

The Covenant with David

The Divine Council and the Messianic Coming

Ps 87:1 *A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.*

I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

² For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."

³ You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:

⁴ 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

⁷ a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?

⁸ O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you?

⁹ You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

¹⁰ You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

¹¹ The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

¹² The north [Mt. Zaphon] and the south [Mt. Yemin], you have created them; [Mt.] Tabor and [Mt.] Hermon joyously praise your name.

¹³ You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand.

¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁵ Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,

¹⁶ who exult in your name all the day and in your righteousness are exalted.

¹⁷ For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted.

¹⁸ For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁹ Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said: "I have granted help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.

²⁰ I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him,

²¹ so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.

²² The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him.

²³ I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

²⁴ My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

²⁵ I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

²⁶ He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

²⁷ And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

²⁸ My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

²⁹ I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.

³⁰ If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,

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,

³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.

³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

³⁵ Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.

³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

³⁷ Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies."¹ Selah

³⁸ But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.

³⁹ You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.

⁴⁰ You have breached all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

⁴¹ All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴³ You have also turned back the edge of his sword, and you have not made him stand in battle.

⁴⁴ You have made his splendor to cease and cast his throne to the ground.

⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame. Selah

⁴⁶ How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁷ Remember how short my time is! For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

⁴⁸ What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah

⁴⁹ Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

¹ “**And a witness in the clouds will be faithful.**” See the NAS, along with **Michael Heiser**, “The ‘Witness in the Clouds’: Psalm 89 and the Divine Council,” <http://www.michaelsheiser.com/cloudwitness.pdf>; **E. Theodore Mullen, Jr.**, “The Divine Witness and the Davidic Royal Grant: Ps 89:37-38,” JBL 102:2 (1983): 207-218; **E. Theodore Mullen, Jr.**, *The Divine Council*, 253ff. P. G. Mosca, “Ugarit and Daniel 7: A Missing Link,” *Biblica* 67 (1986): 508-517; idem., “Once Again the Heavenly Witness of Ps 89:38,” JBL 105 (1986): 27-37.

⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked, and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,

⁵¹ with which your enemies mock, O LORD, with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

⁵² Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen."

Psalm 89

MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE

THE BIBLE IS A *BIG* BOOK. Actually, it is 66 books, written over a span of some 1,400+ years, in three distinct languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), on three different continents (Europe, Africa, Asia), by nearly 40 different authors, ending nearly 2,000 years ago. These facts make even beginning to grasp its most basic contours a daunting task. How is a person possibly able to make sense of it?

This is where the various disciplines of theology can help. **Theology** is literally **the study of God**. It has fallen on bad times in modern days, perhaps because it can be abstract, difficult to wade through, and thus *feel* irrelevant. Nevertheless, when done well, its intent is to help us understand who God is as he has revealed himself in the

Bible. That is anything but irrelevant. It is the most practical thing in all the world.

