to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God's anointed (the Messiah – Heb 1:8-9); He is God's firstborn (Greek *prototokos*) – outside of creation, not part of it (Col 1:15, 18). He overcame all enemies and powers on the Cross (Jn 19:30; Col 1:20ff). As the Captain of our salvation He will lead many sons to glory (Heb 2:10) and they will reign with Him in His Kingdom for a thousand years, and then in the Eternal State, forever (Heb 12:28; Rev 20-22).

All these aspects, both in the context of Psalm 89 and its realized, messianic fulfilment in the LORD Jesus Christ – the Substance of the Old Testament fore-shadowing (Col 2:17) – are dependent on and determined by God's covenant promises to David (2 Sam 7:4-16ff, esp. vv 22-24). Well may we therefore sing Thomas Chisholm's famous hymn: **Great is Thy Faithfulness!**, even though it was penned in reference to the sorrowful events surrounding Jerusalem and God's people recorded in Lamentations 3:22-23.

III. God is faithful in His Commands: Let's OBEY Him! (vv 30-45)

In the next movement in Psalm 89, two inter-related motifs are revealed. First, in verses 30 through 39 the psalmist rehearses the outcomes



if David's sons were to forsake God's law and not walk in His judgements, thereby breaking His statutes and not keeping His commandments (vv 30-31). Divine judgement would follow (v 32); yet His loving-kindness (*chesed*) will not be utterly taken from him (v 33). Then follows God's reason for this: "My covenant I will not break" (v 34a), for once God has sworn an oath in His holiness, He never lies – here again said to be in reference to David (v 35). Moreover, David's seed was promised to endure forever (v 36). Finally, these promises were underscored by God's statement that David's throne will be "as the sun before Me; It shall be established forever like the moon, Even like the faithful witness in the sky" (vv 36b-37).

Such hyperbolic language surfaces again in Jeremiah's prophecies concerning Israel and the new covenant. God would establish His people, Israel & Judah, forever (See Jer 31:31-33; Ezek 36:22-26ff). Israel was assured of God's promises and fulfilment of His prophetic plans because according to Him, the only two ways Israel could ever be defeated, or her people obliterated and her country annihilated, would be by their unprincipled enemies doing the erstwhile impossible: ridding the heavens of its celestial constellations and if that didn't work, trying vainly to measure the heavens (Jer 31:35-37). Israel's future is therefore doubly guaranteed – by the new covenant (Mt 26:38) provisions and the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant promises in the Messiah! (Is 9:6-7; Lk 1:31-33ff; Rev 20-22).

