

# Wicked Chaos, Godly Order

*Acrostic Theology*

- Psalm 9:1 *To the choirmaster: according to Muth-labben.  
A Psalm of David.*
- א (aleph, ' ) **A**ll my heart will give thanks to the LORD; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.  
<sup>2</sup> I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.
- ב (bet, b) <sup>3</sup> **B**ack my enemies turn, they stumble and perish before your presence.  
<sup>4</sup> For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.
- ג (gimel, g) <sup>5</sup> **C**learly, you have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; forever and ever out their name you have blotted ד (dalet, D).
- ה (he, h) <sup>6</sup> **E**nd came to the enemy in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.
- ו (vav, v) <sup>7</sup> **F**or the LORD<sup>1</sup> sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice,  
<sup>8</sup> For he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.  
<sup>9</sup> For the LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.  
<sup>10</sup> For those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.
- ז (zayin, z) <sup>11</sup> **G**o to the LORD with praises, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds  
<sup>12</sup> For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.
- ח (het, ch) <sup>13</sup> **H**ave mercy on me, O LORD! See my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the

<sup>1</sup> Yahweh is literally the first word, but in Hebrew you can add the conjunction “and” to the word, making it one word. Thus, the verse starts with *vuv* and also has Yahweh as the first word.

gates of death,

<sup>14</sup> that I may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation.

ט (tet, t) <sup>15</sup> Into the pit that they made, the nations have sunk; in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught.

<sup>16</sup> The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Higgsion. Selah

י (yod, y) <sup>17</sup> Just as the wicked shall return to Sheol, so will all the nations that forget God.

כ (kaf, k) <sup>18</sup> Know this: the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

<sup>19</sup> Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you!

<sup>20</sup> Put them in fear, O LORD! Let the nations know that they are but men! Selah

ל (lamed, L) **Psalm 10:1** LORD, why do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

**MISSING LETTERS:** מ (m), נ (n), ס (s), ע (‘), פ (p), צ (ts)

<sup>2</sup> In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

<sup>3</sup> For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

<sup>5</sup> His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them.

<sup>6</sup> He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet evil."

<sup>7</sup> His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

<sup>8</sup> He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;

<sup>9</sup> he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he

draws him into his net.

<sup>10</sup> The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might.

<sup>11</sup> He says in his heart, "God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it."

**ק** (*qof, q*) <sup>12</sup> **Q**uickly, rise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted.

<sup>13</sup> Why does the **wicked** renounce God and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"?

**ר** (*resh, r*) <sup>14</sup> **R**emember their mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless.

**ש** (*shin, sh*) <sup>15</sup> **S**eparate into pieces the arm of the **wicked** and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none.

<sup>16</sup> The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land.

**ת** (*tav, t*) <sup>17</sup> **T**he LORD hears the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear

<sup>18</sup> to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more."

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Psalm 9:1-10:18

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## Chaos

HATE, MISERY, ANXIETY, impatience, meanness, badness, faithlessness, harshness, self-abandonment. These are the passions wrought in us through chaos. Consider a fictional but very possible story. Your day has finally arrived. This morning, First Period, first one up, is your big moment. You finally get to present your science fair project that

you've been working on for months to the whole school. You've never done anything like this before. You've been up all night. You woke up very tired and late. You hop in the shower only to find there is no hot water. Upset, you run to the basement only to find your mom and dad furiously trying to soak up one seriously wet floor. The water-heater blew up in the middle of the night. Suddenly, your triplet infant brothers start screaming at the top of their lungs. Dinner time. "Grab your sister and go feed them," mom says in exasperation. "They are starving."

You scrummage around for some food, but mom ran out of baby formula yesterday and forgot to go to the store. You quick run to the refrigerator to get some milk to warm up, but the power in the whole house is out because the water heater hit a power cord to dad's entertainment center, fried all the electronics, and took the power out of the house. No one realized it. The milk is already starting to sour. You run downstairs, babies crying, dad yelling, mom in tears, and now you're late for school, and everyone lived happily ever after. Right? Hardly. At least not this day.

Chaos. What does it do? How does it make us react? It seems like no matter what kind of chaos it is, it always seems to impose its will upon us. It brings out the worst in us. It

makes us long for simple, ordinary order and regularity.

Now, rather than the mundane world of waking up to disorder, let's take this into the moral world. Several **Nazis** come knocking on your door, burst in, move the table and the carpet under it, only to find a hidden hatch. They open it, shoot all those hiding in the room below, and take you and your family at gun point out of the house. **Boko Haram** storms into your tiny village, starts shooting, kills half the population, all of whom are your friends and family, burns all the remaining men left alive in front of the remaining women and children, and then kidnaps the rest for slavery and sex trafficking. You alone remain, having been able to hide where they can't find you. You're **newly elected government** leader who has promised you the world, on the first day in office, proceeds to overthrow a hundred years worth of democracy and turns your nation into a dictatorship. Immediately, his army goes out and kills everyone who is educated, including anyone with glasses simply for looking smart. Total power and control ensues.

