The Hopelessness of Death

Psalm 88:1-18
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Commentary

by

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Text:

Psalm 88:1-18,

1. O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you.
2. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.
3. For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave.
4. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength.
5. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care.
6. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.
7. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah
8. You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape;
9. my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.
10. Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah
11. Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?
12. Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?
13. But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.
14. Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?
15. From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair.
16. Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me.
17. All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me.
18. You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend. NIV

Introduction:

I. Mahalath leonnoth in the title means literally “sickness to afflict”.

A. It may reflect the subject matter or a cultic use of the psalm.

II. For the word maskil, see Psalm 78.

III. “Heman the Ezrahite” presents a problem.

A. Heman, a Levite temple musician, is mentioned in First Chron. 15:17,19.

1. 1 Chronicles 15:17, 19, So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel; from his brothers, Asaph son of Berekiah; and from their brothers the Merarites, Ethan son of Kushaiah; The musicians Heman, Asaph and Ethan were to sound the bronze cymbals; NIV

B. There is a wise man named Heman, connected with Ethan the Ezrahite (1 Kings 4:31; cf. Psalm 89, title).

1. 1 Kings 4:31, He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Cal-
The fame spread to all the surrounding nations. NIV


IV. For the rest of the title, see Psalm 76.

V. Like several other lamentations, this psalmist cries out of the depths of despair (cf. Psalm 7:1-2; 22:1-2; 31:1-2; 61:1-2; 130:1-2); but unlike the others, he sees no hope for better days.

A. Psalm 7:1, 2, O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me. NIV

B. Psalm 22:1, 2, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. NIV

C. Psalm 31:1, 2, In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. NIV

D. Psalm 61:1, 2, Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. NIV

E. Psalm 130:1, 2, Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. NIV
VI. His faith prompts him to continue praying, though he has no hope for deliverance.

Commentary:

The Continual Pleading

Psalm 88:1, 2, O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. NIV

Psalm 88:1, O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. NIV

I. “Who saves me” emends the noun phrase, “my salvation”, to a verbal statement.

II. “Day” and night” expresses his continual calling upon God (88:9; 22:2).

Psalm 88:9, my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.

Psalm 22:2, O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. NIV

Psalm 88:2, May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. NIV

I. This verse implies that he receives no favorable answer from God (cf. Psalm 88:5,14).

A. Psalm 88:5, 14, I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care. Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? NIV

The Gloomy Prospects

Psalm 88:3-12, For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you. Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? NIV

Psalm 88:3-5, For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. NIV

I. “Grave” (88:3b) renders “sheol”. “Sheol” (88:3b) and “pit”(88:4b) are synonymous, as are “the dead” and “the grave” (88:5). “Pit”, b)r, usually refers to the grave, but, in conjunction with “sheol” and “death”, can refer to the state of the dead.

Psalm 88:3-5, For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the
slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. NIV

II. He feels that he is forsaken, forgotten, and disfavored by God (Psalm 88:4-5).

A. Psalm 88:4, 5, I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. NIV

Psalm 88:6, You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. NIV

I. Sheol, or the “pit”, is a dark, gloomy place (cf. Psalm 6:5; 30:9; 115:17; Job 10:20-22; 17:13-16).

A. Psalm 6:5, No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? NIV

B. Psalm 30:9, "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? NIV

C. Psalm 115:17, It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to silence; NIV

D. Job 10:20-22, Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness." NIV

E. Job 17:13-16, If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, if I say to corruption, 'You
are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother' or 'My sis-
ter,' where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me?
Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend to-
gether into the dust?"  NIV

Psalm 88:7, Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have over-
whelmed me with all your waves. Selah

I. God's “wrath”, the cause of the psalmist's suffering, is “heavy” and
can be figuratively described as a flood (cf. Psalm 42:7).

A. Psalm 42:7, Deep calls to deep in the roar of your water-
falls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.  NIV

B. The psalmist does not acknowledge any sin that might have
justified the wrath of God.

Psalm 88:8a,b, You have taken from me my closest friends and
have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot es-
cape; NIV

I. Because his companions consider his sin the cause of his calamity,

A. Psalm 31:11, 12, Because of all my enemies, I am the ut-
ter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends—
those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten
by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken
pottery.  NIV

B. Psalm 38:11, My friends and companions avoid me be-
cause of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.  NIV

C. Job 19:13-19, "He has alienated my brothers from me;
my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My
kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien. I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me. All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me. NIV