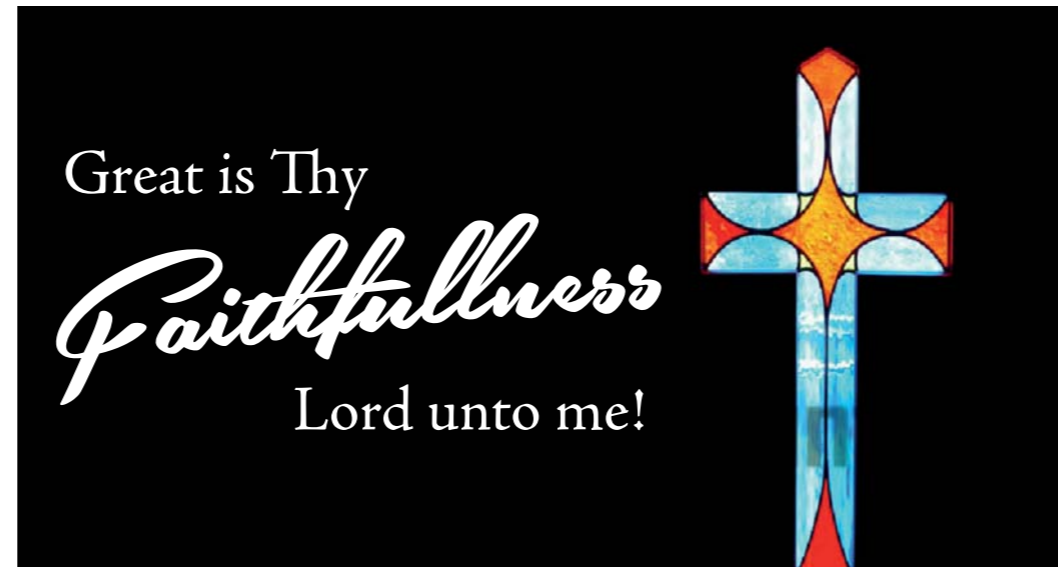
The second movement Ethan described is not hypothetical (as implied by the **if** of verses 30-37), but an actual dramatic reality. The chronological hiatus in verses 38 through 45 was real. The first word of verse 38 is "**But**" and the verse goes on to describe how God has been furious with His anointed – probably a reference to Jeconiah and the disintegration of the throne. Obviously, this was a time as Ethan wrote when there is no one on David's throne. God's commands had been ignored or blatantly disobeyed. He is said to have abhorred his people's disrespect for Him and their flouting of their covenantal obligations. Divine fury has been outpoured on His anointed (v 38). Seemingly, God has renounced the covenant with David; his crown and throne have been cast to the ground (vv 39-40, 44b). David's enemies right now evidently have the upper hand. Israel is a reproach to her neighbours, and they rejoice because they believe God has not sustained them in battle (vv 42-43). This could refer to the king, in particular. In a word, David's (and Israel's) glory has ceased (v 44a), his line has been cut off and therein is his shame (v 45). **Behold! David's house lies in ruin!** Selah: Pause and think on that!

This hiatus in God's 'Panorama of Prophecy' beckons us to further corroborative study

and comment, for it speaks of national Israel's present lot. There is a delay in the coming Kingdom with Messiah's Second Advent. Because of time and space reasons, it must suffice the writer to outline at this point a few salient and relevant scriptural passages that shed further light on the matter.

First, Jesus the Messiah spoke of His coming Kingdom and asked His disciples to pray for it to be realized (Mt 6:9-10; Lk 17:20-37). He had begun His public ministry by announcing that the kingdom was at hand (Mk 1:14-15). He came as King, He lived and ministered as King, He died as King and was raised again as our High Priest, Prophet and King (see Hebrews). He is rightly designated King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 19:16).

Second, that Jesus expected the Kingdom to



come is assured, because he answered the Pharisees' question as to when it would come in specific terms (Lk 17:20-21ff).

Third, Luke-Acts provides relevant comment *apropos* the kingdom of God both in terms of Luke's record of all Jesus began to do and to teach and in the birth, expansion and proclamation of the gospel through the church. In about thirty years, that gospel had been taken from Jerusalem to Rome, not the least by Paul and his missionary team, including Dr Luke. In Acts, there are eight references to the 'kingdom of God' (1:4, 6, 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23 and 31). In context, they are all to be understood eschatologically, i.e. in relation to Jesus and His coming kingdom.

Fourth, John reminds us in his "Apocalypse" that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of the LORD and of His Christ, and

He shall reign forever and ever (Rev 11:15). This will be on David's throne during the Millennium and then forever in the Eternal State.

Fifth, there are other scriptural verses that corroborate an interim delay in the establishment of the coming Kingdom. Take, for example, Jesus' reply to the Pharisees in Luke 17:20f. He said: "The kingdom does not come with observation" (Greek *parateresisos*, connotes near sightedness or things seen near). His reply thus indicated that the coming kingdom is not in the foreseeable future (relative to the unbelieving Pharisees!). Luke 21 elaborates on what would happen in the immediate future – "great distress *in the land* and wrath upon *this people*" v 23; Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by Gentiles **until** ... v24; the kingdom of God is related to the parable of the fig tree, you can know when summer is nigh vv 29-31;

must receive **until** the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Emphasis added). Whether this was another legitimate offer of the kingdom or not, is not our present purpose or focus. What is to be noted is that Jesus must be in heaven prior to His coming to restore all things.

