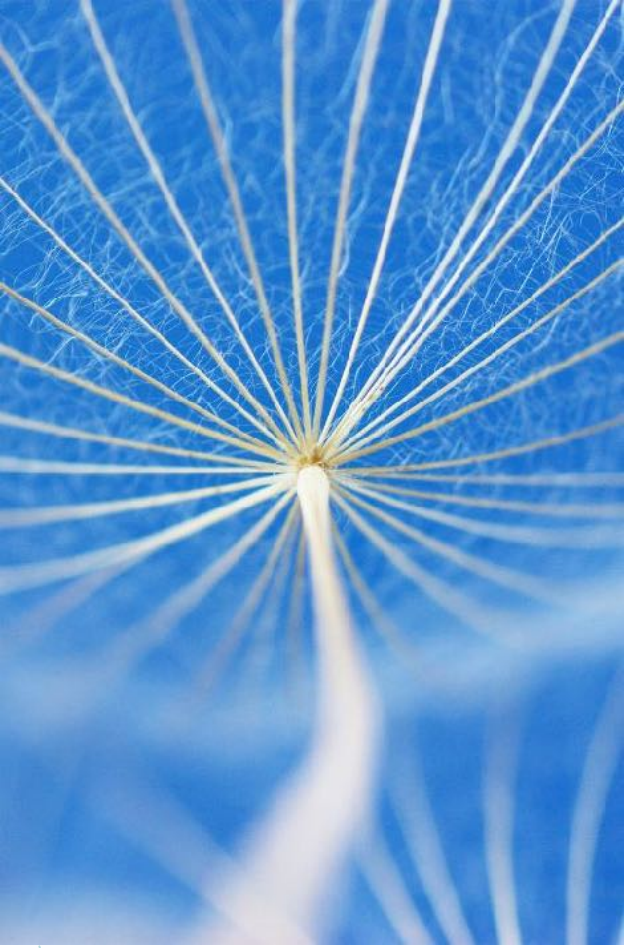
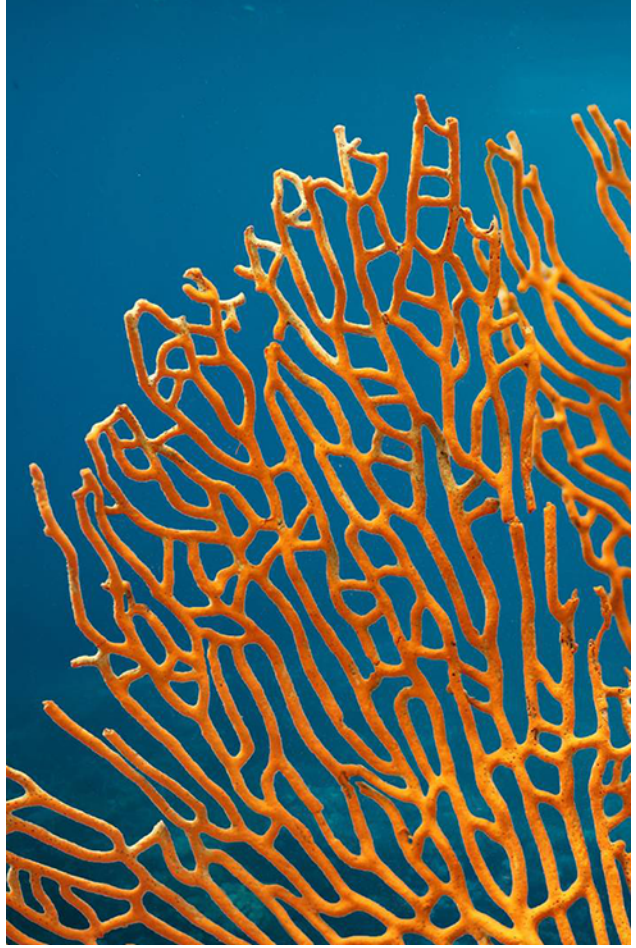





ACROSTIC POETRY

In the Psalms

LEARN YOUR "ALEPH BET"