The chaos of evil. It is disruption of moral order; the very moral order every human being counts on for day to day sanity. Even if a person is himself an unqualified sociopathic dictator, he relies upon moral order in his own

life to allow him to disrupt the regularity in the lives of everyone else as he introduces the paralyzing chaos of evil into their lives. People who have it good in this world far too often take moral order for granted. But nothing in this world like that lasts forever. Before long, evil rises up and brings bedlam, turmoil that always increases, always devastates, always destroys. This is what David was dealing with for a good portion of his early life as the anointed king of Israel due to the politics and wars of his day. This is true again in our Psalm(s) today.

## Psalm 9-10

Today we are in **Psalms 9-10**. Why preach both at once? As we have seen, some of the psalms are actually meant to be read together: **Psalms 1-2** (The Man and The Son), **3-4**, and **5-6** (both “evening and morning” psalms). Many earlier songs have had themes that are picked up in later ones. Thus, we read the Psalter not just as a collection of poems, but as one large book. **Psalms 7-9** are **connected to one another by “the name” of God**. The end of 7, the beginning and end of 8, and the beginning of 9 form a chiasm:

“I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.” (Ps 7:17)

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps 8:1)

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps 8:9)

“I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.” (Ps 9:2)

This device connects these three psalms. Psalm 7 is about God saving David from his enemy—probably king **Saul**. Psalm 8 is about the contemplation of man and the **Son of Man** in the grand scheme of history. Psalm 9 returns to the enemy. Thus, only the Son of Man who has all dominion in an everlasting kingdom can save from the enemy. Importantly, Psalm 10 is also about evil, though its take is a little different, at least at first glance.

Many have thought Psalm 9 was **written after David killed Goliath**. This idea of Goliath comes from the **Superscription**: “**To the choirmaster: according to the Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.**” Yet another word from the inspired occasion of the Psalm that has been lost to time, most modern commentators simply think *muth-labben* is a musical notation. However, it was understood by many Jews to be an allusion to **1Sa 17:4** where Goliath is said to be “**a man of the champions from the camps of the Philistines,**

Goliath is his name, from Gath.”<sup>2</sup> *Muth* is literally “death.” Like most people, Goliath is said to have died using this word (1Sa 17:50-51). *Labben* is the connector. It can mean “the Son” (here meaning “a great man”), or “white” (the giants are always described as white), or “intermediate,” returning to 1Sa 17 where Goliath comes from between the camps.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the Targum has, “To the singer, concerning the death of the man who went out, a general from among the armies.” It then adds in vs. 6, “You have rebuked the nations of the Philistines; you have destroyed the wicked Goliath; you have blotted out their name forever and ever.”<sup>4</sup>

The LXX takes is a very different interpretation. It reads, “For the end, a Psalm of David, concerning the secrets<sup>5</sup> of the Son.” Remember, this was translated before Jesus ever became a human being. The Church Father

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<sup>2</sup> This is the YLT, except I have replaced its “dualists” with the more common translation “champion.”

<sup>3</sup> A good discussion of this is in William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), 131–132.

<sup>4</sup> **Going Deeper.** This is obviously one of the oldest interpretations of this strange phrase. My own speculation here is that Goliath makes sense of all of the meanings of *muth-labben*, at least in part. If it refers to him, then the possible connection to “the Gittith,” which some interpreted as referring to Gath (Goliath’s home town) in Psalm 8’s superscription becomes more curious, especially as that psalm has David contemplating man’s position as lower than the *elohim* “heavenly beings,” which were the same beings responsible for Goliath’s ancestors coming into existence in the first place (Gen 6:1-4), as Goliath is a *nephlim-rephaim* giant.

<sup>5</sup> Vulgate has “hidden things.”

**Theodoret of Cyrus** notices that a couple Jewish translations (outside of our Targum) read similarly to this and thus concludes with many other Fathers:

In making mention of the son, all of them teach us that this psalm also contains a prophecy of Christ the Lord's victory over death: having bravely and vigorously conquered sin without giving death any occasion for capture, he brought to an end its dominion. Now, the Septuagint called this mystery *secret* since it escaped the notice of everyone including the apostles themselves. The evangelist is witness to this frequent statement of the Lord to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise"; and the evangelist added, "And this was hidden from their eyes" (cf. Lk 18:31-34). Hence blessed Paul also calls out, "We speak of God's wisdom, hidden in mystery, which none of the rulers of this age understood; had they known it, after all, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Co 2:7-8). And again, "the mystery hidden for ages and generations" (Col 1:26). It was proper, therefore, for the Septuagint to call the Son's death a *secret*. (**Theodoret**, on Psalm 9:1).

In this way, Psalm 9 can be viewed not only about a particular wicked enemy whose origins are steeped in unimaginable supernatural horror (some like **Augustine** and **Cassiodorus** saw the Antichrist here; see vs. 19), but also in the coming of the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to destroy every enemy that tries to impose itself upon his universal sovereign rule. As Christ is himself the Singer of the Psalms, perhaps we could even think of something like the poor not perishing forever (9:18) immediately followed by “arise, O LORD” (19),<sup>6</sup> as some kind of hidden mystery of the resurrection.