D. Job 30:10, They detest me and keep their distance; they do not hesitate to spit in my face. NIV

Psalm 88:8c-9a, I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief. NIV

I. Worst of all, there is no escape from his sorrowful plight.

Psalm 88:9b,c, I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you. NIV

I. For the significance of stretching out the hands in prayer, see the excursus on prayer at the end of Psalm 86.

Psalm 88:10-12, Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? NIV

I. Each of these rhetorical questions expects a negative answer.

A. Raphaim, literally, “shades”, 88:10b; refers to “the weak, helpless ones”, and refers to the powerless state of the dead.
1. Psalm 88:10, Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah NIV

B. “The land of oblivion” is literally “the place of forgetfulness”.

1. The psalmist feels that he has been forgotten like those in the grave.


1. Proverbs 15:11, Death and Destruction lie open before the LORD—how much more the hearts of men! NIV

2. Proverbs 27:20, Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man. NIV

3. Job 26:6, Death is naked before God; Destruction lies uncovered. NIV

4. Job 28:22, Destruction and Death say, ‘Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.’ NIV

A Lifetime of Affliction

Psalm 88:13-18, But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely
engulfed me. You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend. NIV

Psalm 88:13, But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. NIV

I. “In the morning” suggests the urgency of his prayers (cf. Psalm 119:147,148; 143:8) and their regularity (cf. Psalm 5:3; 59:16).

A. Psalm 119:147, 148, I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises. NIV

B. Psalm 143:8, Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. NIV

C. Psalm 5:3, In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation. NIV

D. Psalm 59:16, But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. NIV

Psalm 88:14, Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? NIV

I. The idea of being “rejected” is frequent in psalms of lament (cf. Psalm 43:2; 44:9,23; 71:9; 74:1; 89:38; 108:11).

A. Psalm 43:2, You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? NIV
B. Psalm 44:9, 23, But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. NIV

C. Psalm 71:9, Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. NIV

D. Psalm 74:1, Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? NIV

E. Psalm 89:38, But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one. NIV

F. Psalm 108:11, Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies? NIV

II. Hiding the face can mean not to remember one's sins (cf. Psalm 51:9), or not to answer one's prayers (cf. Psalm 34:15-16), or not to bless man (cf. Psalm 30:7).

A. Psalm 51:9, Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. NIV

B. Psalm 34:15, 16, The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. NIV

C. Psalm 30:7, O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. NIV
Psalm 88:15, From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. NIV

I. “I…am in despair” renders Aapunah, a word only used this one time in the Old Testament, and its meaning is uncertain (cf. “distracted”, KJV; “overcome”, NASB; “cower”, NEB).

Psalm 88:16-18, Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me. You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend. NIV

I. Compare Psalm 88:7-8.

EXCURSUS

The Hebrew Concept of Immortality

Christ is declared the one who “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. NIV). This does not mean that nothing was known about the afterlife before this time, but Christ gave further information and verified some truths that had already been learned and accepted by some in his day.

Little information is given in the Old Testament concerning the afterlife. Only one passage (Daniel 12:2, Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. NIV) clearly reveals bodily resurrection, and that came during the exilic period (587-536 B.C.). Several passages on resurrection are figurative of national restoration of Israel from exile (cf. Isaiah 25:6-9, On this mountain the LORD Al-
mighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."; Isaiah 26:12-19, LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. O LORD, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honor. They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them. You have enlarged the nation, O LORD; you have enlarged the nation. You have gained glory for yourself; you have extended all the borders of the land. LORD, they came to you in their distress; when you disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer. As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O LORD. We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world. But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.; Isaiah 27:12-13, In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.; Ezekiel 37:1-23, The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.
He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'" The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, 'Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.' Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, 'Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.' Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand. "When your countrymen ask you, 'Won't you tell us what you mean by this?' say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim's hand—
and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah's stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.' Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. NIV). It is not likely that Job 19:23-27 is a resurrection passage. Textual ambiguities render uncertain the meaning of Psalm 88:25-26. Furthermore, the passage ends on the same somber note as preceding and succeeding references to Job's problems (cf. Job 14:7-17, "At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant. But man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more. As water disappears from the sea or a riverbed becomes parched and dry, so man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep. "If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin.; Job 21:23-26, One man dies in full vigor, completely secure and at ease, his body well nourished, his bones rich with marrow. Another man dies in bitterness of soul, never having enjoyed anything good. Side by side they lie in the dust, and worms
cover them both.; Job 24:1,22-25, "Why does the Almighty not set
times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain
for such days? But God drags away the mighty by his power;
though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He
may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their
ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone;
they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut
off like heads of grain. "If this is not so, who can prove me false
and reduce my words to nothing?" NIV).