THE 22 HEBREW LETTERS AND THE NUMERICAL VALUES										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
א **1**	ב **2**	ג **3**	ד **4**	ה **5**	ו **6**	ז **7**	ח **8**	ט **9**	י **10**	ך כ **20**
(a) Alef	B, V Bet	G Gimel	D Dalet	H He	W, V Vav	Z Zayin	H, X Chet	T Tet	J, I, Y Yod	K Kaph
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ל **30**	ם מ **40**	ן נ **50**	ס **60**	ע **70**	ף פ **80**	ץ צ **90**	ק **100**	ר **200**	ש **300**	ת **400**
L Lamed	M Mem	N Nun	S Samekh	(o) Ayin	P, F Pe	Ts Tsade	K, Q Qoph	R Resh	S, Sh Shin	T Tav

HEBREW ACROSTIC POEMS

Psalms 9-10 *

Psalm 25

Psalm 34

Psalm 37

Psalm 111

Psalm 112

Psalm 119

Psalm 145

Proverbs 31:10-31

Lamentations 1-4

Nahum 1:1-9



ACROSTIC PATTERNS

While they do follow patterns, they were not always done the same way.

Psalm 9-10	Each Hebrew consonant covers two verses. These two psalms

	form one acrostic unit. Because of text-critical problems and the fact that they are presented as two separate Psalms, they are not always included in the list of acrostics. In the Septuagint they constitute one psalm (http://bible1.wordpress.com/tag/psalms/ Accessed 16 March 2007).
Psalm 25	Each Hebrew consonant covers 1 verse.
Psalm 34	Each Hebrew consonant covers 1 verse.
Psalm 37	Each Hebrew consonant covers 2 verses.
Psalm 111	Each Hebrew consonant covers ½ verse.
Psalm 112	Each Hebrew consonant covers ½ verse.
Psalm 119	Each Hebrew consonant covers 8 verses.
Psalm 145	Each Hebrew consonant covers 1 verse.
Lam 1- 4	In chapter 1 and 2 each Hebrew consonant covers 1 verse which consists of 3 stanzas. In chapter 3 each consonant covers 3 stanzas/verses, therefore it has 66 verses. Chapter 4 has 22 verses, each consonant consists of 2 stanzas beginning with that letter of the alphabet. Chapter 5 has 22 verses, but is not an alphabetic acrostic.
Prov 31: 10 –31	Each Hebrew consonant covers 1 verse.
Nahum 1: 1- 9	The Aleph covers three lines. There seems to be an interjection of 2 lines before the rest of the consonants, which covers only one verse each. The letter zayin appears in the second position of the line.

PSALMS 9-10

Pre-Reformation, these were a single psalm.