Turning to **Psalm 10**, you will see that it is one of only four psalms in Book 1 that **does not have a superscription**. The others are **Psalms 1-2**, which we have seen can be read together, one of which is attributed to David in the NT, and both serve as an introduction to the entire Psalter. The other is **Psalm 33** which we have not come to yet. It is therefore

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<sup>6</sup> I was not able to find any Fathers' alluding to this. But the word “arise” (*qum*) is found in passages that do allude to resurrection (cf. Isa 26:19; Hos 6:2. The Isaiah verse is interesting for us because it speaks of the land of the *rephaim*-giants being raised to life). On *qum* and the resurrection in the OT see Leila Leah Bronner, “The Resurrection Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Allusions or Illusions?”, *JBQ* 30.3 (30.3 2002). [http://www.jbq.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/303/303\\_bronner.pdf](http://www.jbq.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/303/303_bronner.pdf), last accessed 10-20-2016.

extremely unusual for Psalms in Book I to not have a context. There is actually a very good reason in this case why Psalm 10 is like this.

The LXX renders Psalm 10 as simply the continuation of Psalm 9. In fact, it numbers 10:1 as 9:21, 10:3 as 9:22, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in the LXX, what we would call Psalm 11, it calls Psalm 10.

Hebrew numbering (Masoretic)	Greek numbering (Septuagint or Vulgate)
1–8	1–8
9–10	9
11–113	10–112
114–115	113
116	114–115
117–146	116–145
147	146–147
148–150	148–150

Why would these Jewish translators of the second century BC do this? Let me explain this by way of a story.

### *A Poem to Three Girls*

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<sup>7</sup> The numbering of all Psalms with superscriptions also varies, as some have the superscription as vs. 1 and the beginning of the context as vs. 2. While others (like the ESV) have both in the same verse. This can make it frustrating and confusing when studying the Psalms, but we need simply remember that the numbering of these things is a much later addition not inspired by God.

Lewis Carroll once wrote a sweet short poem to three little sisters: Lorina, Alice, and Edith Liddell. Alice was his inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland*, when she once asked him to tell her a story while on a boating trip in Oxford.

Little maidens, when you look  
On this little story-book,  
Reading with attentive eye  
Its enticing history,  
Never think that hours of play  
Are your only HOLIDAY,  
And that in a HOUSE of joy  
Lessons serve but to annoy:  
If in any HOUSE you find  
Children of a gentle mind,  
Each the others pleasing ever—  
Each the others vexing never—  
Daily work and pastime daily  
In their order taking gaily—  
Then be very sure that they  
Have a life of HOLIDAY.

My reason for telling you this poem is not for its content, but **for its form**. You may wonder about the form and how

it relates to our Psalm today. Is it the rhyme? The meter? The length? None of these. Rather, the first letter of each line spells out the names of the three girls (LORINAALICEEDITH). This is called [an acrostic poem](#).

[Reformed people love acrostics](#). It seems that whenever we meet someone, we are quick to hand them some [TULIPs](#) (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints). Though I'm Dutch, and tulips are part of my heritage, I prefer [BACON](#) (Bad people, Already elected, Completely atoned for, Overwhelmingly called, Never falling away). Acrostics.

Ancient poets loved to use acrostics too. You find them all over the place, in the ANE, Greece, the early church. One of my favorites is in the Sibylline Oracles. Christians preserved the Oracles, and as they did so, they put their own stamp on these ancient Jewish books. In Book 8, there is lengthy poem that spells the acrostic IEUOUS CHREISTOS THEOU HUIOS SOTER STAUROS (“JESUS CHRIST, GOD’S SON, SAVIOR, CROSS”).<sup>8</sup> Another reason this is so interesting is because those words themselves form another acrostic: ICHTHUS (I substitutes

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<sup>8</sup> See the last page of this sermon for the poem.

for J), which is the Greek word for a fish, which became one of the secret signs Christians used to identify each other in days of heavy persecution. You've probably seen many of these on bumper stickers on the backs of cars:



The reason this kind of a poem is so interesting is because **the form of the poem is actually telling a story** apart from the content of the poem. It's like a secret message, just like some of the translations of the superscription and the Son!

There are many acrostic poems in the Psalter. The most famous is Psalm 119. Each stanza of the poem begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Thus, when you turn in your Bible to that Psalm, you will actually see either the Hebrew letter symbol or the name of the letter beginning each stanza. There are four acrostic poems in the first book of the Psalter. The first is our Psalm(s) today.

