



This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Gen 44	2 Sam 17-18	Ps 88	Luke 7
--------	-------------	-------	--------

The Cup of Divination (Genesis 44)

The brothers still have no idea what is happening, but are as cooperative and humble as can be, neither of which seems to help them out much. Joseph frames his brothers with an egregious offense: the theft of the very goblet from which their gracious host had drunk.

When Joseph's servant confronts the brothers for their alleged crime, he is told to ask, "Is not this [the cup] from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination?" (verse 5). Did Joseph really use the cup for prognostication or the interpretation of omens? That would surely not have been approved of by God. About the cup of divination, the *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary* remarks: "Divination by cups, to ascertain the course of futurity, was one of the prevalent superstitions of ancient Egypt, as it is of Eastern countries still. It is not likely that Joseph, a pious believer in the true God, would have addicted himself to this superstitious practice. But he might have availed himself of that popular *notion* to carry out the successful execution of his stratagem for the last decisive trial of his brethren" (note on verse 5). In other words, Joseph may have allowed them to *think* he practiced divination with this cup to instill more fear in them—as it would look to them like they would be charged with the theft of something of great importance in Egypt.

Also notice that Joseph did not order his steward to tell a direct lie—rather, he simply told him to ask a question. The real answer would have been no. But the brothers didn't know this.

2 Samuel 17

Though Absalom follows Ahithophel's advice concerning David's concubines, he and his lieutenants are persuaded by Hushai to reject Ahithophel's plan of attack. The shrewdness of Hushai's counsel is demonstrated in his carefully worded evaluation that Ahithophel's advice is not good "at this time" (2

Samuel 17:7). In other words, Hushai did not reject Ahithophel's counsel outright. Instead, his criticism of merely the timing of the plan showed respect for Ahithophel's wisdom, which may have served to deter suspicion from himself. Of course, verse 14 explains that Hushai's success is really *God's* doing. Remarkably, while God has been using circumstances to actually bring about Absalom's rebellion as punishment on David—in that sense “helping” Absalom—we now see that God is determined to bring Absalom down and ultimately save David.

With his counsel rejected, Ahithophel hangs himself (verse 23). “He apparently realized that Absalom's cause was doomed, and that when David returned he would be put to death as a disloyal subject” (*Nelson*, note on verse 23).

“O Absalom My Son, My Son!” (2 Samuel 18:1-19:8)

Now at the city of Mahanaim (17:27), David reviews his troops to assess the situation he and his followers face. Though only a small contingent originally left Jerusalem with him, we see here in the use of the term “thousands” (18:1, 4) that many have soon rallied to his cause, to the point where he is able to divide his army into three companies (verse 2). Initially he is determined to lead this fighting force himself. But this is no ordinary national war. Instead, it is a conflict over David's kingship—in which the death of David would spell the end of the war. So his men convince him to remove himself from fighting so as not to jeopardize their cause.

David gives orders that his son Absalom not be harmed. Yet, in doing so, David is again showing partiality to his son rather than dealing with him as the situation demands. Absalom has raised his hand to destroy God's anointed king. When someone else claimed to have done this in regard to Saul, David ordered his execution (2 Samuel 1:14-15). Furthermore, the king in this case is Absalom's father. And the penalty the Law of Moses prescribes for striking or even cursing one's parents—and surely raising an armed rebellion to *kill* one's father—is death (Exodus 21:15, 17).

It is interesting to see Absalom's forces referred to as “Israel” and the “people of Israel” (2 Samuel 18:6-7). The appearance is one of a popular uprising—wherein this “army of the people” proves no match against David's experienced troops. The thick woods, rather than concealing and aiding their escape, “devoured more people that day than the sword devoured” (verse 8). Perhaps many died from forest-related injuries, exhaustion, entanglement, exposure, wild animals, etc. The verse could also mean that the forest hindered those fleeing from the field of battle so David's men could more easily catch them. Whatever the case, the observation concerning the part nature played in the outcome is significant—for nature falls within the providence of God.

Indeed, Absalom himself is trapped by a tree (verse 9). We are told that it is his head that becomes caught, but this must surely be due to his thick, long hair. We earlier read in 2 Samuel 14:25-26 of Absalom's good looks and thick hair. Because of these features and the praise he received for them,

Absalom gave into vanity—as is clear from the fact that he liked to flaunt his hair by letting it grow long, cutting it only once a year, and then broadcasting the impressive weight of the shorn hair (about five pounds). His addiction to admiration and adulation ultimately contributed to his plot to usurp the throne of Israel. It is thus interesting poetic justice that his hair plays a key part in his ultimate demise.

