



Bible Study
Biblical Theology of Psalms
Lesson 9: Psalm 9

INTRODUCTION

Psalm Summary:

Psalm 9 praises God's justice through his universal reign to bring judgment to the earth.

Outline

1. 1-12 Praise of God
2. 13-20 Prayer to God

OBSERVATION

Psalm 9 was written by David, as the superscription ascribes it to him. No occasion is mentioned. It is directed to the choirmaster "upon Muthlabben." The term *muthlabben* is somewhat uncertain. As a compound of Hebrew words, it means death of a son. Some think it refers to the death of David's son Absalom. The text of the psalm doesn't correspond to that time recorded in 2 Samuel 18-19. Also, the enemies referred to in this psalm are the nations of the earth and not of David's own nation following Absalom in rebellion against his throne. Other scholars have suggested it could be a reference to a tune for singing the psalm, and this seems most likely.

Psalm 9 is a hymn of praise and has some of the conventional features of a praise hymn. The psalm begins with a call to praise, or a declaration of praise (1-2). The psalm contains a catalog of God's praiseworthy acts and attributes (3-18), and ends with a concluding prayer (19-20).

Psalm 9 is most textually connected to Psalms 2 and 7. Many statements in this psalm are future oriented. The scope of the psalm covers the entire earth. The psalm lacks specific references to events in David's life. Considering these features, the psalm is primarily eschatological, looking forward to future fulfillment.

Walk Through Psalm 9

Verses 1-2 begin the psalm by expressing praise to God. These verses use repetition to express complete praise with the terms praise, be glad, and rejoice. The opening line and the last line of verse 2 match Psalm 7:17 almost exactly.

Reference to God's works is common in praise psalms. These typically refer to God's past interventions in history as miraculous redemptive acts, e.g., exodus from Egypt in Psalm

106:7, 22. Sometimes the reference is to God's daily works (Psalm 71:17), or even to God's word (Psalm 119:18).

The psalm continues with praise for about the first half of the psalm and then alternates prayer and praise until concluding with prayer. Verses 3-6 praise God's righteous judgment on enemies. Verses 3-4 remind us of Psalm 7 where David pleads his innocence in suffering and calls for God to judge his enemies, but verses 5-6 obviously go beyond any temporal deliverance of David to be realized in the Son of David.

God's judgment on the enemies means they fall and perish (3). The enemies are rebuked, destroyed, and their names perish (5). Their cities are destroyed and their remembrance perishes (6).

The word for *heathen* in verse 5 is also translated nations at other occurrences. This is the second occurrence of the Hebrew word in the Psalms. The first use of the word is in Psalm 2:1 & 8. The word is used five times in this psalm (2, 15, 17, 19, & 20). The nations are introduced in Psalm 2 and a pattern is provided there for the nations that runs consistently throughout the Psalms. The nations oppose God and his anointed King. God responds to their rebellious scheming by installing his Anointed Son/King in Zion (Jerusalem) to bring judgment to the earth. The unrepentant nations are crushed. The nations are invited to kiss the Son, submit to him, and put their trust in him to be saved from his wrath. The earlier occurring psalms in the collection tend to focus more on the judgment of the nations, while later psalms tend to speak more of their salvation and envision a future time when they worship the Lord and his King. Earlier mentions of salvation of the nations can be found in psalms such as Psalm 18:49 and 22:27-28.

Verses 7-12 look forward to complete righteous judgment. These verses speak of the universal kingship of God in the future, bringing judgment to the earth to establish righteousness. His dwelling in Zion speaks to his choosing and placing his name there. In David's time, the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem and remained there in a tent with an altar on the temple site.

David previously spoke of the destruction God's judgment brings on the wicked. Here, he speaks of the salvation God's judgment brings to the righteous. God is a refuge for the oppressed, the weak and vulnerable. He vindicates them, proving he has not, or does not, forsake those who put their trust in him. Verse 12 ends the straight run of praise in this psalm.