**The acrostic begins in Psalm 9.** It, like Psalm 119, is an alphabet acrostic. It begins with the first word of the poem itself starting with the first Hebrew letter *aleph* (א). **Vs. 1** is the primary verse, and **vs. 2** is a supplemental verse attached to it poetically. Using some help from others (which I found

partly incorrect),<sup>9</sup> I've tried to render this poem acrostically at the beginning of our sermon, to help us see what you won't otherwise see in English translations.<sup>10</sup> Using this translation, notice the first two verses:

<sup>1</sup> **All** my heart will give thanks to the LORD; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.

<sup>2</sup> I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High”

“A” is our first letter. So I start it with an “a.” In good Hebrew poetry, line one parallels line two. To give thanks with his heart is to be glad and exult. He recounts God's wonderful deeds and sings praise to the Name Elyon—Most High.

**Vs. 3** begins with a Hebrew word that starts with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet bet (ב). Similarly, Vs. 3 is the primary verse, and **vs. 4** is a supplemental verse attached to it poetically:

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<sup>9</sup> See Gordon Churchyard, “God Will Always Remember You Psalms 9-10: An EasyEnglish Translation with notes on Psalms 9 & 10,” *EasyEnglish* (UK: Wycliffe Associates, 2001), <http://www.easyenglish.info/psalms/psalm009n010-taw.htm>, last accessed Oct 18, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Basically, I've taken the ESV in every place except that where I needed a word starting with the correct letter. I've done everything I can here to keep the words in tact, but some poetic liberty was taken, because it is after all a poem.

<sup>3</sup> **B**ack my enemies turn, they stumble and perish before your presence.

<sup>4</sup> For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.

“B” is our second letter. Hence I put “back.” These verses do something different. **Vs. 3** moves from praising God to David’s enemies. The two halves of the verse explain in parallel form what happens to his enemies when they turn away from God. **Vs. 4** returns to God who judges David with a righteous judgment (a theme we saw in Psalms 7-8). My point for now is that I want to show you that David is setting up a pattern of poetic order. **First letter, two verses, second letter, two verses.** This is the symmetry of the poem. And it is found in other Psalm acrostics such as Psalm 37.

Now, the poem continues with the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, all the way through the 11<sup>th</sup> letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In this way it develops its acrostic. What is important to notice now, however, is that **Psalm 10 begins with the 12<sup>th</sup> letter** of the alphabet. In other words, it continues where Ps. 9 left off. It finishes with the last four. In other words, taken together—and only together—these two psalms form the

complete acrostic. **Aleph to Tav**, or as you might say it in Greek **Alpha to Omega**, the Beginning and the End, the special acrostic of John that refers to Christ (**Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13**).

What is strange about this acrostic in both Psalms is that **letters are missing**. Psalm 8 is missing the 4<sup>th</sup> letter (**d**). Psalm 10 is missing **six letters in a row**. Why might this be? Is it because those Masoretic Soferim scribes were incompetent in their jobs of copying the Scripture, and left out several lines of what is now two incomplete poems, as most scholars suggest? Given that their entire job was to count letters (*soferim* means “counters”) after they copied the text and had to destroy an entire book if even one letter went missing, that’s almost impossible to believe. Or could it be deliberate, actually part of the acrostic “secret” deliberately and brilliantly put there by David to teach his Hebrew audience something? What happens if, instead of being skeptical of the text that we have, we actually presuppose it has been handed down faithfully, like we always see proven when ancient discoveries of the text are discovered in places like Qumran. Maybe there would be a letter from a word that

they misread and miscopied, but certainly not entire lines of text just missing.<sup>11</sup>

Besides the acrostic, there are a host of other features that quite frankly **demand** that this was either originally a single poem or was a dual poem meant to be read together. For example, there are **22 Hebrew letters**, half of this (**11**) is where the divide takes place between these two psalms, meaning each psalm contains half of the alphabet. There are exactly **162 Hebrew words in each Psalm**.<sup>12</sup> There are seven words in the seventh letter verse, eight words in the eighth letter verse, and nine words in the ninth letter verse. The major breaks of the poem have **40 words**, **90 words**, **40 words**, and **90 words**. Inside this, there is a mini chiasm of **7-9-9-9-7 words**.  $40 + 90 = 130$ . There are two of these. The last section has half of this at 65 words. We could keep doing this. The point is, both psalms can be fully trusted and they have to be taken together. David did this on purpose. And I can't even imagine how long this would have taken him to write. The question for a sermon becomes "**why?**"

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<sup>11</sup> This is exactly what one scholar decided to do in an article he wrote explaining why we can trust that these psalms have nothing missing and were deliberately written this way. See **Ronald Benun**, "Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in the First Book of Psalms," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures: Volume 6* 6, no. 55 (2006): 2-23. Available online: <http://www.jhsonline.org/cocoon/JHS/a055.html>, last accessed 10-18-2016.

<sup>12</sup> There are 326 words between the two Psalms. If you take the two *selabs* of Psalm 9 to be poetic markers, then you have exactly 162 words in each psalm.