While Absalom hangs in the tree, Joab kills him—apparently convinced he is doing the right thing. However, it should be pointed out that Joab has violated the king’s direct command—which he has no right to do.

Hearing news of the victory of his own forces, David’s immediate concern is, nevertheless, for Absalom. On learning of his death, David slumps into grief and mourning. The fact that he is inconsolable spreads through the troops. Joab marches in to David and tells him that such behavior is insulting to all his soldiers (19:5-6). Indeed, the victorious fighting men do not come back to Mahanaim with fanfare or a “ticker-tape parade.” Rather, they sneak back into the city trying to escape notice. This is sadly pathetic, and Joab is right to point it out to David.

The king responds by taking his seat in the gate of the city—the place of civil government where judgment is typically rendered. The statement that “all the people came before the king” (verse 8) implies that David *is* following Joab’s advice by expressing appreciation to them for their loyalty and help during the recent fighting.

Despondent Prayer; The Davidic Covenant Renounced? (Psalms 88-89)

There is some question as to the authorship of **Psalms 88** and 89. The superscription of Psalm 88 describes it as a song of the sons of Korah (the last of 11 Korahite psalms in the Psalter) as well as a *maskil*—an instructive psalm or “contemplation” (NKJV)—of Heman the Ezrahite. Psalm 89 is labeled as a *maskil* of Ethan the Ezrahite. Many take these names to refer to David’s Levitical choir leaders Heman and Ethan (the latter apparently also known as Jeduthun). Indeed, Heman the singer, grandson of Samuel and choir leader of the Levitical clan of Kohath, was a descendant of Korah (see 1 Chronicles 6:33-38). Yet note 1 Kings 4:31, which says that Solomon was wiser than “Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda.” These men were evidently descendants not of Levi but of Judah’s son Zerah: “The sons of Zerah were Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara” (1 Chronicles 2:6). The distinction Ethan the Ezrahite here appears to denote Ethan the Zarhite or Zerahite (recall that Hebrew was originally written with no vowels). How do we make sense of this?

Some think traditions have become confused and that the superscriptions of Psalms 88 and 89 are in error—that the designation “Ezrahite” was wrongly added to the Heman and Ethan in these psalm titles. But that is not necessarily so. First of all, it is entirely possible that the Heman and Ethan here

are not David's Levitical music leaders at all but instead the illustrious descendants of Zerah. If so, it could be, in the case of Psalm 88, that the sons of Korah took the Zerahite Heman's written poem and set it to music—turning it into a song (making it “a psalm of the sons of Korah”). On the other hand, the Heman here could well be David's Levitical choir leader, a descendant of Korah. Note that Korah himself was the son of Izhar, one of Kohath's four sons (see 1 Chronicles 6:37-38, 18). Perhaps the descendants of Izhar were referred to as the Kohathite sub-clan of the Izrahites or Ezrahites. However, such an explanation would *not* apply to David's music leader Ethan, who was a descendant of Levi's son Merari. Considering all this, perhaps the Heman of Psalm 88 was David's music leader, the Izrahite, while the Ethan of Psalm 89 was the famous Zerahite and not the Merarite choir leader (more on this in the comments on Psalm 89).

Besides attribution, the superscription of Psalm 88 also contains the phrase *le-mahalath leannoth*. Recall that Psalm 53's superscription contains the phrase *le-mahalath*. As noted before in the Bible Reading Program, this phrase has been variously interpreted as “On sickness,” “On suffering,” “To pipings” (on wind instruments) or “To dances” (or some sort of choreography). The second part here, *le-annoth*, is thought to mean “of humblings or “of afflictions.” It is not clear whether both parts are to be understood independently or taken together as a combined phrase (such as “On suffering of afflictions”). Also, one or both parts together could indicate either the subject matter of the psalm or another tune to which the psalm is set.

Heman, whatever his specific identity, is in Psalm 88 enduring some grave, life-threatening trial. Verse 15 in fact says that he has experienced life-threatening affliction for *years*—since his youth. It is not clear whether he means that he has been enduring the same, continuing trial ever since then or that he has experienced numerous similar dire circumstances over the years. The latter seems more likely, though his recurring problems may stem from the same root causes having never abated.