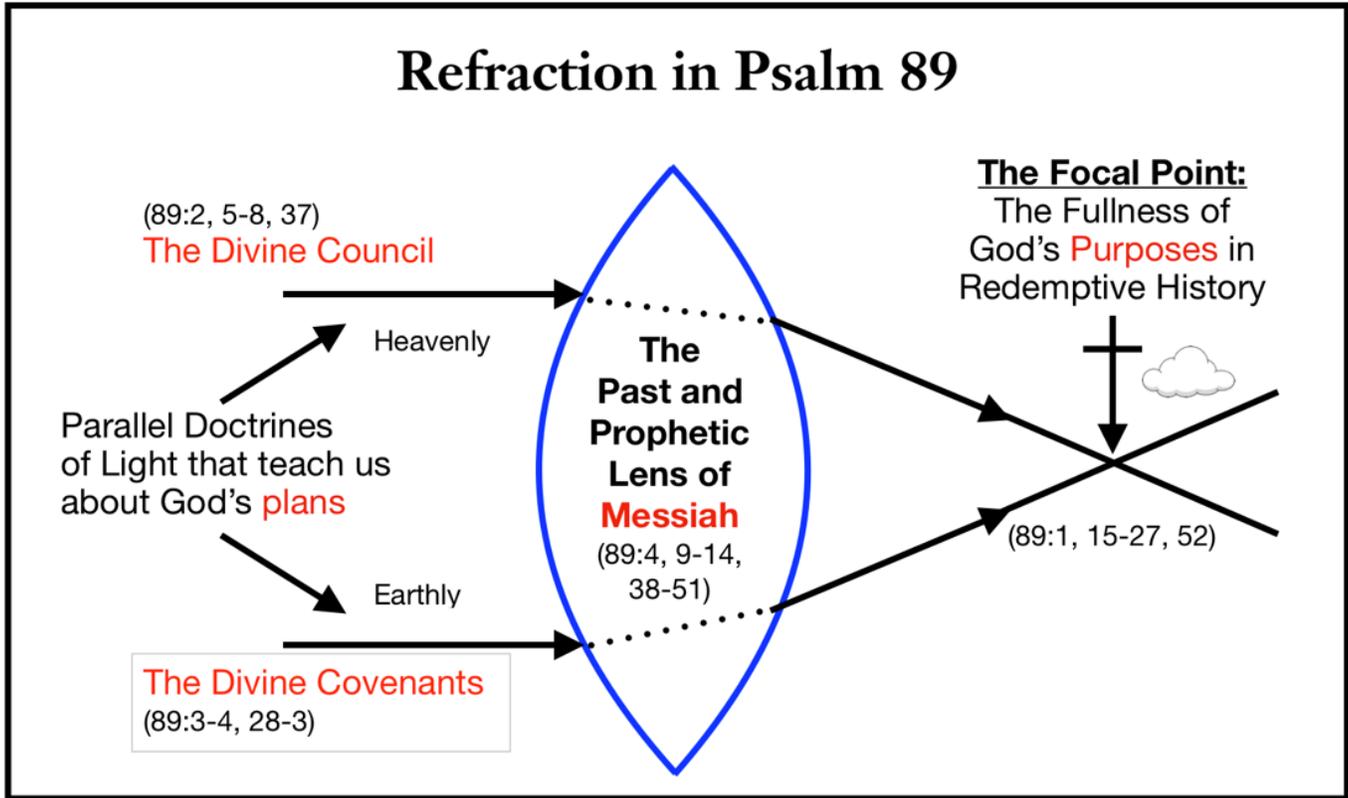
Theology has various sub-disciplines. These include *exegetical theology*, *biblical theology*, *systematic theology*, *historical theology*, and *pastoral theology*. **Exegetical theology** looks at a passage in its own context, attempting to discover the meaning of the original author(s). **Biblical theology** looks at various themes that are found throughout the Bible and attempts to make sense of them according to how they unfold progressively through the Scripture. **Systematic theology** looks at the logic of God and his redemptive plan, attempting to put order to what might otherwise be chaos. **Historical theology** looks at how theology has developed over time, including the time of the Bible. **Pastoral theology** seeks to apply all this to people living today.

I bring this up because to my mind, even though it is a song, Psalm 89 **is one of the great chapters in the Bible for theology**. Therefore, it is one of the chief places to go to learn to understand the Bible itself. Put it to song, and it becomes all the more able to accomplish these things, as songs get under your skin and into your heart. Do you want to have a better grasp of what the Bible teaches? Its story? Its

themes? Its goal? Its God? Then make it a life-long task to understand Psalm 89 better.

To help you on this journey, consider today what I have come to believe are **two of the most important doctrines** from the Bible for creating a map in your mind to help you navigate God's dealings with creation. Both happen to be explicit in Psalm 89. In the song, they are also mutually dependent upon one another. When understood properly, both can greatly advance your understanding of God's purposes in redemptive history. Think of them as **two beams of light** that go into a lens (the proper way to focus their light) which then refracts and focuses the beams at a focal point off in the distance so that everything is seen clearly, including how those beams will continue to shine light throughout the church age:

Refraction in Psalm 89



The first is one that is familiar to Reformed Christians, but often misunderstood (sometimes very badly) by many other Christians. This is **the theme of divine covenants**. God's dealings with man from the Garden of Eden onward are *covenantal* dealings. When people ask me to give them one word that gets at the heart of what it means to be Reformed, "covenant" is the word that I give them. The reason it is so important is because **covenants define the relationship** between God and his creation, especially mankind (the covenant of works), and more graciously, his

chosen people.² If there is no covenant, there is no relationship between God and man. Thus, there is no Bible. For the most part, “covenant” is an idea that teaches us about life with God “down here.” It is mostly earth oriented.³

As its lens and focal point, covenant has Christ in mind, including here in Psalm 89. As John Frame recently wrote, God has entered...

...into genuinely personal relationships with human beings. Indeed, Scripture *emphasizes* these relationships. Among them are *covenants*, which of course are central to biblical redemption. And the principal promise of the covenants between God and believers is “I will be *with* you,” the “Immanuel principle,” fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Christ came to be with us in space and

² As such, covenant theology presupposes what many would probably say is the word that best defines Reformed Christians: [predestination](#). But predestination, while an important and foundational topic, is best embodied through the idea of covenant. God chooses people through covenant.

