

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message The Wonders of God's Righteous Judgments

Scripture Psalm 9

Writing poetry was just one of David's many unique gifts. During his lifetime he was also a shepherd of the family's flocks, a successful military leader, and king of Israel. His special gifts of poetic expression and music were initially appreciated by people more than three thousand years ago and, since then, untold numbers of people have gained comfort and encouragement from his words. We have the benefit of reading his poetry. Unfortunately we don't have any recordings of his singing or playing the harp. (!) Too bad. He had a reputation of being a really good performer.

While still a teen-ager, David was brought into King Saul's court to help with an unusual problem. Saul suffered from some form of mental and emotional instability. Scripture explains the cause of Saul's condition in this way: "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul and an evil or injurious spirit from the LORD tormented him" (*I Samuel 16:14*). For a period of time it was David's responsibility to play the harp and sing to Saul in order to calm his troubled soul. "Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul and he would feel better" (*I Samuel 16:23*).

Today we are going to think about Psalm 9. From the subscription under the title we take note that the Psalm was written "for the director of music" and that the text was "to be sung to the tune of" a selection known as "The Death of the Son." That's all we know about the origin of this Psalm. There isn't any other information in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts to help us.

Before we read, let me suggest the theme of the Psalm so you have something to look for. The Psalm is a reflection on the "wonders" of God. Often the "wonders" of God are called "miracles," such as the plagues in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the food provided to the Hebrews while they wandered around the desert areas for 40 years. That is not the meaning of "wonders" in this Psalm. The theme concerns the wonders of God's righteous judgments. As we read, look for words and phrases that describe God's rule and authority over the nations.

Read Psalm 9

The mood of the Psalm is set in verses 1 and 2. David expressed his gratitude and joy by using five emphatic verbs: “I will praise,” “I will tell (or declare),” “I will be glad,” “I will rejoice,” and “I will sing.” David’s gratitude and joy came from his inner being, “with all my heart,” and with outward public expression, “his telling and singing” to others.

David’s gratitude and joy were directed to the “LORD.” When the word “LORD” is written in capital letters, it means “Yahweh,” sometimes translated “Jehovah.” David also sang praise to the “name of the Most High.” In Hebrew, this was “Elyon,” meaning “the sovereign, all-surpassing God.” Both names appear together in other Psalms. For example, “For you, O Yahweh, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods” (*Psalm 97:9*). David’s praises were directed properly — to “Yahweh, the Most High.”

David was filled with praise on account of all that the LORD had done in history. He referred to these as “the wonders of Yahweh.” As I mentioned earlier, these “wonders” are not, in this Psalm, the miraculous acts of the LORD, but His sovereign judgments of evil and evildoers.

In verse 3 David began to explain the theme. His enemies were not able to stand before the LORD. They were “turned back; they stumbled and perished.” David faced many enemies in his lifetime. There was the giant, Goliath, the Philistines, and other ethnic groups. There were even enemies among his own people. He was on the run from the jealous King Saul for about 25 years. During those years he led his army into many perilous situations, yet he was always victorious because the LORD was with him.

Verses 4, 5, and 6 continue this theme of the destruction of the wicked. Let me remind you of the context of Israel’s history. Before Israel entered the land of Canaan, the LORD had promised to deliver the inhabitants of the land to His people. He said He would go ahead of the Israelites “like a devouring fire,” but that it would be up to the Israelites to actually drive the Canaanites out of the land, to annihilate them and take possession of the land (*see Deuteronomy 7-9*). Unfortunately, the Israelites were not obedient to God and, as a result, even after 350 years, they still had not taken complete possession of the land. That’s when David came on the scene.

David was used by the LORD to finally eliminate the threats of the enemies of Israel. In verses 3 through 6 David gave all the credit for his success to the LORD. It was the LORD who “upheld David’s cause,” and “rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked.” In the book of II Samuel there are several statements about what the LORD did in response to David’s obedience, such as: “He became more and more powerful because the LORD God Almighty was with him” (*II Samuel 5:10*). In II Samuel chapter 8, there is a record of the major battles fought by David and the armies of Israel. It states that, “Yahweh gave David victory wherever he went” (*II Samuel 8:6, 14*). David had the desire to please God, and he was not afraid to be engaged in the LORD’s battles, and the promises of the LORD were fulfilled through David.

The next section of the Psalm, verses 7 through 10, is David’s testimony to the greatness of the LORD. He acknowledged that the LORD was in control of the peoples of the world, that the LORD “would reign forever,” and that “He had established his throne for judgment.” David knew that “The LORD would judge the world in righteousness,” and “govern the people with justice.”

In this Psalm, David celebrated and rejoiced for two reasons. First, he was glad about the LORD’s various destructive actions — His destroying, blotting out, and rooting out of wicked people, and secondly, he was glad that the LORD’s methods of judgment involved righteousness and justice. The concepts of “righteousness” and “justice” were, and still are, very important to the people of God. They relate to the reasons God rejects some people, those who are wicked, and accepts other people, those whose faith and conduct please Him.

Verses 9 and 10 explain that the LORD is a “refuge” and “a stronghold” for those who “put their trust in him.” By personal experience, David knew that the LORD watched over and protected all who “seek Him,” no matter what difficult circumstances they might be in. David wanted everyone to understand that the LORD is righteous and just in taking care of “those who know His name,” and, likewise, He is righteous and just in condemning those who are wicked and reject Him. David understood this concept very well. Back in verse 4 he had acknowledged that the LORD had “upheld his right and his cause” because he had obediently done what the LORD wanted him to do in engaging the enemies of Israel. The LORD had not forsaken him in his many times of trouble.