A few references indicate that some may have had deeper insights
than others. One passage says that God is present even in Sheol
(Psalm 139:8, If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make
my bed in the depths, you are there. ), and two references (Psalm
49:15, But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely
take me to himself. Selah; Psalm 73:24, You guide me with your
counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. NIV) may pos-
sibly refer to resurrection, although both passages are capable of other
interpretations. In Psalm 49, the psalmist is certain that the grave will
be the eternal home of the wicked (Psalm 88:10-12, Do you show
your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and
praise you? Selah Is your love declared in the grave, your faith-
fulness in Destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of
darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? NIV).
Psalm 88:15 probably refers to preservation from an untimely death
(and so, Psalm 16:10; because you will not abandon me to the
grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.; Psalm 71:20,
Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will
restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again
bring me up. NIV). The word “glory” in Psalm 73:24 could be trans-
lated “honor”, and does not necessarily refer to a time following
death. The use made of Psalm 16 in Acts 2:25-31 does not answer the
question concerning a general resurrection of the dead in Hebrew
thought. Nor did miraculous resurrections reveal insights concerning a
general resurrection (1 Samuel 28:8-19; So Saul disguised himself,
putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this." Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground." "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do." Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy? The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines."; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.
Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."; 2 Kings 4:32-37, When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.; 2 Kings13:20-21, Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet. NIV). Sheol, to the Hebrew mind, was generally a place where God could not be praised (Psalm 6:5; No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?; Psalm 88:10-11, Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction NIV), where God was not remembered (Psalm 6:5, No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? NIV), and where God did not remember the dead (Psalm 88:10a,12b, Do you show your wonders to the dead?
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? NIV). There is no clear distinction anywhere between the fate of the righteous and of the wicked in Sheol. In fact, the book of Job presupposes that there is no such distinction. The eternal fire of Isaiah 66:24 (cf. Mark 9:48, where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' NIV) was apparently not interpreted to mean eternal punishment for the wicked until intertestamental days.

Intertestamental Jewish literature developed a concept of bodily resurrection and conscious peace or punishment in Hades, the place of the dead in Greek thought (cf. 2 Maccabees 7:9-38; You wretch, you release us from this present life, but the king of the world will raise us up, because we have died for his laws, to an everlasting renewal of life.” After him, the third was mocked, and when he was told to put out his tongue, he did so quickly, and courageously stretched out his hands, and said nobly, “I got these from heaven, and for the sake of its laws I disregard them, and from it I hope to receive them back again,” so that the king himself and those who were with him were amazed at the young man’s spirit, because he made light of his sufferings. And when he had departed, they tortured and maltreated the fourth in the same way. And when he was near his end, he spoke thus: “It is better to die by men’s hands and look for the hopes God gives of being raised again by him; for you will have no resurrection to life.” Next they brought up the fifth and maltreated him. But he looked at him and said, “Since you have authority among men, though you are mortal, you do what you please; but do not suppose that our race has been abandoned by God. But follow your course and see how his mighty power will torment you and your posterity.” After him they brought the sixth. And when he was at the point of death, he said, “Do not be falsely deceived; for we suffer these things because of ourselves, for we sin against our own God, so these amazing things have happened. But you must not suppose that you will go unpunished for having attempted to fight against God.” But their mother was surpassingly wonderful, and deserves a blessed mem-
ory, for though she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage, because of her hope in the Lord. And she encouraged each of them in the language of their forefathers, for she was filled with a noble spirit and stirred her woman’s heart with manly courage, and said to them, “I do not know how you appeared in my womb, for it was not I that gave you life and breath, and it was not I that brought into harmony the elements of each. Therefore the creator of the world, who formed the human race and arranged the generation of all things, will give you back again a life and breath in his mercy, as you now are regardless of yourselves for the sake of his laws.” Now Antiochus, thinking that he was being treated with contempt, and suspecting her reproachful cry, as the youngest still survived, not only appealed to him in words but also promised him with oaths that he would make him rich and envied, if he would give up the ways of his forefathers, and would make him his Friend and intrust him with office. But when the young man paid no attention to him, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the boy to save himself. After he had labored with her a long time, she undertook to persuade her son. She bent over him, and mocking the cruel tyrant, she spoke thus, in the language of her forefathers: “My son, have pity on me, who carried you nine months in the womb, and nursed you for three years, and brought you up and brought you to your present age, and supported you. I beseech you, my child, to look up at the heaven and the earth, and see all that is in them, and perceive that God did not make them out of the things that existed, and in that way the human race came into existence. Do not be afraid of this butcher, but show yourself worthy of your brothers, and accept death, so that by God’s mercy I may get you back again with your brothers.” Before she could finish, the young man said, “What are you waiting for? I will not obey the command of the king, but I obey the command of the Law that was given to our forefathers through Moses. But you, who have designed every kind of evil against the Hebrews will not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering
because of our own sins. And though our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will be reconciled with his own slaves again. But you, impious man, the vilest of all men, do not foolishly buoy yourself up in your insolence with uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven; for you have not yet escaped the judgment of the Almighty all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk everlasting life, under the agreement of God. But you, by the judgment of God, will receive the rightful penalty of your arrogance. I like my brothers, give up body and soul for the laws of my forefathers, calling upon God speedily to show mercy to our nation, and to led you to confess, in trials and plagues, that he alone is Go; and to stay through me and my brothers the wrath of the Almighty, which has justly fallen on our whole nation.”