³ **Going Deeper:** Covenant is “mostly” earth oriented. But not entirely. Throughout the OT, we are told that God made a covenant with “[the day and the night](#)” ([Jer 33:20, 25](#)), with the constellations-stars ([Job 38:31-33](#)), which the Jews believed were/symbolized with angelic beings: 1 Enoch 5:2-4; 69:13-25; Prayer of Manasseh 1:1-4. This “Creation Covenant” is sometimes equated with the covenant of works, though these non-earthly aspects are rarely discussed (see [Doug Van Dorn](#), *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Primer* [Erie, Co: Waters of Creation, 2014]. esp. 39-41). This is in part because, as the Bible is written to man, its teaching on covenant is concerned primarily with mankind.

time, to take to himself our sins, and to bring us new life *in him*. He came to be our covenant *Lord*. This is the Gospel.⁴

The second doctrine is one that is not familiar to many Christians. It has stayed for the most part in OT academic ivory towers, though that is slowly changing. But it is one we have seen before in the Psalms (especially the recent Psalm 82). As I have been thinking about this idea for seven or eight years now, I have only grown in my belief that it is the perfect complement to “covenant,” and is therefore very important to understand. This is the doctrine of **the divine council**.

Why is the divine council so important? If “covenant” deals mostly with life between man and God down here, the divine council deals mostly with life between God and other beings “up there.”⁵ The divine council is the structure

⁴ **John Frame**, “Scholasticism for Evangelicals: Thoughts on All That Is In God by James Dolezal, *Frame-Poythress.org* (November 25, 2017), <https://frame-poythress.org/scholasticism-for-evangelicals-thoughts-on-all-that-is-in-god-by-james-dolezal/>.

⁵ **Going Deeper:** Again, “mostly,” because while the divine council is a heavenly entity with heavenly “sons of God,” God did place Adam (the “son of God”) on Mt. Eden to be in charge of earth as he was given a seat on the council. People often miss this, and it is a major point of the NT calling believer’s “sons of God.” Sons of God is originally language that was given to the divine council of heavenly beings (**Ps 89:6** where “heavenly beings” is literally “sons of God”). Adam was given this title, but lost his right to rule on the council because of his sin. Redemptive history is God’s way of restoring this right to humanity through his elect human beings, who

through which God works out his plan on earth from heaven. It also has as its lens and focal point the Lord Jesus, for Christ is one like a “son of man” who comes before the Ancient of Days to receive an eternal kingdom in the heavenly council of Daniel 7. And we will see him in the divine council of Psalm 89 as well today.

As such, it is the heavenly counterpart to an earthly doctrine. I describe what divine council theology has done for my life **not as changing** anything I have believed, but **as doubling the information** that I have believed. And why not? If there are two realms (earth and heaven), to be missing one or the other is to be missing half of the universe from a biblical perspective. And this is why so many things in God’s word finally make sense that did not, prior to understanding what the covenants or the council are all about.

Amazingly, Psalm 89 brings both together in perfect harmony. Both are essential to the psalm, which is only half understood if you only appreciate one or the other, and not understood at all if you ignore both. As I said, the lens and focal point through which both rays focus are here in this

will eventually replace the fallen heavenly beings on the council where we will then “judge angels.”

psalm, making it the perfect chapter to figure out how God's heavenly plans and earthly plans work together to reach the final glorious goal of God glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ to the whole universe through the Spirit. If you can get this down, then you have gone farther than most people will ever go in their understanding of the Bible.

PSALM 89 AND ITS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

Psalm 89 is the very last song in Book III of the Psalter. This makes it a capstone, a high-point, a concluding song. Its last verse is nearly identical to the last verse of the previous two book endings, and was added to the original song in order to round out Book III:

- **Last Vs. Book I:** Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen. (Ps 41:13)
- **Last Vs. Book II:** Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! (Ps 72:19)
- **Last Vs. Book III:** Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen. (Ps 89:52)

Last time we looked at Psalms 87-88 together. We saw there that the two songs had in common the theme of **water**. This theme continues to bubble up to the surface in Psalm 89 (though we did not have the time to look at this with that study). “**You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. You crushed Rahab (the Sea Dragon) like a carcass...**” (Ps 89:8-10a). “**I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers**” (25). This links the three songs together.

