

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adults Sunday School

PSALM 9 – THE FIRST ACROSTIC PSALM

I. INTRODUCTION

What is an acrostic psalm? According to Wikipedia, an acrostic is a poem (or other form of writing) in which the first letter (or syllable, or word) of each line (or paragraph, or other recurring feature in the text) spells out a word, message or the alphabet.

An acrostic psalm uses the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet with a few slight variations to form a pattern, beginning the first word of the first verse in sequence to the last letter. Acrostic psalms are sometimes known as alphabetical psalms.

There are a total of 9 acrostic psalms: Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145. Other non-psalm passages are Proverbs 31:10-31 and Lamentations 1-4. Psalm 119 is the most complete acrostic psalm since it contains all the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Why acrostic? There are at least three possible reasons: 1) To add beauty to the psalm as artistic, 2) To indicate completeness, as covering all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet which are known to the readers, and 3) To serve as a mnemonic device to aid the young in learning and memorising the psalm.

A. Title

“To the chief Musician upon Muth-labben, A Psalm of David.” The word “Muth-labben” means “death of a son.” In David’s lifetime, he had at least 20 sons by his wives, excluding those by his concubines. But there are at least three of his sons who died in his lifetime. In addition to the death of Bathsheba’s first son were the deaths of Amnon and Absalom. Another son, Adonijah, was executed shortly after David’s death for his attempt to usurp the throne (1 Kings 2:25). It is likely that this psalm was written by David, shortly after the death of Absalom who was killed in battle.

B. Author

David is the author. Having known that David wrote this psalm in light of the death of his son, it is rather hard to imagine that instead of wallowing in great sorrow, he still had the mood to praise God.

According to 2 Samuel 19:1-10, David did sink into uncontrollable weeping for the loss of his beloved son. He was later rebuked by Joab. This rebuke could probably awaken David to realize that he was not just a father but the king of Israel as well. David had a greater responsibility towards his role as a king called by God to rule over His people.

God was not done with David yet. Those who hinder God’s work must be removed and destroyed. Absalom is one of them. And David must realize his call to serve God takes priority over all. As such, it was through such a spiritual awakening that David was able to praise God in this psalm even after the death of his beloved son.

C. Summary

There is a predominant note of praise. David shared from his own real life experience how God is great in his life. He cannot but to praise God for who He is and what He has done for him. When a child of God experiences God in his life, be it protection or comfort, all that now consume him is to give God the praise and worship He deserves. Nothing should hinder him to do what he is set to do, and that is to: praise God! May we stand with David today in this psalm of praise.

II. GOD'S PRAISE

Verse 1, "I will praise *thee*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works."

Although words of praise were done through the lips and the mouths, they were the results of a heart that is filled with thanksgiving. David's praise is derived from the heart itself. Therefore it is most sincere and full of gratitude and appreciation for God. It is to His person first and foremost. This is noteworthy because David knew his God for who He is. And this is entirely base upon the relationship that David had with God.

Since God is great in His person, His works are great as well. And this greatness can be easily seen in all His creation. As much as we admire the beauty and wonderful design of creation, the praise lands ultimately upon the Creator since they are all His handiworks. It is ironical that men today are able to admire the vast creation in the things that God made and yet they missed Him totally. They refused to acknowledge His presence and His salvation through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. They are offended instead. What irony, isn't it?

Verse 2, "I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High."

David knew how to compose himself before God. And this begins right from the heart that is all prepared to worship God. In other words, David prepares himself to worship God. The word "glad" means to brighten up. Many come with a 'black' face as if it is such a chore and hassle to come to God's house for worship. Not the psalmist! He came with his face fresh and brighten up.

The word "rejoice" means to be happy. And it is an action word which indicates jumping for joy. The feet that walk into God's presence are light and quick. There is no sign of dragging the feet into God's presence at all. The psalmist acknowledges the person of God by His name. And he praises Him in His highest and greatest honour possible to be given Him as His humble creature.

III. GOD'S PROTECTION

A. God Punishes His Enemies

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

The psalmist uses "when" rather than "if" to show the certainty of God's judgment and punishment against His enemies. Believers must have confidence in God's surety to execute His just and righteous judgment upon all those who have chosen to rebel and sin against Him.

David was confident in God's punishment over his enemies. What gives David the boldness that God must deal with his enemies? It must be qualified that David's enemies are also rightly God's enemies. In fact, they are God's enemies first, and then David counted them as his enemies because of this fact. This too must be our confidence.