Hosea 3:4. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. **Afterward** the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness **in the latter days.**" (Emphases added).

Ezekiel 21:26. This is spoken in reference to the "profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, and whose iniquity shall end, thus says the LORD God: Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, **until** He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him." (Emphasis added)

Acts 15:14-16. In this context, James is speaking following Peter's address to the Jerusalem Council re matters of the law concerning gentile believers. He rises and says: "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: **After this** I will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up." (Emphasis added)

In this context then, what more could be said of these passages:

- **Amos 9:11** "On that Day, I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old."

- **Is 9:6-7** "the government will be upon His shoulder ... Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will perform this".

- **Is 55:3** Here God gave another invitation to Israel to "Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you – the sure mercies of David." For God has given him to be a witness and a leader to the people.

- **Psalm 89:35-49** (the present passage being studied) – As stated, it surely will come to pass that this present time of Israel being without a King seated on David's throne will end and Messiah shall reign over all the earth, as Great David's Greater Son!



The kingdom is coming, therefore, and all who acknowledge the King (Jesus, the Messiah) will share in its administration (Heb 3:1, 14; 12:25-27ff). Jewish or Gentile friend, are you ready and waiting for the coming King, serving him with reverence and godly fear? Let us all receive His grace so to do, at this present time!

IV. God is faithful in His Chesed: Let's REJOICE and be GLAD! (vv 46-52)

The final section of Psalm 89 begins with Ethan's seemingly anxious question: "How long, LORD?" It ends with the psalmist's climactic, anticipatory burst of exultant rejoicing and praise: "Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen."

Ethan realized David's throne was unoccupied at this particular time. But given the faith he had in the faithfulness of God to come through with His promises in His own way and time, he poses the inevitable question as to how long it would be before the sorry lot of Israel was put right. He knew it would not be forever (v 46). He acknowledged his life would be relatively short compared with the time frames of the divine epochs (Notice Jesus' reply about this to the enquiring disciples in Acts 1:3-6ff). God is not a God of futility regarding His purposes and men (Ps 89:47b). Yes, men have their day, and the grave looms, but God is ever in control (v 48). His word will stand sure!

With his question, Ethan coupled another telling evidence of his faith in his ever faithful God. He asked: "LORD, where are your former loving-kindnesses [*chesed*] which you swore to David in Your truth?" Had he lost his faith? No, not really. For just as John the Baptist, languishing in prison, sent a two-man delegation to Jesus asking "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?" we sense Ethan's dilemma. He was still willing to look; his faith was not totally dimmed. Nor was he crippled by despairing, depressive, debilitating doubt. He asked the LORD to be in remembrance of his reproach and that initiated by Israel's enemies. He finally identified that reproach not only in reference to himself personally, but to "the footsteps of Your anointed" (v 51), another probable reference to the Davidic line, now in recess at that time, but which would be fully rectified with the reversal of Jeconiah's curse in the coming of the Messiah

(See Luke's Birth Narrative genealogy in Luke 3:23-38, noting Nathan in verse 31).

Something wonderful, gracious and marvellous must have occurred at that point of his interlocutions with the LORD, for he burst into praise. He rejoiced: "Blessed be the LORD forevermore", and sealed his exaltations with a twofold "Amen"! Like Habakkuk had to learn later in his untoward circumstances as Judah faced the advancing Chaldeans and the deportations of the Babylonian Exile, Ethan discovered just how great God's faithfulness was, even though immediate or longer term situations looked bleak. In the long haul, God would have His way.

God's servants must therefore learn to rest in the LORD in the day of trouble (Hab 3:16); rely on the LORD in His grace and mercies in a time of waiting (Hab 3:17), and rejoice in the LORD (Hab 3:18) because His promises will at last always prove true!