Just as this theme continues, so also Psalm 89 furthers the basic teaching of the previous two songs. Psalm 87 **foretold Glorious Things** (87:3), life-giving “springs” of gospel (87:7) concerning how Gentiles, given over to the darkness and the worship of Satan, would one day be born again such that they can say Zion is the place of their birth. Psalm 88 described **the descent of the Messiah to the depths of watery Sheol**, as he would suffer the wrath of God and being forsaken by all his friends. It also foreshadowed the need for God to resurrect him from the dead. Psalm 89 now brings this to a climax (hence the end of Book III) by telling us all about how God is going to accomplish all this.

The simplest outline I found is:

- I. Praise (vv. 1-18)
- II. Promises (vv. 19-37)
- III. Problems (vv. 38-51)⁶ (with a doxology as the last verse)

Keeping this in mind can be helpful as we go along, though our focus will take us to them via the **council** and the **covenants**. As we do this, it will be important to keep the superscription in mind as well. Like the previous song, this is *a Maskil*. A wisdom psalm, meant to impart understanding through the fear of the Lord. It is composed by one **Ethan the Ezrahite**, a man of such renown in the ancient world that Solomon was said to be even wiser than him (**1Kg 4:30**).

PSALM 89 IN THE HEAVENS

I'm going to take us through Psalm 89 via our two rays of light. We'll begin with the divine council. Keep in mind that much of the initial context here comes in the form of **praising God** (see outline above) for his attributes: **"I will**

⁶ See the two longer outlines at the end of the sermon.

sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations” (Ps 89:1). The words “steadfast love” (*hesed*) and “faithfulness” (*emunah*) each appear seven times, usually together.⁷ These will become very important when we come to seeing the focal point of God’s word via this song.

God’s steadfast love and faithfulness both appear in vs. 2 as well. But now the context is specifically the heavens. “...in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness” (2).⁸ This is a point not brought out often enough in commentaries or sermons, but it is vital, not the least reason being that the song begins here. Somehow, God is going to prove to *the heavens* that he is full of steadfast love and faithfulness to man. The heavenly realm will bear witness to this. Some will cheer (the elect angels). Some will growl (the wicked angels). But all will bow down before this great God.

The psalmist calls for all the heavens to praise God (because of his covenant, vv. 3-4, which we will not look at yet). Vv. 5-8 put us right there in the heavenly divine council itself:

⁷ *Hesed*: 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49. *Emunah*: 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, 49.

⁸ “Establish” is covenantal language.

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

⁷ a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?

⁸ O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you?

Four times we are told that this “assembly” or “council” is made up of “holy ones,” “heavenly beings” (literally, sons of God [*beney Elim*]), “holy ones,” and the “host of heaven.” In other words, this is divine council we last saw in Psalm 82. Calvin was on the right track when he said here, “The appellation the *sons of the gods* is here given to angels ... This is a point worthy of our careful attention; for, although God everywhere declares in his word that the angels are only his servants, and always ready to execute his commands, yet the world, not contented with having only one God, forges for itself a countless number of deities” (Calvin, Psalm 89:6).

The reasons for such praise among the heavenly beings is because God does “wonders” even they cannot fathom. But what wonders? He is “faithful,” when they are not. He is “incomparable,” especially because he is uncreated. No one is “like” him. As such, he is to be “feared,” even in the heavens. For he is “awesome” above all the heavenly beings around him. He is “mighty,” and can do all things.

Therefore, what Calvin says next should be heeded by all. “God is very terrible in the assembly ... In these words is censured that devilish superstition, to which almost all men are prone, of exalting angels beyond measure, and without reason. But if the angels themselves tremble, and are afraid before the Divine Majesty, why should they not be regarded as subjects, and kept in their own ranks, that God alone may have the sovereignty entirely to himself?”