If others are against us due to personal reasons such as unfriendliness, or misunderstandings, we must be willing to forgive and seek reconciliation to the best of our ability. However if it is due to

our faith and doctrine, there is no compromise and reconciliation possible until there is repentance by those who sinned against God.

The words “turned back” mean retreat or to fall behind. This means that even when the enemies were to retreat, there is no slowing down of God’s judgment and punishment against them. They will be destroyed utterly and completely. And it shall be done before the presence of the Almighty God to their shame.

Verse 4, “For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.”

David believed in God’s righteousness and justice. And he believed God has vindicated him in which he was willing to bear whatever reproaches and mockery for His sake before the vindication comes finally. This acknowledgement is important for it shows David’s humility and trust in God’s own judgment rather than his own judgment.

As king himself, he could have called upon his wise advisors and counsellors to act on his behalf. But he chose to trust in God’s judgment that is final and perfect, far better than any wise counsels that a man can offer. No matter how wise and good a man’s counsel may be, it can never be higher than God’s. It is important that believers know God’s Word because in it contains the highest wisdom and knowledge that one can ever know, and of course with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5, “Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.”

There are three completed actions that the psalmist deliberately used to describe how God punished the enemies: rebuke, destroy, and put out. “Rebuke” is in a form of chiding and scolding with words. It means God used words to prove the sins and error of the wicked. “Destroy” means to undo. Whatever the enemies plan to do wickedly, God undo them and paralysed them to none effect. That’s the power of God. “Put out” means to abolish and completely remove. The enemies will be forgotten and all their greatness and accomplishment done will all disappear into thin air. Nobody will remember them. All their efforts have gone down to the drain. They literally lived and accomplished in vain.

Is God’s judgment too harsh upon the enemies? Has God overly punished them? The next verse shows that God’s judgment is fair and all the punishment the enemies received are just retribution. In other words, God never over-punish or under-punish!

Verse 6, “O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them.”

Turning towards the enemies in this verse, the psalmist says to them as represent by one of them, destructions are come to a perpetual end. What the enemies have set to do and that is to destroy God’s people, will not be allowed to continue.

A perpetual end means the end that will be final. There is no sign of restarting again. The end is truly ended. That’s how God would punish the wicked by halting their evil plan from fulfilling their intended destruction of God’s people.

What the enemies had done against God’s people were twofold: their cities destroyed and their memorial perished. And these are the “best” of what the enemies can do. Imagine how they spend so much time and resources just to do these two things. They may have succeeded but so what?

The next verse is for our comfort.

Verse 7, “But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment.”

This verse is a great comfort to all believers, in particular to those who have suffered at the hands of the enemies who had sought to destroy them and even the memorial of them are taken away. “But” is the contrasting word that sets to overturn what the enemies had set to do. But the LORD shall endure for ever. Those who stand with the Lord will last forever. They will not be destroyed. The enemies might think that they are destroyed. But they are wrong and they will come to realize how wrong they had been.

God has prepared His throne for judgment. What remains now is the time factor. The enemies may continue to go about in their evil plan against God’s people and may even succeed in taking their life eventually. But God’s judgment will overcome them, and there is no turning back for them. They will be judged finally. No one will escape!

God Saves His People

Verse 8, “And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.”

When God judges, it is judgment upon the whole world, including both the enemies and His people. This is the perfect judgment of God. It cuts both ways. For the enemies, since they are found guilty of going against His righteousness, they will surely be punished. But for His people, since they have been saved and clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they will be able to stand in uprightness at God’s judgment.

Verse 9, “The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.”

A refuge is a hiding place that is safe to all who run there for protection. It is comforting to know that God provides such a safety and protection to all the oppressed in times of trouble. God will not abandon you when you need Him most. He will ensure that you will come to the right path when you learn to trust in Him as your refuge.

“Oppressed” means crushed or injured. This could mean literally in the physical sense, and would also include the spiritual, mental and emotional aspects that one could find in oppression. This happened in times of trouble, when believers have no where to find help for their difficulties, except God.

God can be a refuge when you run to Him for justice. When others are falsely accusing you of something which is untrue, there is no need to panic or be anxious about. Just go to God and let Him vindicate you accordingly. Just present the truth as it is with a clear conscience. If no one believes you, so be it. Truth will out!

God can also be a refuge when you run to Him for forgiveness. When you realize you have sinned, confess to God and repent. He will forgive and let His righteous hand be your Guide to the right path that leads to reconciliation. Do not be afraid to own up your mistake and be sure to repent of your sins and not let it happen again.

