



Pointers and questions on the book of

Psalms:
Selection A

PSALMS

Session 6

Psalm 88

Calling to God from the depths of rejection and despair

Summary

This psalm is the cry of a wise and godly man—Heman—who has experienced deep and prolonged personal suffering. His one desire is to escape from the troubled existence he is currently enduring, and everything takes second place to that. If he doesn't find a breakthrough from God, he might as well be dead. But in the meantime he continues to seek God.

- v1-2** Heman addresses his agonised prayers 'day and night' to God, who alone can save him.
- 3-9a** Cut off from all human friendship, he feels utterly isolated and trapped in his circumstances—which he attributes to God. He concludes that he might as well be dead.
- 9b-14** He can't praise God from the grave, so he continues to cry to him for help and deliverance. But his cries appear to fall on deaf ears.
- 15-18** He recounts again his catalogue of sufferings, which date from as far back as his youth. He is in the blackness of the deepest depression.

Questions to get you thinking

1. Is there anything positive in this psalm at all?
2. Try to identify any specific problems that Heman was experiencing. Have you been through any of them yourself?
3. Is he right to attribute his sufferings to God?
4. Why do you think he continues to pray even though he has clearly been doing so for a long time with no apparent results?
5. What do you know about the causes of depression? What is the best way to help a depressed person?
6. Heman had been afflicted 'from his youth' (v15). How can childhood experiences and traumas affect us as we grow older? What can we do about it?
7. Heman writes from an Old Testament perspective, which had only a limited understanding of life beyond death. We, being New Testament people, know far more about it, so how likely is it that a Christian would get into a state as bad as his?
8. Why do you think God, in his wisdom, saw fit to include this psalm in Holy Scripture?