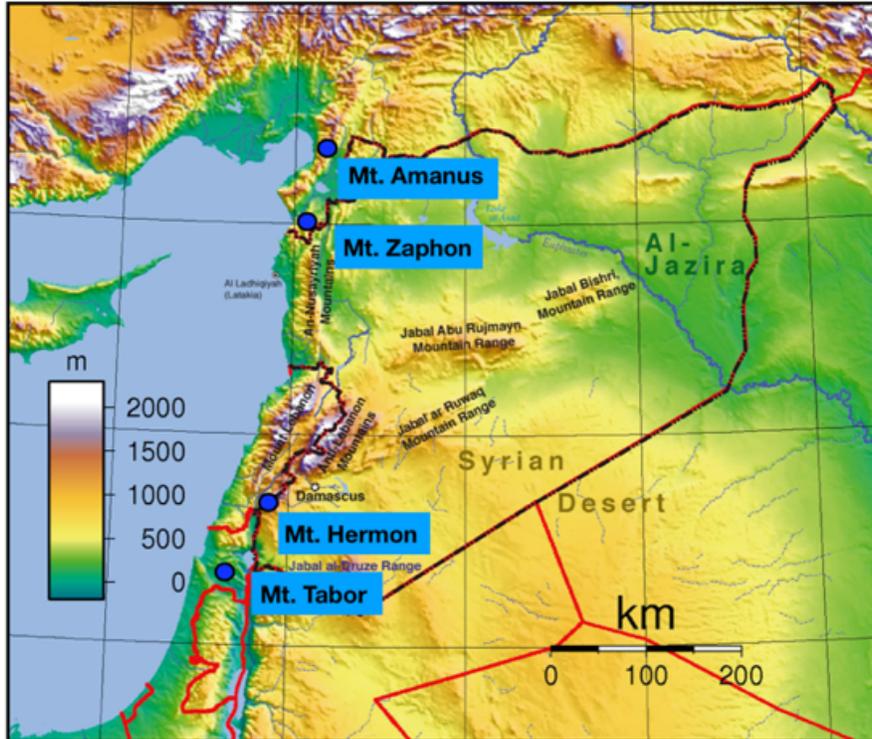
There are hints of the supernatural following in the next two verses, our water verses (9-10, see above), which recall the Exodus and the death of Pharaoh in the Sea. As with Psalm 87:4, Rahab—the sea dragon, who is called in other places likened to Leviathan or Satan, is an image of supernatural evil, an evil that stood behind Pharaoh whom the LORD mocked and proved to the whole world was

powerless against Him. Satan is therefore one who must worship and fear the LORD.

Verse 11 continues this heavenly theme by proclaiming that, “The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.” If everything, literally everything is God’s, then of course *all creatures here below* and *above ye heavenly host* must praise him.

The supernatural divine council connections finish, at least for a while, in the difficult to translate **vs. 12**.⁹ It is not difficult to translate because the words are obscure, but because they are doing double-duty, and in translating, you have to pick one idea or the other. “The north and the south, you have created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your Name.” This translation helps you to see that God has made everything there is—north to south, and taking **Tabor** and **Hermon** geographically, one could possibly say east to west or big and small.

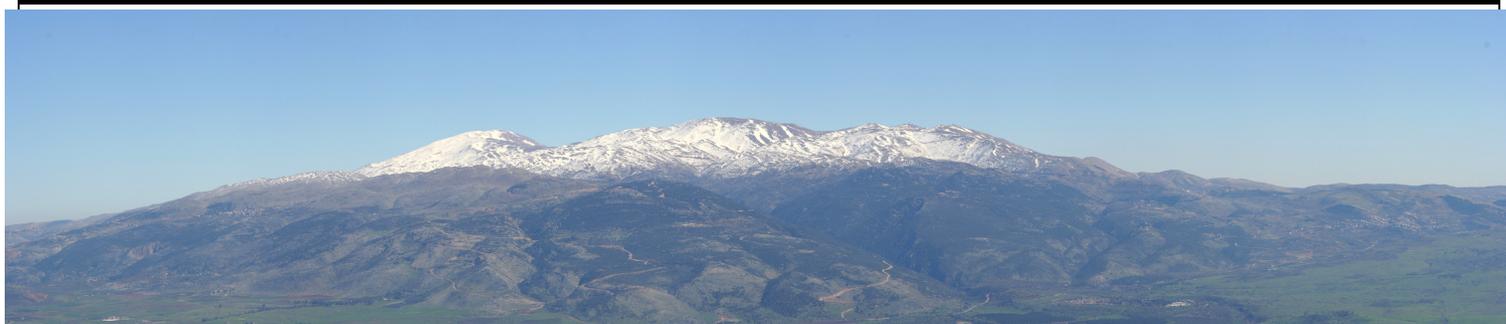
⁹ For a mythological-supernatural interpretation see **Pieter M. Venter**, “The Translation of Psalm 89:13[12] and Its Implications,” *HTS* 61:1&2 (2005): 531-44.
<https://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/viewFile/422/322>