Verse 10, “And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”

This knowledge of God's name is not a mere cognitive knowledge but faith-based knowledge that is planted in the heart of a sinner. This knowledge brings about an intimate relationship with God that is bought by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who truly know God will learn to trust Him. Like David, he will not turn to men or self but God alone. And because of the trust that he had in God, he knew God can be trusted fully and completely. And the most comforting part of this trust includes knowing that God will not abandon him when he needs Him most.

C. God Remembers His People

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

Praises are declarations made to testify of God's marvellous works. It can be done by mere words or in song. The psalmist chose to sing it and he calls upon all to sing together with him. Praise is definitely more than nice words but words that exalt the person and works of God before His whole creation.

The significant mention of God who dwells in Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem, calls for remembrance that God chose to rest His presence among His people, Israel. The name "Zion" means "guiding pillar". God is truly a "guiding pillar" to Israel. This is God's doings that must be declared and praised among His people.

Verse 12, "When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble."

As much as we remember God as a God of grace, mercy and love, let us not forget that He is also a God of holiness, justice and righteousness. This means that when we sinned against God, He will not close an eye to our sins and let us go unpunished. He will chastise us and discipline us until we repent and return to the right path.

When God makes inquisition for blood, it means that God will search all out to determine if we are guilty of sin or not. If we are, then we will be called to account for it. And here it is simply stated, he remembered them. In other words, God's judgment is sure and He makes no mistake about it.

By remembering them, He wanted us to know that we must take sin seriously and if we are truly guilty of committing sin against God, we must immediately repent and return to Him. Otherwise His "sugarcane" will be ready to put into use to spank us so that we will return to the right path again.

Those who refused to repent are those who refused to humble themselves. They probably take God for granted and even believe that He has forgotten all their wickedness. This is far from the truth!

Those who humbled themselves are the ones who will cry to God for mercy. And the promise to them is God will not forget them. In other words, God will forgive them and restore them to the right standing of their relationship and fellowship again. This is important to every believer who seeks to walk right with God.

Verse 13, "Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble *which I suffer* of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death:"

What is the cry of the humble that the Lord will not forget? It is the cry for God's mercy. The psalmist acknowledges that all that he needs now in the midst of all his troubles is the mercy of God.

What can the mercy of God do to him? By appealing to God's mercy, the psalmist knows that God can easily remove all his troubles away from him or he could have allow more troubles to come and let the enemy crush him to death. He did not run to the enemy for mercy but to God. This is remarkable because in so doing, David is showing the evidence who has the ultimate control and power over all.

As king, David did not seek the Lord to consider all the works and services he had done in His name. David acknowledges God as the higher King and Lord of his life. He truly believes that only God can deliver him out of his present troubles. David knew that his current situation came about due to the attack launched against him by his enemies. And he described them as those who hate him. Whatever reason for the hatred is not given. It could be for envy's sake that they were jealous of David's success as the king of Israel that God is blessing him.

And David is seeking God to deliver him from the gates of death. This shows that David's life is in danger. God is the One who put David on the throne. And for those who try to usurp the throne or seek to overthrow him are putting themselves against God and His plan for Israel.

David is sure that he has not done anything wrong that is unjust to his enemies. He asks God to consider his trouble, meaning to say that he is asking God to thoroughly screen through his situation, for he truly is suffering for an unjust cause. And he is sincerely asking God for mercy to deliver him out of all these troubles.

Verse 14, "That I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation."

David is not afraid of suffering. He is more inclined to testify how God is good to him by delivering out of all his troubles. He looked forward to the deliverance in order to declare God's goodness and faithfulness upon His people. God indeed remembers His people. He did not forget them and cast them aside.

The gate is where the people enter or leave the city. Great volume of human traffic is seen at the gate. And David wanted to praise God right at the gate so that those entering the city or leaving the city will hear of God's goodness and faithfulness. The city of Jerusalem is a great city at the time of David. Israel was in great economic success where people came to know God because of the powerful reign of David as the king of Israel. That was the whole purpose of Israel: to make God known to the whole world.

David declares that at the gate he will rejoice in the salvation that God has given him. This is the most basic thanksgiving that could ever be uttered from a child of God. And David was not ashamed of God at all, which many believers today somehow are afraid to make their faith known among their peers. David wanted to make God known and how he as a king submits to a King higher than him, and he is calling upon all to do the same.

Salvation is truly a gift from God. It cannot be earned or bought with money. And we are to learn from the psalmist that possessing such salvation gives us every reason to rejoice in the Lord.

