

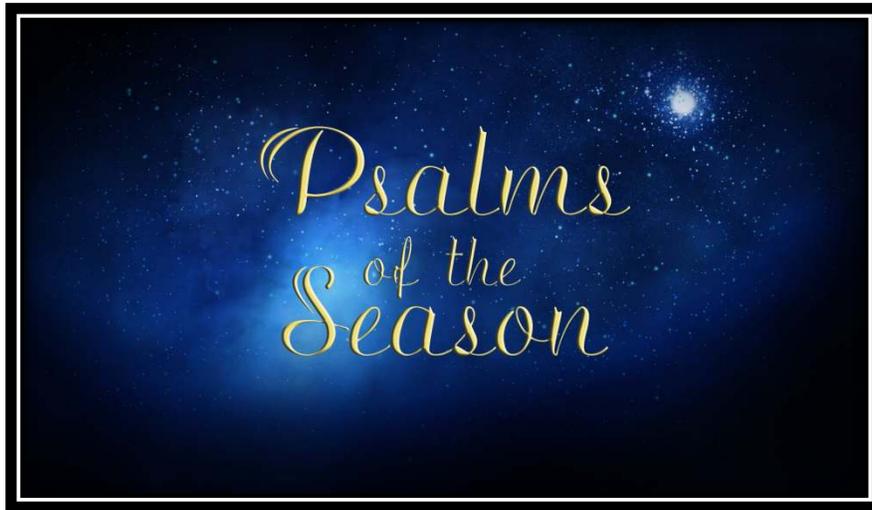
PSALMS OF THE SEASON

Expositional Study Of Enthronement Psalms

Hardness To Hope : Part 2

Psalm 89

December 15, 2013



In addition to reading theological books, I read political ones as well so I can better understand where my country is going and how the inspired Scriptures can, and should, help build us into a people who love, honor, and respect the God who gave us this fine, free land. One thought-provoking, challenging, and sobering title I recently worked my way through is titled *After America* by Mark Steyn. Regardless of whether you like Mark's conservatism or not, it's hard to argue with the analytics he provides in the well-documented work about our eventual collapse from just a financial perspective.

The first chapter called *The Stupidity of Broke* details how both political parties in the United States have placed us on a trajectory of internal financial implosion. Really, it is not a question of "if," but "when," because our leaders do not have the courage to make the necessary cuts to spending, like any normal family would, for purely political purposes. Hence, they all continue to spend at break-neck speed, digging us deeper into a financial hole of debt instead of digging us out. What will happen as we continue on this sinful, selfish slide? Quoting economist Herbert Stein, Mark gives us a sobering answer, "The Federal debt cannot rise forever relative to the GNP. Our foreign debt cannot rise forever relative to the GNP ... But of course, if they can't,

the will stop.”¹ What happens when the financial markets stop? Words like collapse and chaos should immediately come to mind.

In the rest of the book, Mark goes on to relate our structural implosion to God’s words to King Belshazzar on the wall of his palace on the night the Babylonian kingdom fell: Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin; translated,

²⁵ Now this is the inscription that was written out: “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. ²⁶ “This is the interpretation of the message: ‘MENE’ -- God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. ²⁷ ‘TEKEL’ -- you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. ²⁸ ‘PERES’ -- your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 5).

Financial stats don’t lie when you’re running deficits of \$16 trillion and revenue which can’t pay down the debt, coupled with leaders who won’t make much-needed cuts in order to save us. As Douglas Elmendorf, director of the Congressional Budget Office warned back in the spendthrift days of 2010, “... current U.S. deficits [are] unsustainable.”² How right he was but, unfortunately, nobody was, or is, listening.

When I read books like this, I feel better equipped to do my small part in slowing down our out-of-control luge ride into cultural oblivion. I also struggle with feelings vacillating between discouragement and dismay, as if those are two great poles to be stuck between. Political questions bubble up, as well, questions like: Where are the brave, God-fearing leaders today who will count the cost and walk in the shoes of our forefathers, leaders willing to put their fortunes on the line for liberty and longevity? Where are those leaders who govern and guide us, like our forefathers did, by remembering the lofty and life-giving teachings from the Word of God? Theologically, I can’t help but wonder at times, “God, how much disintegration am I going to have to watch before you appear? God, when will you fulfill your word and bring peace on earth?”