2 Maccabees 12:43-45, He also took a collection, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, each man contributing, and sent it to Jerusalem, to provide a sin offering, acting very finely and properly in taking account of the resurrection. For if he had not expected that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead; or if it was through regard for the splendid reward destined for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be set free from their sin.; 1 Enoch 22; 1 Enoch 51; 1 Enoch 54; 1 Enoch 98). The Pharisees accepted belief in a resurrection and in rewards and punishments; but the Sadducees, who did not accept the validity of the oral tradition and intertestamental writings, rejected these concepts (Matthew 22:23, That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.; Acts 23:8, (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) NIV; Josephus, Wars, 2.8.14; Ant., 18.1.4).

The careful student of the Old Testament will not read New Testament ideas back into Old Testament settings, but will attempt to see the de-
development of thought as God continued to reveal His will to Israel and the church (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2, In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. NIV).
Questions

Psalm 88:1-18

(Questions based on NIV text.)

1. Who were Korah and Heman? _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________

2. Define mahaloth leannoth and maskil. _______________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________

3. “O _____________, the ______________ who ______________
   ______________, ______________ and ______________ I
   ______________ ______________ before you. May my ______________
come ______________ you; ______________ your ______________
to my ______________.”

4. “For my ______________ is ______________ of ______________
   and my ______________ ______________ the ______________.”

5. “I am ______________ ______________ among those who go down to the
   ______________; I am like a man ______________ ______________.”

6. “I am ______________ ______________ with the ______________,
   like the ______________ who ______________ in the ______________,
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
   _____________________________
whom you ______________ ________________ ________________,
who are cut off from your ________________.”

7. “You have ______________ ________________ in the ______________ 
_______________, in the ______________ ________________.:”

8. “Your ______________ ________________ ________________ upon ________; you have ______________ ________________ with all your ________________.”

9. “You have ______________ ________________ ________________ ________________ ________________ ________________ and have made ________________ ________________ ________ to them. ______________ ________________ ________________, ________________ ________________; my ________________ ________________ are ________________ ________________; my ________ are ________________ ________________;”

10. “I ______________ to you, O ______________, ______________ 
_______________; I __ ______________ out my ________________ ________________ to you.”

11. “Do you show your ________________ to the ________________?
Do those who are ________________ ________________ ________________ and ________________ ________________ you?”

12. “Is your ________________ ________________ in the ________________,
your ________________ in ________________?”

13. “Are your ________________ ________________ known in the ________________ 
of ________________, ________________ ________________ ________________ in the ________________ ________________?”

14. “But I ______________ to you for ________________, O ________________; 
in the ________________ my ________________ comes ________________ ________________.”
15. “Why, O __________, do you ___________ ___________ and ___________ your ___________ from ___________?”

16. “From my ___________ I have been ___________ and ___________ to ___________; I have ___________ your ___________ and ___________ in ___________.”

17. “Your ___________ has ___________ ___________; your ___________ have ___________ ___________.”

18. “All ___________ ___________ they ___________ ___________ like a ___________; they have ___________ ___________ ___________.”

19. “You have taken my ___________ and ___________ ___________ from ___________; the ___________ is my ___________ ___________.”

20. In what ways is this lamentation like several other laments and in what respect is it unlike others? __________________________________________________________

21. Why would the psalmist continue to pray when he had no hope for deliverance? __________________________________________________________
22. List all synonyms/synonymous expressions used in Psalm 88. 
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

23. Why was God angry with the psalmist? _________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

24. What do the psalmist’s friends believe caused the psalmist’s problems? What were their responses to him and his troubles? Is this the way God’s people should act toward the distressed? _________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

25. What were the psalmist’s plans for overcoming his problems? ___
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

26. What is the meaning of hiding the face in the Psalms? __________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
27. Speak to the idea of rejection in the Psalms. 

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

28. How did the psalmist describe his emotional and spiritual condition in Psalm 88? 

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

29. Who is you in Psalm 88? What had you done to the psalmist? 

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

30. What was the Old Testament concept of the human condition after death? How did this view change during the Intertestamental period? 

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________