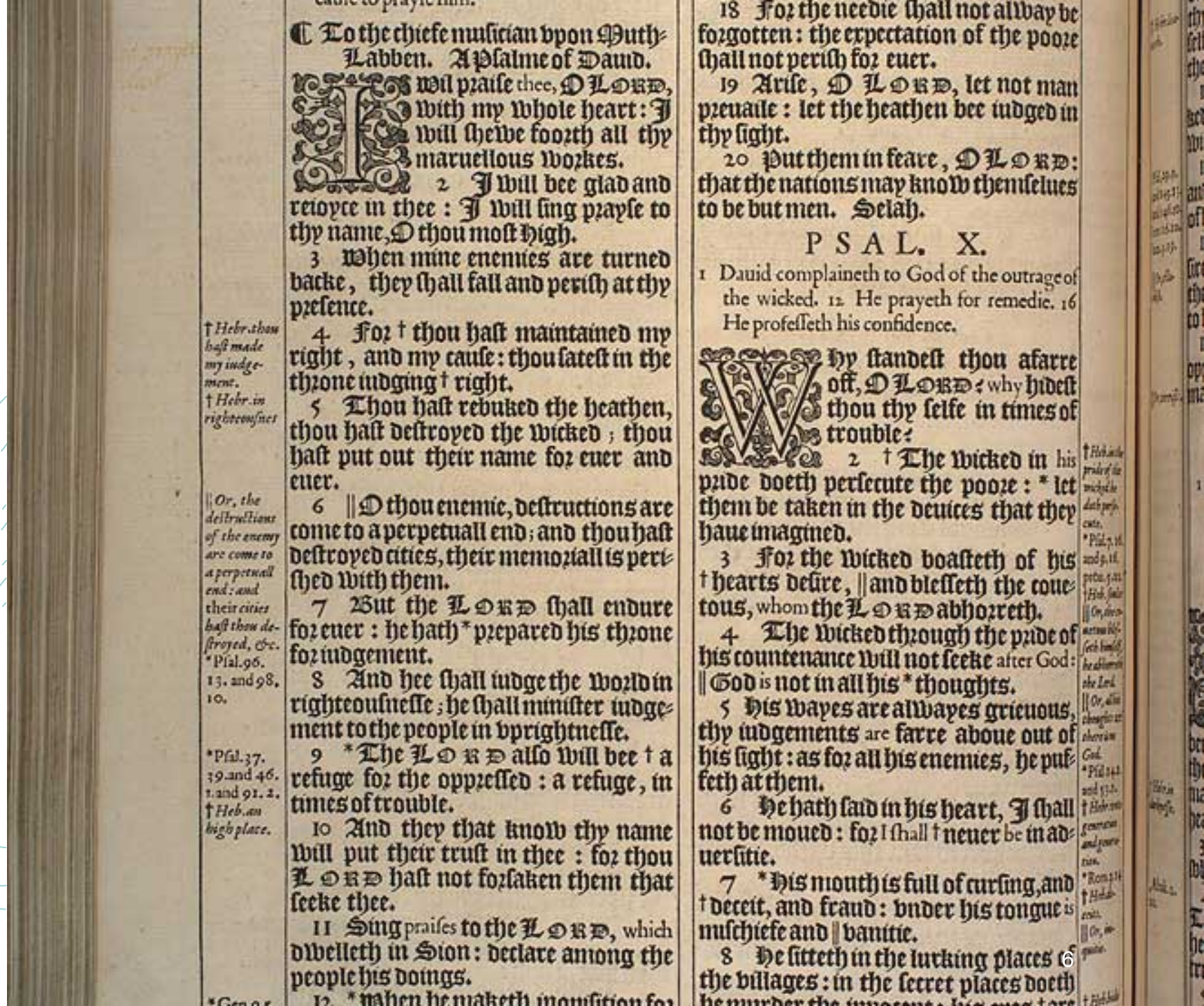
Though certain letters are not represented, and verses 10:2-6 might not be part of it, the combined psalm is considered to be an acrostic.

Their united acrostic form is one reason some might think these psalms should be combined again.



PSALM 9, VERSES 1-20

After the Reformation, because Psalm 9 has such a different tone from Psalm 10, they were separated. This is the original 1611 KJV, where Psalm 10 starts after Psalm 9:20.



To the chiefe musician vpon Muth-Labben. A Psalme of Dauid.

I Will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart: I will shewe foorth all thy marueilous workes.

2 I will bee glad and reioyce in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most high.

3 When mine enemies are turned backe, they shall fall and perish at thy presence.

† Hebr. thou hast made my iudgement. † Hebr. in righteousnes

4 For † thou hast maintained my right, and my cause: thou satest in the throne iudging † right.

5 Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked; thou hast put out their name for euer and euer.

‖ Or, the destructions of the enemy are come to a perpetuall end: and their cities hast thou destroyed, &c.

6 ‖ O thou enemie, destructions are come to a perpetuall end; and thou hast destroyed cities, their memoriall is perished with them.

* Psal. 96. 13. and 98. 10.

7 But the LORD shall endure for euer: he hath * prepared his throne for iudgement.

8 And hee shall iudge the world in righteousnesse; he shall minister iudgement to the people in vprightnesse.

* Psal. 37. 39. and 46. 1. and 91. 2. † Heb. an high place.

9 * The LORD also will bee † a refuge for the oppressed: a refuge, in times of trouble.

10 And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou LORD hast not forsaken them that seeke thee.

11 Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Sion: declare among the people his doings.

12 * When he maketh inquisition for

18 For the needie shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poore shall not perish for euer.

19 Arise, O LORD, let not man preuaile: let the heathen bee iudged in thy sight.

20 Put them in feare, O LORD: that the nations may know themselues to be but men. Selah.

PSAL. X.