## Evil Chaos and Psalms 9-10

The Proverb says, “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (Prov 25:2). Biblical study can be tremendously rich even at a surface level, just learning the basics. But this kind of study belongs to the glory of kings. Let us search it out together. I want to use the form of the Psalm itself to teach the theology of the content. Ask any gymnast, diver, or figure skater—**form matters**. It isn’t just what you are able to do. It is how you are able to pull it off. When you see this, it becomes a remarkably **memorable way** of helping us come to a lasting understanding of the deepest theological point of these two Psalms.<sup>13</sup>

In his absolutely fascinating study of these psalms, **Ronald Benun** writes, “Generally, the psalm moves between praise of God for past vindications (9:1–12, 15–16; 10:16–18) and request for God to take action, destroy the wicked, and help the lowly and afflicted (9:15–16, 19–20; 10:1, 12–

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<sup>13</sup> My take on whether they are one psalm or two is that they were deliberately split in two by David, so that we are not dealing with a long Psalm 9 only, but with Psalms 9-10 as the Hebrew Bible has it. They are like first and second acts in a play.

15).”<sup>14</sup> The wicked are ruling in oppression over the suffering. But the Psalm believes strongly that God will remember his people, remain true to his covenant, and so pleads with Him to act.

But there is one substantial disruption of this pattern. This occurs in 10:2-11. These verses describe at length the internal justification that the wicked person uses to defend his actions. The point becomes a kind of reminder to God, “Don’t you see what he is doing? Remember just how wicked these wicked people really are? He doesn’t think you exist. He cares not a wit about you, Lord. Sometimes it feels like you don’t care and won’t do anything either. God, arise! Come to our aid.” This unique section of the two poems just so happens to fit the exact place where the majority of missing letters should have appeared. Why? Let’s look at the specifics of the psalms and then think about what they are saying in relation to the way David wrote them down according to his acrostic.

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<sup>14</sup> Benun, 6. I’m changing his verse number count of Psalm 9 (Psalm 10 has the same number count because there is no superscription) to match that of the ESV.

## *Aleph. Psalm 9:1-2*

As we have seen, the Psalm begins with praising the name of the LORD. *Aleph*. “**All my heart will give thanks.**” David will sing the name by “recounting” the wonderful deeds. The word “**recount**” is the same root word as those “**counters**” I mentioned earlier, those scribes called **the Soferim** who literally counted the number of letters in the texts. The word is *saphar*. It can mean to “recount” or “tell” or more literally “to count.” The LORD told Abram to “count” the number of the stars (**Gen 15:5**). Same word. Is David merely *recounting*, or is he also literally *counting*? I will count your deeds. *Aleph. Bet. Gimel*. The alphabet. David literally is counting! Order is being established in his counting. It is because his God is the God of wonderful deeds. He is the Most High God.

## *Bet. Psalm 9:3-4*

Next, he moves to some particular instance of God’s deeds. *Bet*. “**Back my enemies turn, they stumble and perish before your presence. For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.**” Again, as the superscription was often interpreted, it is probable that the enemy here is **Goliath**.

The word “enemy” next appears in **vs. 6**, “End came to the enemy in everlasting ruins; their cities your rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.” Again, the Targum puts a specific event here saying, “You have rebuked the nations of the Philistines; you have destroyed the wicked Goliath; you have blotten out their name forever and ever.”

David is most likely thinking not only of Goliath, but of his other giant “brothers,” who were killed by his mighty men in the last great giant wars of the OT (**2Sa 21**; **1Ch 20**). But also the previous wars against Og and Sihon in the days of Moses, and then again against the sons of Anak in the days of Joshua would come to mind. This major theme of the OT that so many miss is more true for David than anyone else. Where are the mighty giants of old now that Goliath is dead, the men of renown, the wicked children of the sons of God? They perish in the face of Yahweh’s tiny mighty men, for Yahweh fights for Israel and defeats literal giants out of their land. The order of the Psalm stays perfect. God is in total control.

### *Gimel. Psalm 9:5*

**Suddenly**, we come to the first disruption in the order. *Gimel*. “**C**learly, you have rebuked the nations; you have

made the wicked perish; forever and ever out their name you have blotted.” There is no second pairing verse here. Instead, you have the first instance of the words “nations” and “wicked” (*rasha*).<sup>15</sup> In the context of Goliath, these “nations” are those seven nation lists,<sup>16</sup> who were associated with or were themselves giant clans, some of which were literally “blotted” out (cf. Dt 25:19). The whole purpose of the conquest was to destroy *these* nations, and in killing Goliath, a last remnant of them was taken out of Israel.

At the end of this verse “g”, David does not move to “d”, but skips the only letter of this psalm and goes to the fifth letter “h.” Though, there is an interesting “d” in vs. 5. It is the last letter of the verse. It starts with “g” and ends with “d.” Is it a coincidence that this may very well be about “Goliath” and “David?” The more important thing to see here though is that **the disruption occurs and will occur whenever the psalm contemplates the wicked.** The wicked, it seems, bring chaos to the otherwise masterful order of Psalms 9-10. Similarly, the wicked bring chaos to all of history, including our lives now. Wicked people will never

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<sup>15</sup> Poetically close to *rapha* (*rephaim*), of which Goliath was one (2Sa 20:16). See my Giants book, p. 167-68.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gen 15:20-21; Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5, 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; Num 13:29; Deut 7:1; 20:17; Josh 3:10; 9:1; 12:8; 24:11; Jdg 3:5; 1 Kgs 9:20; 2 Chron 8:7; Ezra 9:1.

be able to bring order out of the chaos that is their very essence. This you see from the *form* of the poems, which imposes itself upon the content to work at a double, deeper level.