D. God Outsmarts His Enemies

Verse 15, "The heathen are sunk down in the pit *that* they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken."

From the way God deals with His enemies, we see His wisdom and power beyond our human understanding. What the heathen had planned to do to destroy God's people were in the end destroyed by their own doing. Is this not God's wisdom? The pit that they dug was meant to bury God's people in it, instead they themselves were buried in it. The net to catch God's people turned out to be a snare to themselves when they find their legs entangled in it. No one can outsmart God. Are you on the Lord's side or are you against Him? You decide!

Verse 16, "The LORD is known by the judgment *which* he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah."

Although God outsmarts His enemies, He is not the Author of sin and evil. God is always holy, just and righteous. God needs not sin in order to reign over His enemies. In His sovereignty, He allows sin to be present simply because the ultimate end is that His name will be glorified. That's why the psalmist testified that the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth. The Lord needs not become evil like His enemies in order to win over them. God is God, and He alone by His Word, can destroy them completely.

Again the psalmist testified how the wicked falls into his own trap. He sets to trap God's people with all his careful planning and yet in the end, he ends up being caught by his own doing. That is utter humiliation to the enemies, isn't it?

The word "Higgaion" occurs three other times in Psalm 19:14 (meditation), Psalm 92:4 (solemn sound) and Lamentations 3:61 (imaginings). It is believed that the word occurs here is for the purpose to meditate in a solemn manner. And together with the word "selah", it means the worship song is to make a short pause over here for the purpose to solemnly reflect over what has been sung, especially God's judgment of the enemies.

E. God Prevails Over His Enemies

Verse 17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God."

We live in a world that goes about in life as if God is dead. But the world will be in for the great shock of their life when God judges and prevails over them. Hell literally means the world of the dead. This is not ordinary as in the death which all men will end up including believers. This must mean the just punishment that God has rightly meted to all who perish without Christ.

Although it is clear that Satan is the god of this world, there are evidences in this world that God truly exists. From the creation, man has no excuse not to know God. Therefore all sinners will be judged according to this light of nature which clearly reveals the presence of God in their midst. Instead they chose to worship the creation than the Creator.

That includes all the nations that forget God. The word "forget" implies the knowledge known that is now ignored or disregarded. How can the Gentile world ignore God when it is clear to them that there is indeed a Creator? How can Israel ignore God when the law points clearly to Jesus as the way, the truth and the life? As such, the unbelieving world, both Gentiles and Jews will be judged for their ignorant and unbelief.

Verse 18, "For the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall *not* perish for ever."

It may seem the wicked are getting their way and not punish for their evil deeds. But here the psalmist assures the suffering believers that they are not forgotten by God. God remembers them.

As much as the poor expects to be fed and delivered, God Himself will see to it and give them greater than what they expected. Many of them expected to be physically fed and delivered from their suffering.

But God gives them the eternal blessedness that provided them beyond the temporal blessings enjoyed in this life. The glorified body is more than what we could have asked for because it is a perfect body that is fit for heaven and will never die or be hungry ever again. It will not be subjected to sickness or the elements of the world.

Verse 19, “Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight.”

David cried to the LORD to arise. The word “arise” means to stand up and take up the prominent position of power and authority. The reason for this is that truly God in all His justice and righteousness prevail finally over His enemies. For God to rise also means that is an appeal not to let man prevail. Man should not and must not be given the last word and final act of sin. Let them all be judged in the sight of the LORD! He cried to his covenantal LORD to prevail over all of his enemies, who were also the LORD’s enemies, since David was doing the will of the LORD.

He may be David’s LORD but He is also the Creator of the whole heaven and earth! Therefore, all men must stand before Him and be judged by Him. There is no escape. The LORD is not only the God of Israel but of the whole world.

Verse 20, “Put them in fear, O LORD: *that the nations may know themselves to be but men.* Selah.”

Make these nations afraid of God so that they may realize that they are only puny men. Who are they to fight against God? David contrasted their mortality and frailty with the LORD’s immortality, power and might.

Men have invented spacecrafts that can bring them into the stratosphere. Men have made medical advancements that seek to prolong life. They have made overwhelming technological advancements today before our very eyes. Yet all these are nothing in the sight of God, for mortal man remains frail and foolish before the almighty God.

The fear of God will cause men to see their frailty and their accountability to the Creator who created him. The only safe passage is to return to God whom they have rebelled and to make right with Him through the only channel made available for them. This channel is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. May God help us. Amen.