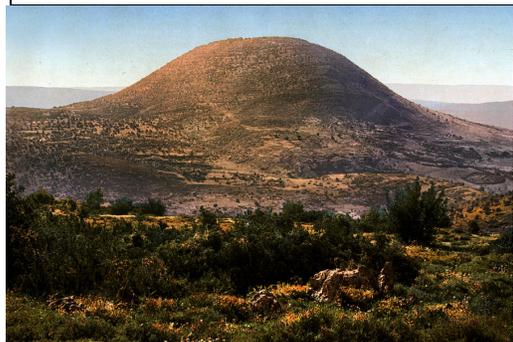
However, both of those mountains were important to **false worship** in the ancient world. The Canaanites used them prior to Israel, and Israel fell into their snare later on (see **Psalm 68**). This leads the point that “north” and “south” are also words for **two other mountains**, both with otherworldly reputations. “North” is the word *zaphon*, and refers to the cosmic mountain of Baal. “South” is the word *yamin* and refers to **Mt. Amanus**, another significant mountain of false worship. One is in Syria; the other in

Turkey.¹⁰ The cumulative effect is that even the most sacred precincts of the gods of the ancient world were created by Yahweh; they know it and praise his Name (“**the rocks cry out**”).

Four Mountain-Directions of Psalm 89:12



Mt. Hermon, Israel



Mt. Tabor
(Israel)



Mt. Zaphon
(Syria)



Mt. Amanus
(Nur Mountains, Turkey)

As long as we are here, it is also worth noting that several words used to depict **the Second Person** of the Trinity in the OT appear in the next few verses, and in this way we can feel in the divine council the presence of the Angel of the

¹⁰ The book **Shigeo Yamada**, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (859-824 VC) Relating to His Campaigns to the West* (Boston, Brill: 2000), relates several times how the ancient king went to this mountain.

LORD: “arm,” “hand,” “right hand” (Ps 89:13; Mk 16:19), “face” (15; 2Co 4:6), “name” (16; Php 2:10), “glory” (17; Jn 1:14), “shield,” “king” (18; Rev 19:16), and “firstborn” (27; Col 1:18). Notice how vs. 13 starts it off. “O LORD God of Hosts (8) ... You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand.” In other words, I would argue that we have here veiled references to the Father and Son. This becomes important when we come to the last place we find the divine council in Psalm 89.

The important verse is 37. “Like the moon it [the covenant] shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies. Selah.” The Selah is important here, because this verse is truly astonishing. If you get this, the entire psalm comes alive in even greater ways than you could ever have imagined.

The verse speaks about a “witness” “in the skies.” More literally, it is a witness “in the clouds” (the same word is found in vs. 6). Read it this way in its context earlier. “Who in the clouds can be compared to Yahweh?” E. Theodore Mullen writes, “Both occurrences presuppose some figure who stands before Yahweh in his court, one of the *qedoshim*

beney-elim [holy sons of God].”¹¹ For the Canaanites, Baal comes in/on the clouds. For the Greeks, it is Zeus. For the Scandinavians: Odin. We have already seen that there is no created being that is comparable to Yahweh. That’s the very reason they are praising him.

In the OT, there is a heavenly figure that comes this way. At the Exodus, which we have already seen is in view in this very song, it is Yahweh himself who is “in a pillar of cloud” (Ex 13:21; 16:10; etc.). He is clearly identified as The Angel of the LORD (14:18). In Revelation, “I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud” (Rev 10:1). This clearly refers to Christ.

But the verse as it reads in the ESV seems to suppose that the covenant itself is the witness in the clouds. The covenant is “a faithful witness in the skies.” But the verse can be translated more literally, “... a witness in the clouds will be faithful.”¹² *It is not a thing but a Who* that is in the clouds. In other words, God is going to make a covenant in heaven before all the heavenly beings, and one Being in the Clouds

¹¹ Mullen, “The Divine Witness,” 215-16.

¹² See note #1.

will be its faithful witness. As Heiser puts it, this is God's co-signer of the covenant.¹³

Who is that co-signer? It is none other than Revelation's, "Faithful Witness," language that comes straight out of this verse. The book starts off, "...from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev 1:5). And again, to the church at Laodicea (and listen to the themes we've already seen in Psalm 89), "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the [Chief]¹⁴ of God's creation" (Rev 3:14).

What this last divine council verse is teaching, then, is that God is going to swear an oath before the heavenly beings (the sun and the moon represent heavenly beings). This is why the council is brought up in the early part of the song. But a Faithful Witness who can be no less than Yahweh himself is going to be witness to the fact that what

¹³ Michael Heiser, "Does God Need a Co-Signer?" *LogosTalk* (Oct 24, 2017), <https://blog.logos.com/2017/10/god-need-co-signer/>

¹⁴ The ESV has, "The beginning of God's creation," giving on a possible impression that he is a created being. This is not what beginning means here. The word can also be translated as "chief" (YLT) or "ruler" (CJB). Those can be more helpful in keeping us from making this mistake, which is by no means necessitated by the word "beginning."

is sworn will come to pass. He is its Guarantor. We must therefore turn now to the second ray of light: the divine covenant(s).

