

Studies in Psalms by [John T Polk II](#)
For [The Fellowship Room](#)

Psalm 88

1/16/13

Vs. 1-9 acknowledge the anticipation of impending death;
Vs. 10-14 reveal an uncertain relationship with God;
Vs. 15-18 picture the loneliness of a soul without God.

It was said that Solomon "was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman" and others ([1 Kings 4:30-31](#)). Heman, a Kohathite, was "a singer," and one of those appointed by David to serve at the tabernacle, and later, the temple built by Solomon ([1 Chronicles 6:31-33](#)). This is one of the darkest and gloomiest of all the Psalms, with a minimum of the uplifting encouragements usually found in them. This could be titled "A Song of Dejection."

Verses 1-9: To cry out "day and night" before God (**verse 1**) doesn't reflect on God's inaction, but on the petitioner's despondency and persistence (**verse 2**). "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" ([Luke 18:7-8](#))

When a soul is "full of troubles" there is no room for any more, and the grave is near (**verse 3**); to be "counted" for death, one is powerless to live (**verse 4**); "adrift," already "slain," frees one for death, but released by God, also (**verse 5**). The "lowest pit," "darkness," and "depths" could not be more descriptive of dying (**verse 6**). There are 7 descriptions of death: "the grave" (**verse 3**), "the pit" (**verse 4**), "among the dead," "lie in the grave" (**verse 5**), "the lowest pit," "darkness," "the depths" (**verse 6**). To die feeling God's rejection (**verse 7**), already considered dead by "acquaintances" (**verse 8**), exhausting appeals to God (**verse 9**) is as despondent as one may become.

Verse 10-14: These questions answer themselves: (**verse 10**) Since "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" ([Matthew 22:32](#)), then God will not reverse death; (**verse 11**) God's "lovingkindness" and "faithfulness" are for the living, as are His "wonders" and "righteousness" (**verse 12**). Additional terms which describe going down from life are: "the dead" (**verse 10**), "grave," "destruction" (**verse 11**), "dark," "forgetfulness" (**verse 12**). Facing death is no reason to quit praying (**verse 13**), though there has come from God no immediate reassurances (**verse 14**).



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Verses 15-18: Whatever the affliction since youth (**verse 15**), the Psalmist’s life was lived in the pale of death, terrified, and distraught over the problem. Feeling God’s wrath is the curse and cause (**verse 16**), it has been overwhelming to live with. Life has been likened to struggling to keep one’s head above “terrors” (**verse 17**). Life ebbs away without “loved one,” “friend,” or “acquaintances” (**verse 18**).

The Psalm ends without happy reassurance, hope for tomorrow, or a pleasant relationship with God. Such gloom and doom comes to those who live and then die in sin, separated from God. “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ” ([Ephesians 4:17-20](#)). “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” ([Mark 16:16](#)); that is to obey “from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” ([Romans 6:17](#)). We must remove the affliction of sin while we can.

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