Ethan, the writer of Psalm 89, shared my feelings long before I walked the planet. As we learned in our last study, he, too, struggled as a godly man with the willful and purposeful unraveling of his country. His fear and frustration was wrapped around the age-old promises of God for a messianic and eternal Davidic King and their shocking contrast with the spiritual and political decay and destruction of the once great nation of Israel. So much initial promise under David and Solomon had quickly unraveled under the politically naïve and godless leadership of Solomon’s spiritually rudderless son, Rehoboam. In this moving Psalm, Ethan he worked through his emotions and fears by teaching us one key truth:

In Hardness There Is Always Hope (Psalm 89)

Hope for the future, where peace, sanity, and prosperity reign supremely, rests squarely upon two concepts directly related to God:

- Hope Is Grounded In God’s Character (Psalm 89:1-2; 5-18)

¹ Mark Steyn, *After America*

² *After America*, 13.

- Hope Is Grounded In God's Covenant (Psalm 89:3-4, 19-29)

Despite what man does to destroy the kingdoms of the earth, God's inexorable, unchanging character will move Him to eventually usher in the Davidic Kingdom under the Messiah. We can all bank on this concept this Christmas. Additionally, God made an eternal covenant/deal with David, a covenant to bring the King of Kings, the Messiah to earth, and God is not about breaking or renegeing on the covenants He establishes. They will be realized in God's perfect timing. This is, of course, the positive side of God's promises to all of us who, like Ethan, shudder as we live in tenuous, tumultuous times, and these concepts are not the last word either. To them, Ethan adds one more.

Hope Is Grounded in God's Commitment (Psalm 89:30-37)

Basically, Ethan's words here are a re-cap of the eternal Davidic Covenant as detailed in 2 Samuel 7. In this re-statement you will readily find hope, as he did, in the unwavering commitment of God to bring His glorious King and Kingdom to earth no matter what happened in the lives of the chosen Davidic kings.

³⁰ "If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, ³¹ If they violate My statutes And do not keep My commandments, ³² Then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.

Two conditional sentences anticipate the sinful activity of Davidic kings like Rehoboam. Their willful rejection of God's words and ways would meet with divine discipline. Let us not forget that consequences always follow sin. Do not be deceived. Jeremiah, the prophet, reminds us of this truth:

⁹ "Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God, and the dread of Me is not in you," declares the Lord GOD of hosts (Jeremiah 2).

Ezekiel echoed Jeremiah's words when he wrote:

² "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them ³ and say, 'Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys: "Behold, I Myself am going to bring a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places. ⁴ "So your altars will become desolate and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will make your slain fall in front of your idols (Ezekiel 6).

God has to judge sin. Why? Because His holiness demands it (Habakkuk 1:13), as does His love (Deuteronomy 11:1ff), and His jealousy (Psalm 78:58). But, as learn from God, he uses the disciplinary rod of a father, not the axe of an executioner. Yes, He will judge deviation from godly principles, but in His discipline He will always remember mercy.

God's mercy is showcased in the ensuing words He spoke to David as recalled by Ethan:

³³ "But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. ³⁴ "My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. ³⁵ "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. ³⁶ "His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. ³⁷ "It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful." Selah.

The Hebrew of verse 33 is most emphatic by wedding a *waw* (pronounced 'vav' in Hebrew) conjunction, viz., the word "and," with the noun *chesed*, or loyal love. By starting in this unusual fashion instead of employing a verb, God draws strict attention, again (Psalm 89:1, 2, 14, 24, 28), to His unshakeable loyal love toward His king and kingdom promise to David and his descendants.³ His love for His word and promise, coupled with His love for chosen people would guarantee them a future and eternal King and a Kingdom. His promise to do this on a worldwide scale is also tied intrinsically to His commitment to always telling the truth and to His absolute holiness. Hence, God promised the King and Kingdom would be as eternal as the sun and the moon. True, the kings and kingdom would suffer chastisement for veering off the chosen path of God's law and light; however, but eventually, the King would come who could, in fact, realize the forever nature of this divine promises because He would, in fact, be the eternal God in the flesh, the Messiah (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2).

