

## Psalms 73 and 89—But now...

We have been learning about the structure of the book of Psalms from Toni little by little over the past year. These two psalms are the “bookends” of Book 3. Many scholars believe that this portion of the psalter was compiled during the Exile. This would explain the following:

It contains many problem psalms, in which, both at individual and at national levels, the psalmists are wrestling with difficulties of theodicy. (Geoffrey Grogan, *Prayer, Praise and Prophecy: A Theology of the Psalms*, p. 209)

**theodicy** : defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil ([merriam-webster.com](http://merriam-webster.com))

In other words, the main question seems to be, “What is going on here?!?”

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### Psalm 89: Doing things in order

Psalm 89 begins by carefully laying out the foundation for the psalmist's questions. He doesn't just say, “We know you are good, and can do all things, so why...?” What is noted about God's activity and character in each of these sections?

89:1-4	89:14-18
89:3-8	89:19-29
89:9-13	89:30-37

After highlighting all of that, everything turns on the phrase, “But now...” in verse 38. God seems to have forgotten about his covenant, and the psalmist wonders if anything will be done soon enough to benefit him at all:

How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?  
How long will your wrath burn like fire?  
Remember how short my time is! (vv. 46-47a)

### How would you summarize the psalmist's complaint in your own words?

Author Esau McCaulley (a Canon Theologian in our own C4SO Diocese) would say that the psalmist has done this in the right order. In his recent book, *Reading While Black*, Esau talks about asking questions in their **proper order**.

I did not join the Nation of Islam for a variety of reasons, even when I most despaired of a hopeful future for African Americans in this country. Why? I came to believe that we must ask questions in their proper order. The fundamental question was whether or not the

Christian story was true. I believed that the tomb was empty on the third day. White supremacy, even when practiced by Christians, cannot overcome the fact of the resurrection. (pp. 72-73)

**What truth do you hold onto when “enough is enough,” yet there is no end in sight?**

We don’t know exactly how or when God answered this psalmist. We do know that there is now a Davidic king on the throne: Jesus, the Son of David.

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### **Psalm 73: A deeper understanding**

Like Psalm 89, Psalm 73 begins with a statement of truth: “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” It then immediately turns to a harsh look at an unjust reality, complicated and magnified by the lens of the writer’s own envy.

**Looking at those whom the psalmist envied, what sins are mentioned?**

**What unjust or unfair situations, for yourself or for others, especially provoke anger in you? What situations provoke envy?**

There is another dramatic turn in verse 15 as the psalmist is granted new insights into himself, a new perspective on an unjust world, and a deeper understanding of what “God is good to Israel” means.

In fact, Grogan notes that the editors of the Psalms may have included this psalm at the beginning of Book 3 to serve as a correction to any “naive kind of prosperity theology” understanding of scriptures such as Psalm 73:1 (p. 213).

**What brought about the change in the writer’s “lens” (point of view)?**

**What were the psalmists new insights into himself?**

**What was the psalmist’s new perspective on an unjust world?**

**What is the psalmist’s deeper understanding of what “God is good to Israel” means?**

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### **Summary**

Together these Psalms illustrate the tension of the “already and not yet” nature of where we find ourselves today in God’s kingdom. The long-promised Davidic king, Jesus the Messiah, is on the heavenly throne. Until the final judgment and restoration of all things, however, his kingdom is revealed in often hidden and unexpected ways. We will be unable to understand or participate unless we experience the security, guidance and satisfaction of dwelling in him, and cooperate with his growth plan for us.