David wanted everyone to “sing praises to the LORD, and to proclaim among the nations what the LORD had done.” Verses 11 and 12 are a kind of summary of what David had been explaining. We are informed that God’s “throne,” which was mentioned two times previously, is located “in Zion.” Zion is one of the names for the city of David, or Jerusalem, but it also refers specifically to the temple, the place where God maintained His presence among His people. David was emphasizing the remarkable truth that Yahweh, the Almighty One who reigns forever over the nations of the world, was present among, and hence, close to, His chosen people.

David wanted the people to “proclaim among the nations what the LORD had done.” Remember that David began this Psalm with the words, “tell of the wonders” of the LORD’s righteousness and justice. The Israelites were to proclaim this truth to the gentile world. They were to proclaim among the nations that the LORD “avenges the blood” of those who suffer abuse and injustice at the hands of evildoers, and that He “does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.” The Israelites were to warn the gentiles that the great God over all the earth judges the wicked but protects those who put their trust in Him.

There are a couple of interesting subtle points that David included in this Psalm. For example, he mentioned that the “names of the wicked will be blotted out for ever and ever” and “even the memory of them will perish,” whereas the LORD will remember” forever and ever those who put their trust in His name.

In the first 12 verses David was taking a backward look at his experiences. Yahweh had been faithful in protecting him from his enemies for many years and David wanted his readers to learn from his personal testimony. Beginning in verse 13 there is a shift in the context. David began to speak about his current situation. He reminded Yahweh that his troubles were not yet over. Even while he was king, David had enemies who harassed and persecuted him. At the time of the writing of this Psalm, David felt that his troubles were so severe that he was at “the gates of death.” Therefore, He pleaded for the LORD to have mercy on him and to lift him out of his current precarious situation.

Notice the reason he gave for wanting his life to be preserved and extended: he wanted to “declare the praises of the LORD in the gates of the Daughter of Zion.” The expression “Daughter of Zion” is an idiom referring to the people of Jerusalem. David wanted future opportunities to declare the praises of the LORD to his fellow Israelites. Reports of his “salvation” would be a testimony to the LORD’s protection and care. The word “salvation” also means “deliverance” from danger.

Did you catch the clever way David contrasted his status? He wanted to be lifted from the “gates of death” and positioned at the “gates of the Daughter of Zion.” He wanted his message to be heard by the Israelites, so that they would be encouraged if one of the surrounding heathen nations would launch an attack. In the last part of this Psalm, David was no longer thinking of personal enemies. Instead, he wanted the Israelites to think about national enemies — to be concerned about “the hostile nations” around them.

The first important point that David wanted to get across was that those who wickedly attack others bring destruction on themselves. David used poetic words which gave a very clear picture of what would happen — “the nations” will “fall into the pit they have dug,” “their feet will be caught in the net they have hidden,” and they will be “ensnared by the work of their own hands.” This is the nature of sin and wickedness. Transgressions “boomerang” on perpetrators of evil and destroy them. Evil has a double consequence; it turns back on evildoers in this life and also determines their eternal destination. David had seen his enemies destroyed, and he wanted all Israel to hear his testimony so that they would put their trust in the mercy and justice of God when they were attacked by enemies.

The Israelites needed to recognize that they might be in a future position of need and affliction. David’s experience could be their experience. In verses 17 and 18 David contrasted the nations which “forget God” and suffer consequences with those who will not be forgotten by God. In Old Testament thinking, “remembering God” was a term which described on-going unbroken faith and confidence in God. “Forgetting God” had the opposite meaning of turning away from God and ignoring Him. David wanted his countrymen to understand that the LORD would not forget those who remember Him, while those who forget Him had no hope of escaping judgment and punishment. He wanted the Israelites to understand about the “deliverance” available for the righteous and, in contrast, the “pit,” “net,” “snare,” and “grave” awaiting the wicked nations.

This Psalm concludes with series of requests: “Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph,” “let the nations be judged in your presence,” “let the nations know they are but men.” These statements are a logical conclusion to the Psalm. Let me explain. When enemies attacked David they did not realize that they were actually dealing with the God of David. The LORD had promised to be a “refuge” and a “stronghold” for His chosen people. As the previous verse indicated, the enemies who “forget God” cannot appreciate the power and authority of the One who rules over everything.

David’s prayer was that the LORD would reveal His presence to the nations. God had done this at other times. Think about the way He revealed Himself to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. During the plagues, the Egyptians quickly learned that their political and religious powers were insignificant compared to the LORD’s. Or think about the way God revealed His power when the city of Jericho was destroyed. The phrase, “Strike them with terror,” was David’s request that the LORD would reveal Himself in such a way that the nations would be convinced of their weak and limited nature, their frail mortality. The nations needed to know that they could not compete against God. All people need to have a soul-searching fear and respect of God.

This psalm should give us, as present day believers, confidence in God's justice. Sometimes we look only to eternity as the time when all will be set right. Psalm 9 helps us to understand that God is working now to maintain righteousness and justice. We may not have the dramatic experiences of David to prove how God is intervening against our enemies, but God is protecting His people now just like He protected David. As verse 7 states, “The LORD reigns forever. He has established his throne for judgment” and verse 9, “The LORD is a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know the name of God will put their trust in Him.”