1 Dauid complaineth to God of the outrage of the wicked. 12 He prayeth for remedie. 16 He professeth his confidence.

WHy standest thou afarre off, O LORD? why hidest thou thy selfe in times of trouble?

† Heb. in the pride of the wicked he doth persecute. * Psal. 9. 16. and 9. 16. † Heb. faint. ‖ Or, deuices ‖ Or, also thought as there in God. * Psal. 14. and 53. † Heb. euer. ‖ Or, vanitie.

2 † The wicked in his pride doeth persecute the poore: * let them be taken in the deuices that they haue imagined.

3 For the wicked boasteth of his † hearts desire, ‖ and blesseth the couetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.

4 The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seeke after God: ‖ God is not in all his * thoughts.

5 His wayes are alwayes grieuous, thy iudgements are farre aboue out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.

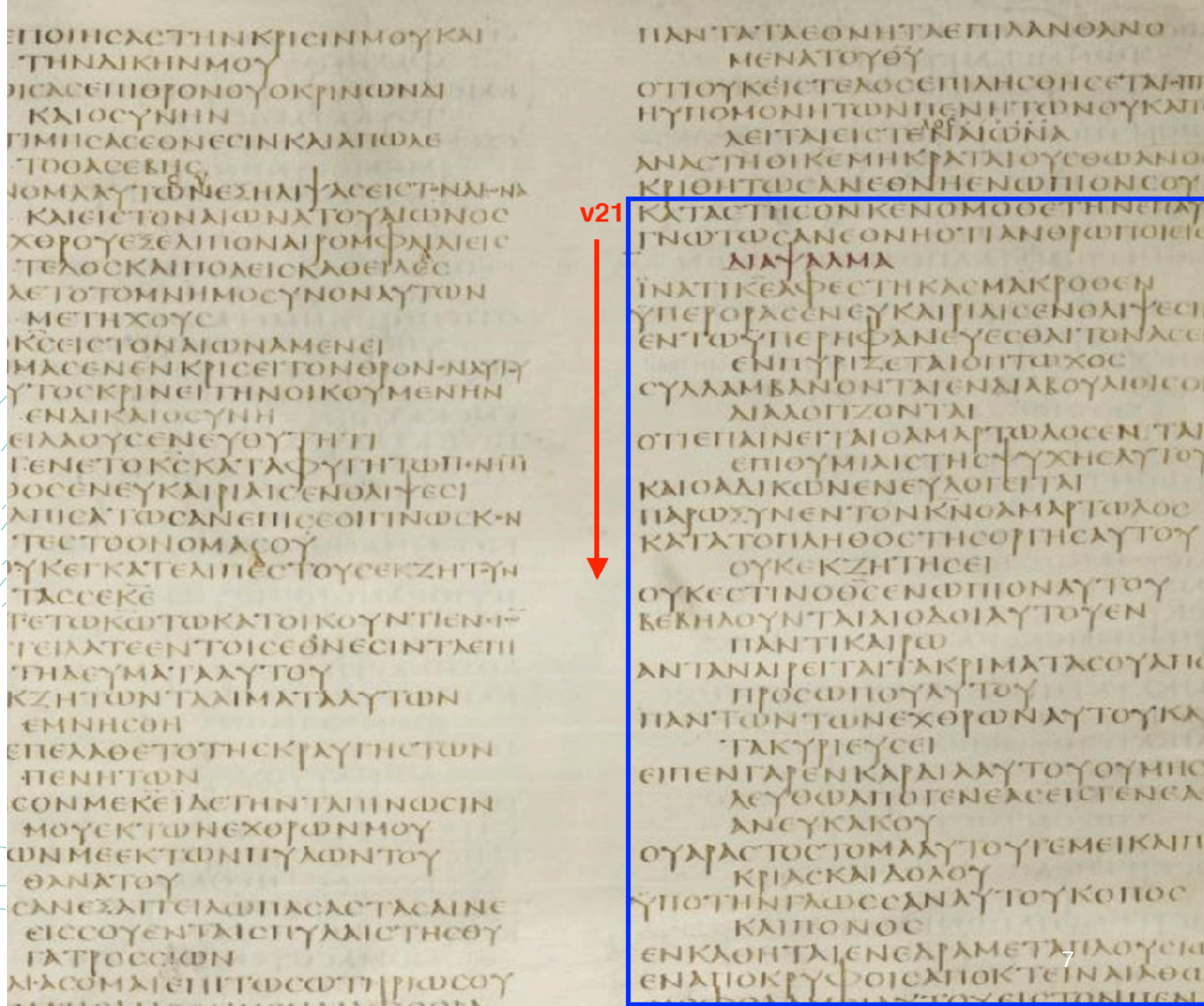
6 He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moued: for I shall † neuer be in aduersitie.