Ethan sought two things by discussing, one more time, the divine nature of the Davidic Covenant: One, to bring some hope to his life as he watched his nation unravel all around him, and two, to motivate God to act based on what He had promised. We, today, especially at Christmas, gain great insight from Ethan's methodology, don't we? God will judge the nations as they continue to slide into the deep, dark shaft of sin, and we, as saints, will be here to watch the sad outcome; however, we watch as ones who have hope in the hardness, hope in the living God who has promised to eventually fulfill His ancient promise to David. From our time perspective, we know the King did come, but they did unto Him as they wanted, choosing to reject and crucify Him. He, conversely, as the risen sovereign Lord has not forgotten any part of His promise to David. Perhaps you need to remind yourself of the essence of this promises, as Ethan did.

Perhaps you also need to get real, authentic, and, well, honest this Christmas. Sometimes the tension between God's promises and His words and the carnal culture we live in does, in all reality, create a great deal of angst in our hearts and minds. Ethan did what you might need to do. He put his real feelings right out in the open, and his feelings were raw. With verses 38 through 51, he shared the inner conflict he struggled with as he patiently and faithfully waited for the Lord to bring the Davidic Covenant to full fruition and realization. Two pragmatic points demonstrate how hope can move from grounding to pounding.

³ Reading from right to left you will note the opening emphasis of the Hebrew: **מַעֲמוֹ וְלֹא־אֲשַׁקֵּךְ בְּאַמוּנָתִי**:

וְחִסְדִּי לֹא־אֶפִּיר.

Hope Is Pounded By Chastisement (Psalm 89:38-45)

Verse 39 is most emphatic and contrastive in the Hebrew text. Our English texts translate the Hebrew this way, “But now you have ...” In Hebrew we have the *waw* conjunction again wedded to a non-verb (here it is the pronoun, you,) to create a complete contrast with what has been said thus far.⁴ Yes, Ethan knew the Word of God, especially where it spoke about the coming Davidic King and Kingdom; however, he had trouble relating that Word to the divine disarray brought against the sinful Davidic dynasty. Ever been there? Ever had those kind of theological issues? Ever just shared with God how you felt about what you were watching unfold before you on a daily basis?

Ethan didn't hold back but shared honestly, and you can really sense the deep emotion in his words. The numerous verbs tell the sad story. Moving quickly from point to point, the wise man catalogued fourteen actions of God he had a hard time working through in light of God's covenantal promise to David.

- One: ³⁸ But You have ^acast off and ^brejected,
- Two: You have been full of wrath ¹against Your ^canointed.
- Three: ³⁹ You have ^aspurned the covenant of Your servant;
- Four: You have ^bprofaned ^chis crown ¹in the dust.
- Five: ⁴⁰ You have ^abroken down all his walls;
- Six: You have ^bbrought his strongholds to ruin.
- Seven: ⁴¹ ^aAll who pass along the way plunder him;
- Eight: He has become a ^breproach to his neighbors.
- Nine: ⁴² You have ^aexalted the right hand of his adversaries;
- Ten: You have ^bmade all his enemies rejoice.
- Eleven: ⁴³ You also turn back the edge of his sword and have ^anot made him stand in battle.
- Twelve: ⁴⁴ You have made his ^{1a}splendor to cease and cast his throne to the ground.
- Thirteen: ⁴⁵ You have ^ashortened the days of his youth;
- Fourteen: You have ^bcovered him with shame. Selah.

Knowing God would judge sinful activity among the kings and watching it are certainly two different things. Watching soldiers lose battles, tough. Watching fortresses fall, hard. Listening to the taunts of our gloating enemies, unbearable.

Divine chastisement in relation to sinful choices, national or personal, takes a toll not just on the sinner but on those who are personally impacted by the judgment. Whatever hope one has in God's promises of what lies ahead when He arrives to fulfill all of His words to David is naturally diminished when God deals with those who would dare depart from His word and ways. I don't know about you, but all of this speaks to me. I, like Ethan, know what God has promised. I, like Ethan, know that the Messianic King is coming back as He promised. But, I like

⁴ וְאַתָּה זָנַחְתָּ וְתַמְאַסְתָּ הַתְּעִבְרָתָ עִם־מְשִׁיחֶךָ

Ethan, have my fourteen issues in the interim as our nation careens off the moral and spiritual cliff:

- One: Seeing judges codify sin, thereby making it legal to prosecute godly, moral people.
- Two: Seeing leaders attempt to placate vicious enemies with concessions of peace and financial aid (\$7 billion to Iran who has not given us any assurance they won't produce the bomb) ... all while we've got a morally twisted athlete, Dennis Rodman, doing some of our diplomacy in Korea with his hoops for nukes approach. What is going on?
- Three: Seeing our glorious, God-honoring Constitution re-framed as a fluid document to suit power-hungry leaders.
- Four: Seeing perversion replace purity all around me.
- Five: Seeing our military hamstrung before our enemies by restrictive rules of engagement.
- Six: Seeing our leaders abandon their commitment to our ally Israel.
- Seven: Seeing our people—thinking people---trade absolute truths for the shifting sands of relative proofs.
- Eight: Seeing our freedom eroded all for the sake of so-called safety.
- Nine: Seeing our people hide sinful activity behind so-called rights of the freedom of expression.
- Ten: Seeing our military made into a social experiment.
- Eleven: Seeing the de-Christianization of our culture. Patrick Buchanan reminds us of our roots in his insightful book, *The Death of the West*: “The First Charter of Virginia, the colonists’ declared goal is to ‘spread the Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.’ ‘In the name of God, Amen,’ are the first six words of the Mayflower Compact, which proceeds, ‘by the grace of God ... having undertaken for the glory of God the advancement of the Christian faith ...’ In the Fundamental orders of Connecticut in 1639, the assembled declared, ‘The word of God requires that to maintain the peace and union of such a people there should be orderly and decent government establish according to God ... to preserve the liberty and purity of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’” (*The Death of the West*, 181-182). We’ve come a long way since then haven’t we, and it hasn’t been uphill either. No, the cultural revolution against everything Christian will continue until it is a hegemony and then it will become a Statist dictatorship so we all fall in line for the sake of tranquility and peace.
- Twelve: Seeing our leaders spend us and our grandchildren and their children into financial oblivion.
- Thirteen: Seeing pastors who are afraid to teach the Word of God for fear of shrinking their churches.
- Fourteen: ... Seeing the bourgeois majority intimidated by the lawless minority, resulting in concession after concession for the sake of getting along.

Now you see why I readily identify with Ethan. As I said, it is one thing to know God judges nations when they turn from Him, but quite another to be in the quagmire. Further, it is one thing to know the King shall return just as assuredly as He came the first time; however, the constant blows to the body from the logical results of God turning us over to our own darkness does knock the wind of hope out of you at times, doesn't it?

This is not being pessimistic, just realistic. There is something spiritually and psychologically cathartic about opening up and sharing your true, deep feelings with the living God who loves you as His child. So, go ahead this Christmas and tell the King how you feel. He's listening. Share with Him your honest feelings about divine chastisement. Share with him, also, how ...

Hope Is Pounded By Conundrums (Psalm 89:46-51)

What is a conundrum? It's a puzzling question or problem.⁵ What was Ethan's theological conundrum? I'll let him speak for himself:

⁴⁶ ^aHow long, O LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your ^bwrath burn like fire? ⁴⁷ ^aRemember ¹what my span of life is; For what ^bvanity ²You have created all the sons of men! ⁴⁸ What man can live and not ^asee death? Can he ^bdeliver his soul from the ¹power of ²Sheol? Selah. ⁴⁹ Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, Which You ^aswore to David in Your faithfulness? ⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, the ^areproach of Your servants; ¹How I bear in my bosom *the reproach* of all the many peoples, ⁵¹ With which ^aYour enemies have reproached, O LORD, With which they have reproached the footsteps of ^bYour anointed.

His first two perplexing questions are followed by a plea for God to remember that he is just a man and won't live that long. His point is well-taken: Lord, can you hurry up and establish your covenanted kingdom with the Messiah at the helm before I pass off the world scene. His third thorny question is followed by yet another plea for God to remember and take action. Here the remembrance is tied to the fact the godly are being harassed, mocked, and made fun of by all those who detest and disrespect the living God.

Have you reached a point where you are asking God questions like this? I ask them all the time:

- God, why do the wicked seem to be almost invincible in their quest to make our culture completely godless?
- God, why do godly people seem to fold so quickly in light of the advancements of evil?
- God, why don't people listen to sound reasoning anymore. Why do they opt for illogical, destructive thinking?
- God, how can you not move quicker to bring the messianic King and Kingdom when there is so much blatant cruelty in the political systems of this ol' earth?