### *He. Psalm 9:6*

While still contemplating the wicked, he moves to the fifth letter. *He*. “**End came to the enemy in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.**” Again, there is no paired verse to this fifth letter. The verse stands alone, keeping the chaos of the form going. His thought is still on the enemy. We are reminded now of the cities that Joshua rooted out, and again we think of the giants and those associated with them perishing. For these were the peoples God commanded to have utterly and totally obliterated from the face of the earth. “**Everlasting ruins,**” is what happens when the wicked die and go to hades, found later in **vs. 17**. But this language reminds me of the giant *rephaim* that are said to greet the souls of evil people when they die and go to hades (see **Prov 2:18-19; 9:18; 21:16; Isa 14:9**). Dante got it from the Bible. A terrifying prospect indeed.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See here **note #6**.

## *Vav. Psalm 9:7-10*

Suddenly, David thinks again of the LORD and the order of the poem is not only restored, but four-fold restored. **Vv. 7-10** each begin with the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet: *vav*. “**For the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice”** (7). The LORD has defeated. David is counting again! “**For the LORD judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness”** (8). He is king no matter who it is that defies the Living God. “**For the LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble”** (9). He uses a word (“**stronghold**”) here used in only one verse in the Bible up to this point. It is a psalm of David found in 2 Samuel 22 where he speaks of his Rock, his stronghold, and his Savior. David is singing of Christ! “**For those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD have not forsaken those who seek you”** (10). Amazingly, these four verses have as their first, middle, and last word “Yahweh.” Three Yahwehs, the beginning and end and middle, all in all. Total order restored by God alone.

## *Zayin. Psalm 9:11-12*

The order of the Psalm, its symmetry, its harmony, its beauty, its complexity, its wonder continues in vs. 11. The **seventh** letter *zayin* starts a verse of **seven** Hebrew words. “**Go to the LORD with praises, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds**” (11). As he now sings once more about Yahweh, the verse rightly has its pairing verse added back, “**For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted**” (12). What amazing comfort the king of Israel now gives to the lowliest among his own people. His God is their God. This God looks after all of his own children who are afflicted by the wicked, especially the Lord Jesus who suffered at their hand. In days when you can do absolutely nothing about the evil that is increasing around you, if you will turn to this Lord instead of your own supposed autonomy from his sovereign will, then this verse can actually give you serenity in the midst of chaos. For in the LORD, and only in him, is order restored for the afflicted, no matter what happens around them.

## *Het. Psalm 9:13-14*

Proper form continues in the next two verses. Now the

eight letter *het* begins a verse of eight Hebrew words. “Have mercy on me, O LORD! See my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the gates of death” (13). David knows God can deliver you, because he himself is one of the afflicted. The parallel verse adds, “That I may recount...” (14). Again, counting! 7, 8, 9... “... all of your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation” (14).

### *Tet. Psalm 9:15-16*

Counting God’s deeds is so important, because it roots present deliverance in past truth. David remembers the past again. *Tet*, the ninth letter put into a nine word verse. “Into the pit they have made, the nations have sunk.” (15). Again, he remembers those nations that were destroyed in days gone by. “In the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught.” Like previous Psalms, the ruin of the wicked comes from God, but because of their own sin. God is just, not capricious. His judgments are good, not evil. The wicked are evil, not God.

The paired verse continues, “The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Higgsaion. Selah.”

**Higgaion** can mean “rejoice” or it may be a musical notation to pause. This would have double duty with *selah*, which probably means to reflect. Reflect upon what? The order of God judging and making himself known. But also upon the wicked. Oh, when you think on the wicked, force your mind to think on Christ! Do not stay in their net or chaos. Run to the God of order and stability.

### *Yod. Psalm 9:17*

The wicked are reintroduced again, and appear also in the next verse. The tenth letter *yod*, “**Just as the wicked shall return to Sheol, so will all the nations that forget God**” (17). There is no paired verse. Chaos is returning. The poem is moving off balance again. The wicked are in view. Don’t be wicked O Peoples of the earth. Do not turned to wickedness O Nations who have had the gospel. For in wickedness there is chaos, disorder, disruption, death.

### *Kaf. Psalm 9:18*

In the end of the first half (Ps 9), order is restored. Turning away, returning, the wicked, and the LORD. The twelfth letter *kaf*, “**Know this: the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish**” (18).