7 * His mouth is full of cursing, and † deceit, and fraud: vnder his tongue is mischiefe and ‖ vanitie.

8 He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doeth

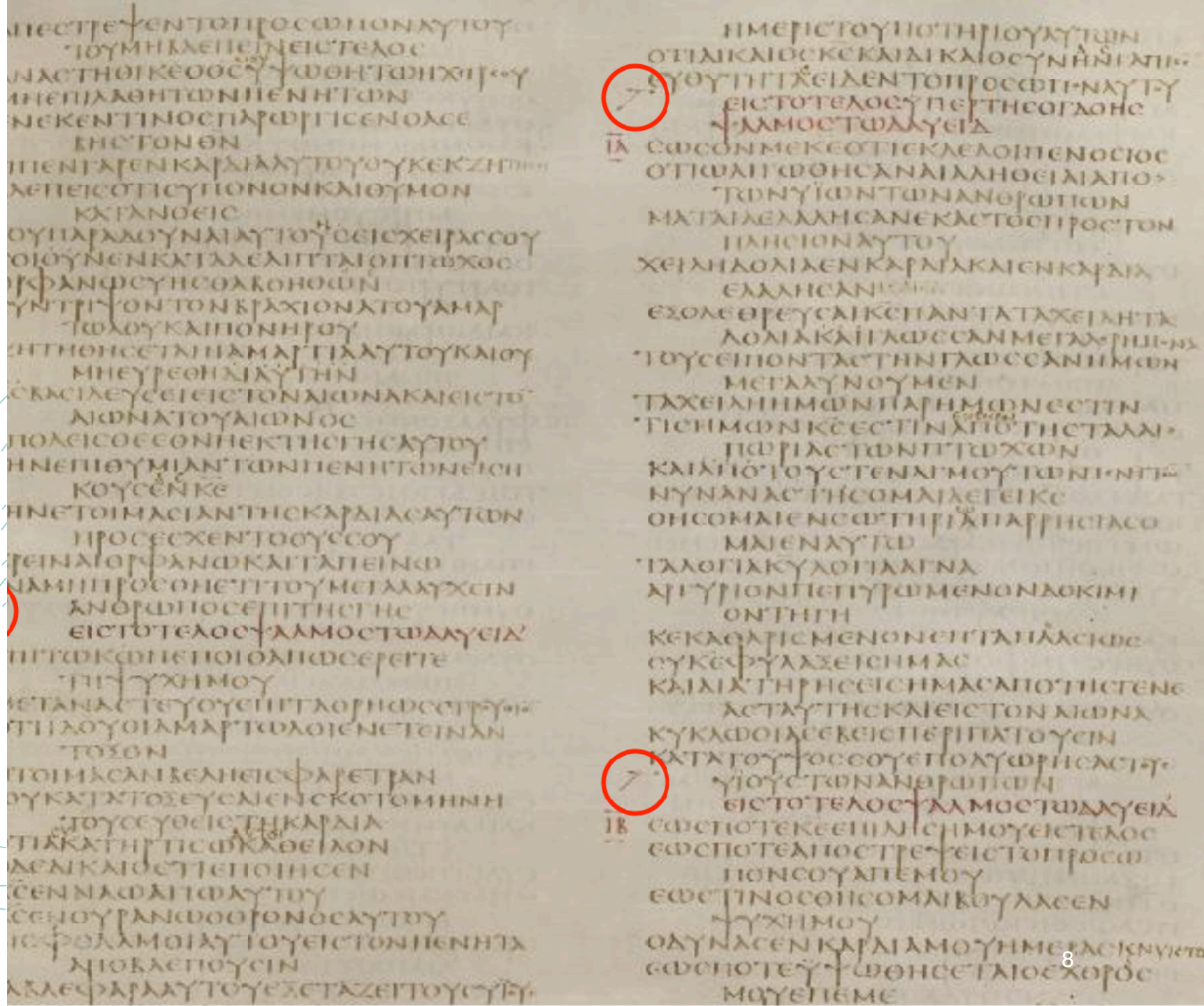
PSALM 9 VERSES 1- ...39?