PSALM 89 ON THE EARTH

Much more familiar to most people is the idea of **covenants**. The “**covenant with my chosen one**” is the content that the psalm begins with (**vs. 3**). This, it says, will establish God’s steadfast love and faithfulness in the heavens (**2**). God wants to show even the angels just what kind of loving, faithful God he is.

Vv. 3-4 read, “**You have said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ‘I will establish your offspring (seed) forever, and build your throne for all generations.’” Selah.**” We pause here because this verse recalls in vivid detail the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7.

2Sa 7:5, 12-13	Ps 89:3-4
Go and tell my servant David ...	You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant :
When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.	'I will establish your offspring forever,
He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. "	and build your throne for all generations. " Selah

The second half of the text talks about David specifically. He is the great king of Israel in the OT. The first half seemingly calls him “**my chosen one**,” and certainly **David was chosen by God**. But this is also cryptic language used of **David’s Greater Son**.

After the Fall, this covenant with David becomes the sixth and final great covenant of the OT: Adam post-fall, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Levi, David. Moses and Levi are what I call the **Prophetic** and **Priestly** covenants. The Davidic covenant finishes out the three great offices. It is the **Kingly** covenant. One Person in the future will fulfill them all as God’s Prophet, Priest, and King.

Davidic language resumes in **vs. 20**. “**I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him.**” Yet, this is the context for the hand and arm of God in **vs.**

21 which “shall be established with him” and “shall strengthen him.” Here, Ethan is exploring the implications that this covenant is with David’s seed, though I’m not certain Ethan the Wise knew the full extent of his inspired words.

The promises of the covenant now come into full view in several verses:

²² The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him.

²³ I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

²⁴ My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

²⁵ I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

²⁶ He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

²⁷ And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

²⁸ My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

²⁹ I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.

³⁰ If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,

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,

³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.

³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

³⁵ Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.

³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

Here we see the promises of the covenant which include military victories (22-23), exaltation (24), expansion of the kingdom (25), adoption as a son of God (26), salvation, (26), the role of cherished firstborn son (27), a never-ending lineage of descendants to serve as king (29, 36), and of course, God's faithful, steadfast love (24, 28). All of this has as its ultimate purpose God finding a way to display his faithful, steadfast love! Just as we saw last week, behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us.

Yet we also see stipulations. Those kings must not forsake God's law, rules, statues, and commandments (30-31), or else they will be punished (32). This is not technically

part of the Davidic covenant, but rather the kings are themselves still under the Mosaic covenant and must keep the Law if they want to remain in the land.

Nevertheless, and this is the point of the Davidic covenant, God will not remove his steadfast love or faithfulness. He will not be false, even when they are (33). He will not violate his covenant (34). For it is a gracious covenant, a “Royal Grant,” full of unconditional promises that God has sworn and he cannot lie (35). Moses’ is a conditional covenant (“do this and live”). David’s covenant is not. It is all of God. And what a lesson this teaches us about God’s grace. Grace is what God does, not us. It is what we do not deserve. Yet, he gives it anyway, because of his love.

If God did not enter into a covenant like this, the entire line of David—*beginning with David*—would have been destroyed before it ever got started. For God is holy, as we have seen, and he will not tolerate sin. Instead, he would annihilate it. This is precisely why covenant is such an important concept to grasp, especially when the covenant promises come unconditionally, simply because God swears them.

Curiously, there is something in verse 35 that brings us back to the council idea, for the covenant and the council are intertwined. When it says, “I have sworn by my holiness” (35), it is possible to read this, “I have sworn by my Holy One.”¹⁵ That is, the Father swears through the Witness in the Cloud (an image of the Holy Spirit), so that there are “two or three” witnesses to establish his covenant!

PSALM 89 AND THE GREAT PROBLEM

But the thing is, the Psalm does not finish on this high note. Rather, it descends into a minor key that shows confusion, dissonance, and sadness. At least for Ethan—and the editor, who uses this as a launching pad to introduce the next set of songs in Book IV. For, just as soon as he thinks about the covenant being made firm in the heavens, he looks around here on earth and sees that in fact, everything seems the opposite. Beginning in vs. 38 and going through vs. 51, we have an extended lament and series of questions wondering how these glorious things can be true when the reality is “You have cast off and rejected; you are full of

¹⁵ Heiser, “Witness,” 8 (but unnumbered).

wrath against your anointed” (38). This now links us to the extremely depressing and sad Psalm 88.

