

Psalm of Ethan the Ezrahite

Ethan the Ezrahite, (firmness) (I Kings 4:31) is credited in the title of Psalm 89. He was one of the musicians appointed by David to officiate in the worship of the tabernacle (I Chronicles 6:44), and his line continued to officiate in the Temple of Solomon. He was of the line of Merari, son of Levi.

Another line of reasoning equates him in I Chronicles 2:6 as the son of Zerah (could be Ezrah), of the tribe of Judah.

Another line of thinking has him being the same as Jeduthun, though that is less authoritative. It was not uncommon, however, for people in the Old Testament to receive new names at their appointment to godly office.

Ethan the Ezrahite is listed in I Kings 4;31 as being one of the wise men of Solomon's kingdom, second only to Solomon himself in worldly wisdom. Psalm 89 is ascribed to him in the title. Being one of the chief musicians of the tabernacle of David and the Temple of Solomon, and being recognized as one of the wisest men in Israel, made him well qualified to contribute this psalm to the collection used in the worship of the Israelites.

The opening verse in KJV has been set to music in our day as a Sunday school chorus:

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.

Rather fitting for something written three thousand years ago to be sung in the worship of that day.

The psalmist goes on to laud the calling of David to become king of Israel, calling upon heaven and earth to recognize God's covenant with him forever. His exploits in conquering neighboring enemy nations became bywords in the world's powers.

But then, Ethan's thoughts turn to sinister developments, where David's power is taken away and his people downtrodden by enemy forces. This is probably prophetically spoken of the time four hundred years later, when the city of Jerusalem was levelled by the Babylonians and most of the population taken into exile to Babylon. The sins of the later Davidic kings had brought the nation to its knees. The sentiments of that decline capture Ethan's imagination.

Beginning in verse 15, his thoughts become focused once more on the individuals who did not bow the knee to idols, but maintained their trust in God.

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord.

They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness. For you are their glory and strength, and by your favour you exalt our horn. Indeed, our shield belongs to the Lord, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

And beginning in verse 33 his tone changes:

But I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.

Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness – and I will not lie to David – that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.

He ends with a paean of praise:

Praise be to the Lord forever!

Amen and Amen.

After closing this study, another thought came to me, based on the article in Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary, Ethan*. He gives the Hebrew meaning of Ethan as “enduring” or “ancient.” I suppose the Oxford rendering of “firmness” is similar in its root, but the enduring quality of Ethan’s wisdom struck me as being of importance, especially as it refers to the rise and decline of the line of David and of God’s immutable Covenant with the house of David, in that the Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, would come from that line and fulfill all the promises God made in his Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then David. How God takes the foibles of mankind and creates eternal blessing out of them amazes me. The present state of war in Ukraine almost gives me hope that God will take it and work His good out of a lot of heartache and pain. Joseph’s statement to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 comes to mind:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

When I look back on the economic boom of the post-WWII era and the worldwide cooperation within the United Nations, I can sort of grasp the possibility that even

this crisis can result in God's will being accomplished once again, in spite of the attitudes of evil men and their evil actions against their neighbours.