God looks after the poor and needy. He is unlike all the other gods. He cares about the plight of the poor. The pair begins the conclusion before intermission. “Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you!” (19). Though he died, he did not perish. The Lord has arisen. He is alive! And he will conquer. A final verse is added for a triplet of encouragement, “Put them in fear, O LORD! Let the nations know that they are but men! Selah” (20). Pause. Reflect. Sob. Trust. Wonder. Then return to Psalm 10.

### *Lamed. Psalm 10:1*

It is one thing to know with your head what God has done in the past and to trust what he can do in the present. It is another to feel something with your heart. It is one thing to know the chaos of evil, but another to experience it. In a theme that will return many times in the Psalter, David asks, “Lord, why do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (10:1). The poem begins with the thirteenth letter (*lamed*). But does not have the paired verse. Something is wrong.

## *Total Formal Chaos. Psalm 10:2-10*

Indeed, the psalmist now contemplates **the longest portion of the wicked** in the two-set psalms. **Six missing letters** should appear here, but they do not. In their place, the wicked (*rasha*) are found three times (**2, 3, 4**), and the related word “evil” (*ra'*) occurs another. God feels far off when the wicked are near. Total established form chaos of the poems ensues. The patterns just stop. Reflecting the heart of the singer in the first verse, nothing is as it should be.

What is the wicked person like? They are **arrogant**. Arrogance is wickedness, not virtue. **“In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor”** (**2**). Like Nimrod the mighty hunter (of men? **Gen 10:8**), the wicked man goes after those less fortunate than himself, those with no means, no money, no material possessions. The poor of this world exist purely for the good pleasure of the wicked person to stomp upon. **“Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.”** Oh, how I pray that would be true of every single person who in such wickedness preys upon our unborn and elderly, our single mothers and the poor of our inner cities, our homeless and our orphans for political or economic gain.

“The wicked boasts” (3). He boasts of his worldly desires. “The desires of his soul, his “greed for gain.” Boasting in yourself, of your power and strength and money is wickedness. “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” For the opposite leads to “curses and renounces the LORD.” He needs no God who has all the world has to offer, at the expense of others.

“In the pride.” The wicked are utterly proud. “The wicked does not seek him” (4). Wickedness turns you into an atheist. Atheists, while perhaps nice people, is a result of wicked rebellion. “All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’”

Sadly, in this life it so often seems like, “His ways prosper at all times” (5). Another common complaint of the psalmist is why do the wicked always seem to prosper while the righteous are so often trounced upon? Then he realizes that this is the life-blood of the wicked. “Your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes he puffs at them.” Like a dragon, he spews his fire to destroy anyone who stands in his way.

He now justifies himself. “He says in his heart, ‘I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet evil’” (6). His atheism now turns to pure, satanic rebellion. He *IS* evil, and yet he thinks he will not meet with it in the

end. He will stand alone as god. He can defy anything he likes, because he believes himself to be the highest authority there is.

He can't contain his evil any longer. “His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity” (7). The wicked cannot help it, for out of the heart come all the words of the mouth. Amazingly, Paul says, “No one seeks God,” citing another Psalm, and in that section that condemns every single person on earth as he quotes vs. 7 (See Rom 3:14). What a damning thing this is, for even as we contemplate those who are obviously not like us, the Apostle says that apart from Christ everyone is this. That would have to include everyone where prior to salvation by Jesus Christ.

Four more verses complete the onslaught of evil. Now it isn't just his mouth, but his eyes. “He sits in ambush in the villages” (8). “He lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket” (9). He is openly, deliberately looking for people to destroy. And these people are, again, the unfortunates, the poor, the helpless, those unable to defend themselves (also vs. 10). Big, tough, strong men they are to have to resort to murdering tiny helpless infants, when they themselves weigh 1,000 pounds. That's manliness, right? So he deceives himself and

says in his heart “God has forgotten ... he will never see it” (11). The circle is complete. God doesn’t care, he thinks. That is the way of the wicked. What then can bring order from this chaos? How can we ever hope to have purpose and beauty restored, hope regained, fear removed?

### *Qof. Psalm 10:12-3*

You remember the LORD. The next letter finally reappears. *Qof*. “**Quickly, rise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted**” (12). The prayer for help is recast. The paired verse returns. Hope is reconfigured in Yahweh. “**Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, ‘You will not call to account’**” (13). There is that word again. Counting. David is counting again. Finally.

### *Resh. Psalm 10:14*

The next letter (*resh*). “**Remember their mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless**” (14). But there is no paired verse. The poem seems wobbly here. Is it going to return to form, or topple to a sad and meaningless end?

## *Shin. Psalm 10:15*

He keeps counting, in spite of the wicked surrounding him. He keeps praying, no matter how it feels, no matter what the chaos feels like, no matter how hopeless it seems, no matter what his eyes tell him about the prosperity of the wicked. Their end is as near as the alphabet and poem. He knows his God is real and will answer. The next to last letter (*shin*), “**Separate into pieces the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none**” (15). LORD, bring total and complete order by stamping out all evildoers wherever they are. The paired verse returns too because, “**The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land**” (16).