There are over a dozen “you have” in vv. 38-45. They are not happy. “You have” cast off in wrath your Messiah, renounced the covenant and defiled his crown (39). God has breached his walls and destroyed his strongholds (40). He has exalted the right hand of his foes and made his enemies rejoice (42). He has turned and made him fall by the sword and not stand in battle (43). He has destroyed his splendor and cast down his throne (44). He has cut short his days and covered him with shame (45). *Selah*. The psalmist is clearly thinking about events in his own day, perhaps some great battle or even exile.

But the remarkable thing is that the song ends with puzzling questions about how God’s covenant can be unconditional with such amazing promises, and yet all seems exactly the opposite. “How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever ... will your wrath burn like fire?” (46). Men are a vapor (47). Who can live and not see death or deliver his soul from Sheol (48). *Selah*. This is the language of Ecclesiastes and we pause, because we do not often think of life like this, though it is.

But the descent goes even lower. “Where is your steadfast love of old and your faithfulness you swore to David” (49)? Remember how your servants are mocked and bear insults of all the nations (50). They mock you, LORD, and they mock the footsteps of your Messiah (Anointed; 51). And the song ends. A conclusion with no answer, save that of the last verse, which concludes the book in a praise.

This is why you need the lens. You cannot understand Scripture properly, any doctrine, no matter how important it is, unless you have the lens that refracts all the light to a single focal point. That lens is Christ, the co-signer of the council and guarantor of the covenant. The focal point is his coming to earth as a human. And he is right here, even in Ethan’s lament.

No, God will not hide his face forever! Why? Because he would hide his face for that brief moment from Messiah on the cross, so that he might look upon you with favor. Psalm 89 takes the death theme of Psalm 88 and the new birth theme of Psalm 87 and shows through mysterious prophecy that the very things little messiah (David or one of his kingly sons) was going through on earth would have to be fulfilled by Big Messiah who came from heaven.

The reason the Guarantor of the covenant and the divine council part is so important is because the Guarantor is the one who himself swore to become the very Messiah who would suffer in this way, causing all who looked upon him to shake their head in disbelief, but in doing so made a way whereby the covenant promises would be sure and certain forever. The promise was made in heaven itself before the heavenly beings. Do you think the Angels understood this as they watched the Son of God become a witness to the covenant?

This has ramifications for those who fell from heaven, for in dying on the cross, Christ destroyed their legal power of the souls of men. As God, he made the covenant promises certain. As man, he brought them to pass. And now, Book Three ends having given us one long cycle of lamentation and rejoicing, over and over again, ending in lamentation, except for the inspired words that were certainly not part of the original song.

“Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen” (Ps 89:52). You can praise God even in lamentation in the midst of great evil, because God through Christ entered into that very same evil and overcame it. In giving us these words,

our hearts are not left in despair, but in thankfulness, knowing God in Christ has found a way to show you his steadfast love and faithfulness through putting the Son to death and raising him to life, that all who trust in him should never be put to shame.

Longer Outlines of Psalm 89

I. Covenantal Praise (vv. 1-18)

A. Preparatory Words from the Psalmist (vv. 1-4)

B. Praise-filled Words for the LORD (vv. 5-18)

II. Covenantal Promises (vv. 19-37)

A. Promises to David (vv. 19-29)

B. Promises to David's Descendants (vv. 30-37)

III. Covenantal Problems (vv. 38-51)

A. Complaints (vv. 38-45)

B. Questions (vv. 46-51)

IV. Doxology to Book 3 (v. 52)

William D. Barrick, Th.D., "Psalm 89—An Everlasting Covenant with David," *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies* (2007), https://drbarrick.org/files/studynotes/Psalms/Ps_089.pdf.

89:1 Meditation with Insight

89:2-5 :Introduction: **Possession of Reality**

89:6-19 God's Characteristics: **Basis for Praise**

89:20-38 God's Covenant: **Basis for Confidence**

89:39-46 God's Chastisement: **Basis for Petition**

89:47-52 Conclusion: **Prayer for Restoration**

89:53 Benediction of Book III

D. Wayne Knife, "Psalm 89 and the Ancient Near East," Doctor of Theology Dissertation (Grace Theological Seminary, 1973), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.620.1619&rep=rep1&type=pdf>