

## **THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL**

### **PSALM 88**

#### Introduction:

The old master's of the spiritual life often spoke of a "dark night of the soul". They referred to an experience in life in which all of the lights seem to go out, and you must feel your way along in the dark. Such dark nights are often over an extended period, and it may seem that they will never come to an end. A reading of Christian biography confirms that many of God's most useful servants have gone through such a "dark night of the soul." Even Luther the great Reformer found himself in such an extended time of darkness that he almost despaired.

Heman was in the midst of such an experience when he wrote this psalm.

We know nothing for sure about the man or his experience. Heman is the name of a singer of Israel who was also a seer or prophet. It may well have been this man who had the fineness of spirit that goes with musical gifts and the sensitivity of spirit that goes with being a prophet. It would only add to the darkness that he had known such sensitivity to the things of God.

This Psalm was preserved for others who will experience the "dark night of the soul." You are probably not in such a period now, but no one knows

what a day may bring forth. Or you may have already walked through such a valley and know the pain that Heman described. Let's take a deeper look at this "dark night of the soul."

There in a nutshell is this 'psalm without hope'. Someone who knows the Lord as (lit.) 'the God of my salvation' (1), has no hope in the face of death (9–12). Someone who is committed to prayer finds no remedial answers to suffering. The wrath of God (7), the alienation of friends and inescapable (8) debilitating grief (9) fills the whole of life; the upward look sees only wrath, the inward look, terror (16); the outward look, present threats and absent friends (17–18) and the forward look, unrelieved darkness (18).<sup>1</sup>

- I. IN THE DARK NIGHT OF SOUL PRAYER GOES  
UNANSWERED (V. 1-2)
- II. IN THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL TROUBLES MULTIPLY  
(V. 3-9)
- III. IN THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL USEFULNESS SEEMS  
TO BE ENDED (V.10-12)

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lit. literally

<sup>1</sup>Carson, D. A. 1994. *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) . Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA

IV. IN THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL THE SOUL IS FULL OF  
TERROR. (V. 13-17)

V. IN THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL THERE IS NO HUMAN  
HELP. (V. 18)

When you find yourself in the “dark night of the soul”, what do you do? You do what Heman did. You continue to cry out to the Lord day and night. You refuse to turn away from Him. You seek Him with all of your heart until you find Him.