

Psalm 88

Heman the Ezrahite wrote this psalm. Here are a few things known about this man:

- Heman was the grandson of Samuel, the final judge of Israel who anointed King Saul and King David.
- In addition, Heman is listed as one of three main musicians appointed by King David “for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals” ([1 Chronicles 25:1](#)).
- God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.) All these men were under the supervision of their father for the music of the temple of the Lord, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God.” His musical family of fourteen sons and three daughters was prominent during the reign of King David.
- Heman and his family were also present when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem: “All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets” ([2 Chronicles 5:12](#)). Heman and the other Levites were formally dressed, sang, and played instruments at this time.
- It seems that Heman was still serving during the time of King Solomon, son of David. Heman was considered very wise. Solomon, the wisest of all, was compared to Heman: “He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman” ([1 Kings 4:31](#)).
- The musician and sage Heman served in Israel as a Levite, a seer, a songwriter, a godly father, and a man of influence during the time of David and Solomon. Today, his only known song is Psalm 88, a song of one passionate for God: “Lord, you are the God who saves me; / day and night I cry out to you” ([Psalm 88:1](#)).

Heman was a very intelligent and wise priest and worship leader. He was involved in some historic times of worship and saw God’s deliverances for his people in many ways. His whole family was on the national worship team. This guy seemed to be the person who had it all. He was in a position of multiple blessings. How can it be that he is writing a psalm about a lifetime of suffering and pain and rejection and loneliness? How can this national hero be describing abandonment of all loved ones and friends?

How do we explain this man's tortured thought life to his stellar and successful reputation and public persona?

Read Psalm 88:1-7: There were a number of famous national worship leaders who were sons of Korah. All of the sons of Korah who were listed worship leaders noted in the psalms seemed to write songs about being at death's door. There was a strange dichotomy in their history. They wanted to lead; but they were frequently in trouble.

Their great grandfather challenged Moses for his job; and the earth opened up and 14,700 people died. Korah had felt that he was a more capable leader than Moses. He may have been more talented and gifted. God handicaps the shrewd and the simple ones to an equal standing.

Think about how the great writer and well-trained pharisee Paul was constantly being faced with difficulties:

...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? 30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my [d]infirmity. 31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. (2 Corinthians 11:23-31)

God can use the gifted; but it is hard to keep it from going to their head. Many of the well-known preachers have big family problems.

Is it an oversimplification to say that this world-class song writer paid his dues so that he could *play the blues*? We experience trials and victories to obtain the survival and coping skills to share with others in need. The famous Eric Clapton lost a son; which inspired him to write a famous song or two.

Ezra is a well-respected biblical leader; but personally he feels like a helpless prisoner in his own body. Likewise Job was a worldwide standout for his righteous conduct and reputation. He personally was a tortured soul.

But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last And where is he? 11 As water disappears from the sea, And a river becomes parched and dries up, 12 So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, They will not awake Nor be roused from their sleep. 13 “Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, That You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, That You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! 14 If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, Till my change comes. (Job 14:10-14)

Job got pounded physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. David was a uniquely-skilled warrior and poet; and yet he suffered with depression. David got disrespected, was hunted down and ran for his life for years. Joseph was a uniquely-skilled administrator; and he ran into wreck after wreck in his life. Joseph was treated roughly, ignored, disrespected, forgotten and used. Heman is in pretty good company here.

We have to stop worrying about our plan. It is going to get thrust aside. The Holy Spirit has a better plan.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, [k]were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:35-38)

Like Ezra, Job angrily reminded God that a dead man cannot praise him or do good works! They both were very frustrated about not being able to extricate themselves. They were both very vocal about the abandonment of family and friends. David spoke of his body failing him; and his mind becoming a place of daytime nightmares.

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! 2 For Your arrows pierce me deeply, And Your hand presses me down. 3 There is no soundness in my flesh Because of Your anger, Nor any health in my bones Because of my sin. 4 For

my iniquities have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. 5 My wounds are foul and festering Because of my foolishness. 6 I am [a]troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. 7 For my loins are full of inflammation, And there is no soundness in my flesh. 8 I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart. 9 Lord, all my desire is before You; And my sighing is not hidden from You. 10 My heart pants, my strength fails me; As for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me. 11 My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, And my relatives stand afar off. 12 Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; Those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, And plan deception all the day long. (Psalm 38:1-12)

We are humans; and not angels. We do not glorify God by our accomplishments or power or obedience. The angels are described as successful and obedient and mighty, and colorful, and powerful, and holy and obedient. The only way that we glorify God is through redemption. In other words; we are an amazing example of recycling cast offs. That is why we identify with the underdog. That is us. The guy who gets into a bad situation somehow survives.

The name Adam comes from the clay soil he was made from. Visualize a clay water pitcher on a kitchen counter that gets bumped..and falls to the ground, broken into pieces. Our lives fall apart all of the time. It is frustrating. We are like generic water pitchers. We are not an especially-attractive container; but at least it was designed to hold a little water. That is a picture of us. We are like a bunch of cracked pots that leak. Who would pay for such a thing; or search a dump site for one to fix up? We are examples of how God can do something notable with a dirt person.

If Elon Musk makes 10 billion dollars this year is it to God's credit? No. If the world weight lifting record gets broken this year is it to God's glory? No. What about a street person or drug addict who finds Jesus; and becomes a healthy God-loving example of a responsible and humble man in his community? That is absolutely to God's credit. Ezra was extremely talented; as also was David, Joseph, Daniel, Job, etc... Any success they had would have been expected. To glorify God, it has to be clear that you are being carried or helped.

This realization brings us to a question: Am I trying to become something greater; or am I trying to see what God can do in my life? Hopes of accomplishment and success can

lead to disillusionment, if we hang on to our vision too closely. This world has a way to break you down; and leave you depressed and alone. On the other hand, letting the Holy Spirit drive to an *unknown destiny* can't disappoint you; because you never knew where it was leading. How gratifying it is to live for something other than our own plan. We no longer have so much invested in telling others: "Look what I can do".

We know of biblical figures by their actions and quotes. We do not know their thoughts. Psalms is a unique book of scripture. It is an intimate prayer diary. We might be very surprised at what is going through the minds of others. Perhaps nagging thoughts and concerns are what drove them to action. Ezra saw himself at death's door; and a breath away from the grave. The children of Israel saw him as wise and gifted. Elijah and other biblical heroes were weak men, led by the Holy Spirit to do supernatural things.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:17-18)

I am probably the same. I have an outward persona; and an internal *push and pull* going on. For me; I can see how God has used my daily concerns about my construction project challenges and obstacles. I really start to pray when it looks like I am heading towards failure. I have learned that there are just too many things that can go wrong in so many ways. Instead of obsessing over every detail and dreading tomorrow; I have chosen to just draw closer to God. I have seen in scripture that all of Israel's hardships were directly related to their obedience and faith. It seems like a naive oversimplification; but it works.

Consider Joshua, the great military leader of Israel. He did not write a psalm. We only know of his exploits. Perhaps his psalm would have been of great despair for seeing friends die dilay on the battlefield. God can use intellectual honesty. The question is how far does a capable person have to be brought down before they are relying on God again?

Read Psalm 88:8-18: The next time we get into a jam; or we are getting crushed; don't hit the panic button so fast. This is our most creative and prayerful and worshipful state. We see things as they are when we feel alone. We see how much we are dependent on God when our toys are gone. They next time you are going through the wringer; make use of it. Improve your worship time. Reach out to another ailing soul amidst your own

hardships. It will carry a more meaningful message for the kingdom. The gospel got into more doors through average people, than with centurions and priests.