In his despair, Heman voices a desperate complaint against God: “Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?” (verse 14). He cries out to God day and night (verses 1, 9, 13), pleading for Him to hear (verse 2). He feels death is inevitable and close. He is as good as dead already, “adrift among the dead” (verse 5), cut off from God, no longer remembered by Him (same verse).

Indeed, he perceives his circumstances as coming *from* God: “You have laid me in the lowest pit” (verse 6). “You have afflicted me with all Your waves” (verse 7)—that is, of wrath and terrors (compare verses 16-17). “You have caused my friends to abandon me; you have made me repulsive to them.... I am worn out from the burden of your punishments” (verses 8, 15, Today's English Version). Heman can't escape his misery: “I am shut up, and I cannot get out” (verse 8).

He has called on God every day and worshipped Him with outspread hands (verse 9). Is it to no avail? Is he to die like the wicked? Will God wait to intervene until after he is already dead? (compare verse 10a). Of course, God certainly *can* intervene for those who have already died through

resurrecting them—and He *will* ultimately resurrect all His people in the future. But this thought was far from the psalmist. For how would letting him die at this time bring God glory in the present? If dead, without consciousness, Heman could not declare God’s lovingkindness, faithfulness and righteousness to others (see verse 10b-12). In other words, he was no use to God dead. This recalls David’s reasoning in Psalms 6:4-5 and 30:8-9.

The psalm ends gloomily with the situation unresolved: “You have made even my closest friends abandon me, and darkness is my only companion” (88:18, TEV). Nevertheless, there is a glimmer of hope in this darkest of laments based on the way it opens, for Heman begins the psalm by addressing the Lord as “the God who saves me” (verse 1, NIV) or “God of my salvation” (NKJV). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says: “Though the psalm ends on a lament, faith triumphs, because in everything the psalmist has learned to look to ‘the God who saves’ (v. 1). The ‘darkness’ (v. 18; cf. v. 12) of grief is reminiscent of death; but as long as there is life, hope remains focused on the Lord. [One particular commentator] is right when he writes, ‘Psalm 88 stands as a mark of realism of biblical faith. It has a pastoral use, because there are situations in which easy, cheap talk of resolution must be avoided’” (note on verses 15-18).

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out in its note on the closing cluster of Book III (Psalms 84-89): “The final two prayers (Ps 88; 89) both end unrelieved by the usual expression of confidence that God will hear and act.... However, the editors of Book III have placed them under the near shadow of Ps 87, the more distant shadow of Ps 84 and the still more distant shadow of Ps 82. From these psalms they should not be dissociated.”

Luke 7

In Luke 7 we encounter a Roman Captain who has great faith and he, for one, understands how authority works. One of the very few we get to read about in Scripture. One of the Captain’s Servants is sick and near death and so he sends for Yeshua for a healing. The captain’s reputation among the Jewish people is that he is supportive of them and builds up their congregations. Yeshua marveled at his faith.

After this, Yeshua raises a young man who was dead back to life in Na’im, and everyone was struck with fear, knowing that the Kingdom of Heaven had truly come!

John the Immerser sent two of his servants to ask Yeshua if He is “THE” coming One. In that hour, Yeshua does the following: Blind receive sight, lame do walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf do hear, dead are raised, the Good News is brought to the poor.

Then Yeshua testifies of John the Immerser and proclaims that he is the one to make way for the Messiah. The learned men rejected the counsel and immersion of John and said he had a demon

even though he had neither bread nor wine. These same people said about Yeshua that he was a drunkard and glutton and spends time with tax collectors and sinners. Nothing touches the hearts of these men, they are hard and critical.

Yeshua accepts an invitation from a Pharisee to join him for to eat. A woman comes to Him with an alabaster flask of perfume while He is there. The Pharisee began to stumble in Yeshua because in his view, if Yeshua was a true prophet, He would know this woman was a sinner and unclean.

Yeshua, knowing His thoughts... proclaims a great parable to him to teach him about forgiveness and mercy. The one who needs forgiveness more, loves more and that love is demonstrated by their lowliness of spirit. Yeshua forgave the woman of her sins because of her demonstration of love and belief in Him.