⁵ *New World Dictionary*, 310.

- God, is the rest of my life going to be all about watching the sacred being deconstructed and replaced with the unsacred?

I could go on, but you get the point. I live with the tension of Ethan. All godly people do. You can't read the writings of any saint, like an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, and not see how they all struggle with living in a sinful world in light of the glory of God's kingdom which is just over the chronological horizon. And as they struggle, they always pose their questions, questions not designed to question or affront God, but to be open and honest before His throne as mere creatures totally dependent on so He can sustain them and supply them with wisdom and insight for living in hard times.

This Christmas God just might be waiting for you to share your heart with Him. Ethan did and it led him to close with an amazing, and highly positive and hopeful doxology:

⁵² aBlessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

To hear the words in Hebrew is to find a balm for the weary soul:

בְּרִיךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

Why this sudden change of heart by Ethan? Why did he move back to a point of hope in the hardness? Probably because he knew that despite what he saw with his eyes and heard with his ears, nothing would stop God from bringing the King of Kings and the Kingdom. Haven't you ever reached this point as you struggled before the Lord in prayer? Haven't you, too, poured your heart out to Him only to be overcome by His blessedness? It is true: in hardness God always gives hope.

Interestingly enough, the hope here is related to the opening phrase, blessed be the LORD. The first time this opening phrase appears in the Bible is when Noah, post-flood, blessed the LORD, the God of Shem, his son (Genesis 9:26). This is most significant because the Messiah, the Seed of Genesis 3:15, would come through his chosen line. Shem was eight grandfathers removed from Terah, the father of Abraham (Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah). Through Abraham came Isaac and then eventually Judah. And through Judah would eventually come Boaz, the great, great, great grandfather of King David, the first messianic king.

The second use of this significant term came from the lips of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, when he located a wife for Isaac by God's sovereign and providential leadership (Genesis 24:27). This is most interesting because the Messiah, the Anointed One, would come through the line of Abraham.

Most intriguing is the usage of the term by Israelite women when Boaz took the Moabitess, Ruth, for his wife.

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not failed to provide you today with an heir! May he become famous in Israel!" (Ruth 4:14).

Verses 15 through 22 go on to tell us how Boaz, from the tribe of Judah, became the father of Obed, who, in turn, became the father of David, who, in turn, became the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus (Matthew 1). Don't tell me God is not working out His intricate plan to fully realize the Davidic Covenant. From the time Ethan shared his heart in this powerful psalm, to the birth of Jesus, God connected billions of lives and events so that the Messiah could be born to set in motion the realization God's ancient kingdom promise. If that doesn't give you hope, I don't know what will.

Today, as in Ethan's day, we have God's promises to David, coupled with those Jesus gave us while He walked among us. Prior to His glorious ascension on the Mount of Olives back into heaven after His resurrection, the disciples, like Ethan, had a perplexing question for Him:

⁶ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1).

You can easily follow their thinking. The Messiah came as promised. Check. He came from the Davidic line. Check. He did the works prophesied of the Messiah. Check. He died for the sins of the world as Isaiah prophesied. Check. He rose from the grave, defeating sin and death. Check. Hence, the reason they asked the question at hand. They were rightly excited that NOW was the time for the Davidic Kingdom to come in its fullness, and thereby remove theological tension and bring peace.

Christ's reply is most instructive:

⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which ^athe Father has fixed by His own authority;

Had they been wrong in anticipating the arrival of an earthly King and Kingdom, Jesus missed the perfect opportunity to correct them. He didn't correct them because that King and Kingdom was/is still future. What they were to focus on in the interim was made clear to them:

⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Translated: Until He returns to set up that kingdom, we aren't to lose hope but give people the hope of the gospel. What greater gift can you give someone this Christmas than this? And you need to get busy. Why? Read on and you'll see:

"⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹ They also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

This is our blessed hope in the hardness. The Messiah is coming to earth again to rule and reign, just as prophesied (Isaiah 2, 9, Zechariah 12-14), and just as He promised (Matthew 24-25). All of this should make you want to sing:

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King!
Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King!
Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We're going to see the King!
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