Reader friend, always remember: *"(Even) God's explanations will never engender faith, but His promises can and do!"* (Warren Wiersbe, on Habakkuk 1:5)

Is this your testimony right now? **The King and His kingdom is coming! "Kiss [i.e. embrace] the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way"** (Ps 2:12) and join all who have done so already and can truly and meaningfully sing with full assurance: **Great is Thy Faithfulness!** Hallelujah!

House in ruins

I remember a family reunion where we all took a trek to my grandma's original farm-house. It was in ruins but it was fascinating to see the original cottage and get a picture of what it was like as a fully operational house – complete with wood-fired stove! But it is now in permanent ruins, with no vision whatsoever to see it rebuilt.

But then we went to grandma's later house – the one I remember visiting many times as a kid. It too I remember as old and run down. But now it had been completely renovated, and I remember wandering amazed through its modern renovations. It had been rebuilt and restored to a fully-functioning house that my cousin and his family live in – with all the joy and activity of a fully operational family!

The difference was the **right builder** – with a vision for its future!

King David's house is currently in ruins, and here we see a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. Acts 15:14-16 defines both. Verse 14 denotes the church where God at this time is taking a people for His name from among the Gentiles. Then verse 16 notes a later time: "AFTER THIS I will return and will rebuild

the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins," (Emphasis added) There is a clear distinction here between God's current activity through the Church and his future activity in rebuilding the house of David.

While the Church continues to be a living witness of the body of Christ, the house of David lies in ruins. You can see it for yourself! A visit to the archaeological centre "The City of David" in Israel is one of the amazing adventures when touring the land of Israel. Furthermore, new discoveries are constantly being celebrated as they piece together more aspects of this ancient, magnificent kingdom.

But there is no illusion that it is currently anything more than ruins.

This theme strongly challenges the notion that the Church is the kingdom, as well as the idea that the Church is the new replacement plan of God. God already has a plan – He doesn't need another one! But what He DOES do is graciously include a people for Himself from among the Gentiles (Acts 15:14) who are promised to enjoy the kingdom blessings that are promised in the yet future kingdom (Acts 15:16-17). To the praise of His glorious grace!

The house of David awaits the right Builder – who has a clear vision for its future.

This One has come – as was declared by an angel just before His appearing: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:32-33).

Moreover, He came at *just the right time* – a unique time in history when Israel were back in the Promised Land, ready to repossess the kingdom (Gal. 4:4). One man had already declared himself *King of the Jews* (Herod, 40 BC) – but was clearly unworthy of this title by God's standards, despite his authority through Rome.

In contrast, the One pronounced by the angel was completely worthy. He showed by sign, wonder and miracle that He was "the anointed one" as prophesied in Scripture. But then, tragedy. He was the rightful king, with the rightful kingdom prepared, but the nation – through the authority of their leaders – refused to be loyal subjects. And so the house of David remained in ruins.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate;" (Matt. 23:37-38, emphasis added)



The right Builder had arrived, but the people were not ready for restoration. While many personally placed their faith in Him (Jn 7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 12:42), as a nation they were not willing.

Thus the unshakeable, forever promises of the house of David (Psalm 89) still await a future time for their miraculous renovation, as affirmed by Acts 15:14-16.

And God offers this time of His tarrying as a **"hope"**: that more people will realise "when Messiah comes, will He do more miracles than these which this Man has done?" (Jn 7:31) and place their faith in Him. By doing so, they are promised to share the kingdom through their faith in its King (Jn 1:12; 20:31).

So while we await the One who will return and rebuild the house of David, let us worship at the wonder of these words:

"these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn. 20:30-31)

All that is meant by that little word "life" is yet to be revealed!

Kevin Vigus
Ministry Representative, WA

The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry (Australia) Inc.

P0 Box 171 Melrose Park SA
5039 Australia

Office and Books:

c/o EBC Community Centre
Suite 406 (Upstairs)
Cnr. Rothesay Ave and Dorene St
St Marys SA 5042 AUSTRALIA

Phone/Fax: (+ 618) 08 8276 1333
Email: australianoffice@foi.org