For example, in the Codex Sinaiticus, your Bible's Psalm 9-10 is just Psalm 9. This is an image of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) from that codex. There is no denotation of a new Psalm after Psalm 9:20.



PSALMS 11-13 AS PSALMS 10-12

By comparison, in the next folio (page) in the Codex Sinaiticus, your Bible's Psalm 11-13 are Psalm 10-12. Clearly visible are the markers that denote the beginning of each next Psalm. No marker separates 9:20 from 9:21.





MEMORIZATION MNEMONIC

is one utility believed to be intended for writing psalms in acrostic form.
Children might have taken familiar songs into adulthood in this way.



BEAUTY AND FORM

is another theorized intent for acrostic psalms. Order and organization can relax, much the way our poetry emphasizes meter (rhythm) and rhyme or alliteration.



PLACE IN SEQUENCE

"What you call remembering is the last part of pleasure, as the last part of a poem. When you and I met, the meeting was over very shortly, it was nothing. Now it is growing something as we remember it. But sill we know very little about it. What it will be when I remember it as I lie down to die, what it makes in me all my days till then–that is the real meeting. The other is only the beginning of it. You say you have poets in your world. Do they not teach you this?"

"But even in a poem [can we] never long to hear on splendid line over again?"

"...the poem is a good example. For the most splendid line becomes fully splendid only by means of all the lines after it; if you went back to it you would find it less splendid than you thought. You would kill it."

- *Out of the Silent Planet*, C.S. Lewis

"Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

- Jesus, Mt. 6:34, ESV



COMPLETENESS “FROM A-Z”

is the other theorized purpose for these psalms' acrostic form.

CONTEMPORARY CUSTOMS

might have influenced Hebrew poetic patterns.

This turn might have been used by God to speak to his people.

Sumeria, Akkad, Babylon, and other nations' scribes may have been primarily concerned with religion.

Their beliefs in the numerical value of language are believed by some to have been heavily influenced by the patterns they saw in creation.

The Hebrews likely would have come from the same mentality. There is some chicken-egg debate about acrostic origin form.



The Babylonian name/sentence acrostic poem is at least as old as the Hebrew alphabetic acrostic, probably older. Two of the seven extant Babylonian acrostics can be dated precisely, because they were written for two kings: Ashurbanipal (668-626) and Nebuchadrezzar II (605-562). On the general date and origin of the acrostic in Babylon, W. G. Lambert comments,

> Even if it could be shown that the biblical examples antedate the seventh century B.C.—and it cannot—it would still seem that the Babylonian word and sentence acrostic is a native invention. Although the

"Babylonian and Biblical Acrostics"
William Michael Soll
Biblica Vol. 69, No. 3 (1988), pp. 305-323 (19 pages)



RULES, EXCEPTIONS

- Psalm 9 Alef occurs four times in verses 1-3, and Bet only occurs once in verse 4
- Some believe letter Nun is intentionally skipped in Psalm 145.
- The psalmist “doubles up” on the letter Resh in Psalm 25:18-19 (parallelism?)



DO YOU KNOW?

Your Bible blatantly tells you the acrostic pattern of one of the Psalms.

Which one?

A PORTION OF PSALM 25

1 To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in You I trust,
Do not let me be ashamed;
Do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed;
Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed.

4 Make me know Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
5 Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
For You I wait all the day.
6 Remember, O LORD, Your compassion and Your lovingkindnesses,
For they have been from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
According to Your lovingkindness remember me,
For Your goodness' sake, O LORD.

THANK YOU

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