Verses 13-14 form a prayer for mercy and brings David back to his present time. These verses help to show the future orientation of the praises. David prays for deliverance from troubles that obviously threaten his life. He has already spoken in terms of enemies taking his life and God delivering his life (Psalm 6:5; 7:5). He also expresses his death, unless God intervenes in Psalm 13:3-4. Finally, the reference to the daughter of Zion is a reference to the people of Israel in restoration (Isaiah 62:11).

Verses 15-18 go back to praise God's righteous judgment. These verses speak of judgment

in terms of a great future reversal. The wicked will receive according to their works and all the plots and rage against God will undo them. The wicked are obviously in power positions and are contrasted with the needy and the poor. They will not always suffer injustice and the wicked will not always prosper.

The pit and the net are images of hunting snares. The work of their hands suggests their schemes and devices. The reversal imagery of retribution affirms the justice of their judgment. The word for *hell* (17) is *sheol*, which means grave. David expects to be saved from death and the wicked will go to it.

Verses 19-20 are the concluding prayer of the Psalm. The call to God to arise is echoed from Psalm 3:7 and 7:6. This call appeals to God's sovereign power to execute justice. This calls for the judgment of the nations. God acts and the nations know they are mere men. This reminds us of Revelation 6:16, when men will call on the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of him on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb.

INTERPRETATION

What does Psalm 9 teach?

God's Universal Kingship

This psalm uses God's name, Most High (2), which speaks of God's supremacy and position over all his creation. The psalm refers to his throne and judgment (4), which is his right and power to execute judgment. The psalm refers to the eternal nature of his universal dominion and his throne as prepared for judgment (7). He will seek, or require, blood at the hands of all the murderers and bloodthirsty (12). Throughout the psalm, life and death are in his hands. He can lift David up from the gates of death (13), and he can turn wicked nations into the grave (17). His universal kingship establishes righteousness, so the righteous, those who put their trust in him and take refuge in him, will be delivered (4, 9-10, 12-13, 18).

Warning to the Nations

This psalm has the first mention of the nations after Psalm 2. The context of Psalm 2 shapes our reading of this psalm and other references to the nations in the Psalms. Psalm 9 has an overwhelming message of judgment, but verse 17 hints at mercy. God's judgment does not preclude repentance, but rather encourages it as Psalm 2:11-12 charges the nations to kiss the Son and put their trust in him. Later psalms look forward to those out of the nations who do repent and kiss the Son (Psalm 18:49; 22:27-28; et al).

The Messianic Hope

Seeing the connections with Psalm 2 points us to the Messiah. God's universal reign in

the heavens above the earth is pictured in both (Psalm 9:2, 4-7; 2:4-5, 8). God's dwelling in Zion mentioned here in verse 11 will be realized in the installation of God's Anointed Son/King in Zion (Psalm 2:6-7). Through his Anointed he will bring judgment to the earth (Psalm 2:8-12).

David's reference to death in verse 13 comes in the midst of a mostly future oriented psalm. He suffered innocently at the hands of his enemies, but is lifted up from the gates of death. This verse is not quoted in the New Testament, but Psalm 16:10 is quoted. Both Peter and Paul quote that verse as a prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:27-31; 13:35-38). It's not difficult to see Psalm 9:13 fitting that same pattern.

The word used for lifting up in verse 13 is used in Psalm 3:3, where it refers to being exalted to kingship. The lifting up here from the gates of death results in God's praise shown in the gates of the daughter of Zion (14). We see this will be fulfilled in the return of the Messiah (Isaiah 62).

APPLICATION

What does Psalm 9 say to modern readers?

1. Understanding Psalm 9 helps us understand the sovereignty of God means his justice will come to this earth. We have the added benefit of Christ's first coming and his promise to return. This gives us hope and helps us in prayer so that we are not overcome by God's enemies. Their prosperity will not last forever.
2. Understanding Psalm 9 also helps us understand how we should praise God now for what he has done, is doing, and will do. This would include proclaiming the gospel to the nations.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology of the book of Psalms. Each lesson typically covers one Psalm. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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