## *Tav. Psalm 10:17-18*

Thus he comes to the final letter of his poem and to the perfect restored order of its form. *Tav*. “**The LORD hears the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more**” (17-18). The Psalmist ends with one of the great cries of all who are oppressed and helpless to do anything about it. And he knows his God will answer. His

poem finishes the way it began. His counting is complete. He has recounted all the works of the LORD. His God can and will answer him.

Beloved, we will come upon many psalms like these in the future. But how many will be written in a way such as this? So mysterious is his form. So hidden is its deeper message. David has worked not merely in his content to teach you the great theology of a sovereign and just God gaining victory over the wicked through judgment. He has done it through the very way he has crafted his poem. Remember it.

It is his acrostic. His counting. His secret. Many have come before you and have never had the privilege to see what you have seen today. Just as many have not understood the God who eventually brings this all to pass through his Son: Jesus Christ God Son Savior Cross. **ICHTHUS**. A secret hidden in days past, but revealed to you now in these last days through his brave conquering of his enemies by the foolish means of dying on a cross as a man, The Man, the Son of Man. The Son of David. The End.

*Iesus Christos Theou Huios Soter Stauros* (Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior, Cross)

*An ICHTHUS ("fish") Acrostic Poem in the Sibyl*<sup>18</sup>

	Charlesworth SibOr 8.217-50 <sup>19</sup>	SibOr 8.217-50 <sup>20</sup>
Line		
217	The earth will sweat when there will be a sign of judgment.	In sign of coming judgment earth shall sweat;
218	A king will come from heaven who is to judge	Eternal monarchy shall come from heaven
219	all flesh and the whole world forever when he comes.	Straightway to judge the flesh and all the world
220	Both faithful and faithless men will see God	Outcasts and the elect shall look on God,
221	the Most High with the holy ones at the end of time.	Uplifted at time's end with all the saints,
222	He will judge the souls of flesh-bearing men on the tribunal	Set on his throne to judge all flesh ensouled
223	when the whole world becomes barren land and thorns.	<b>CH</b> aff now and earth shall all the world become;
224	Men will throw away idols and all wealth.	Riches and all their idols people shall break;
225	Fire will burn up land, heaven, and sea,	Earth, sky and sea shall be consumed in flames;
226	pursuing the hunt, and will break the gates of the confines of Hades.	Invading fire shall breach the gates of hell.
227	Then all the flesh of the dead, of the holy ones, will come	Sinner and saint shall rise to day's free light;
228	to the free light. The fire will torture the lawless forever.	Their flesh the fire shall test eternally.
229	Whatever one did secretly, he will then say everything,	Of secret deeds none shall remain unknown,
230	for God will open dark breasts with lights.	Since God's torch shall unlock the heart's recess.
231	A lament will rise from all and gnashing of teeth.	<b>TH</b> en shall all people wail and gnash their teeth;
232	The light of the sun will be eclipsed and the troupes of stars.	Eclipse shall hide the sun and dancing stars,
233	He will roll up heaven. The light of the moon will perish.	Oblivious wrap the heavens and the moon's light,
234	He will elevate ravines, and destroy the heights of hills.	Uplifting hollows, casting down high peaks.
235	No longer will mournful height appear among men.	<b>HU</b> ge sorrow then shall fall on humankind.
236	Mountains will be equal to plains, and all the sea	In peak and plain there shall be no distinction.
237	will no longer bear voyage. For earth will then be parched	Ocean shall bear no ships, as thunderbolts
238	with its springs. Bubbling rivers will fail.	Strip the burned land of springs and sounding rivers.
239	A trumpet from heaven will issue a most mournful sound,	Sounds of lament shall trumpet forth from heaven,
240	wailing for the defilement of limbs and the woes of the world.	Omen of squalor, grief and cosmic pain.
241	The gaping earth will then show the abyss of the nether world.	Then yawning earth shall open Tartarus;
242	All will come to the tribunal of God the king.	Emperors all shall come before God's throne;
243	A river of fire and brimstone will flow from heaven.	Rivers of holy flame shall pour from heaven.
244	There will then be a sign for all men, a most clear seal:	Signs manifest to all people there shall be;
245	the wood among the faithful, the desired horn,	True people shall crave the branches of the cross.
246	the life of pious men, but the scandal of the world,	As people grow pious Christ will shock the world,
247	illuminating the elect with waters in twelve streams.	Unveiling the elect with his twelve springs.
248	An iron shepherd's rod will prevail.	Rod shall be shepherd, ruling as with iron.
249	This is our God, now proclaimed in acrostics,	Our God is this, set forth now in acrostics,
250	the king, the immortal savior, who suffered for us.	Savior immortal, king who died for us.



<sup>18</sup> Chart by Doug Van Dorn.

<sup>19</sup> SibOr 8 in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 423–424.

<sup>20</sup> Mark J. Edwards. *Constantine and Christendom* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 43. Reproduced in *We Believe in the Crucified and Risen Lord*, ed. Mark J. Edwards (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 169–70.