

## **GOD IS JUST**

### **PSALMS 9:1-20**

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Death of the Son"

The correct interpretation of the meaning of the phrase "upon Muthlabben" as transliterated by the KJV is not certain. Some commentators think it is simply the name of the melody to which the psalm was to be sung and other have made arguments that it refers to the "death of a champion" such as Goliath whom David killed.

You can probably think of many situations that have occurred over the past decade that you have just shook your head in disbelief and said something such as "I can't believe it! That is just not fair. That is a miscarriage of justice!" We could spend the whole time relating such things and we probably would not know any more regarding what we could do about correcting the problem than we know at this point. We know from previous studies of other accounts in the Bible that David had experienced both problems and injustice and the Children of Israel had many instances of troubles at the hand of those who literally hated them. In this chapter of the Psalms David gives testimony that we (who belong to the Lord) can look to Him for justice and help in times of troubles. In the same way, we should be doing all we can to make sure to correct injustices where we have any influence.

We can divide this chapter into four sections as we study and learn from it: Praising God (1-2), Trusting God (3-8), Turning to God (9-12), and Praying to God (13-20)

#### **PRAISING GOD**

<sup>1</sup>I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. <sup>2</sup>I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. Psalm 9:1-2 (NASB95)

These two verses are very similar to each other in that they are about praising the Lord. Notice that the first verse is about praising God for what He does (His wonders) and the second verse is about praising Him for Who He is (His name). We will see this dualism repeated in several of the verses that follow.

Our praise for God should overflow from the fullness of joy within us as we marvel at God's greatness (what He does and Who He is). This is akin to the idea Paul expressed in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 of "singing and making melody in (with) our hearts to the Lord." When I read the New Testament passages, I only thought of voiceless praise (in my heart) rather than with or from my heart. When we compare the advice of Paul to that of David, then we are encouraged to give voice ("I will tell") to the praise that comes from our hearts and to share it with others. Telling others of the wonders of God is truly acceptable praise.

True praise comes from the joy that wells up from within us as we realize how great is our God and how much He loves us. We should be careful to not get caught up in praising God only for "what He has done" but also include rejoicing in the One Who has caused it to happen. (God is worthy of our praise regardless of whether or not we can see and appreciate what He has done.)

Rather than our singing praise in our heart (silently) unto the Lord, many times we find ourselves signing aloud words that are on the page of the hymnal but our hearts are not engaged. If we are not careful, we can participate in praise as an exercise of habit and it is little more than a ritual rather than an act of true worship.

In these first two verses David introduced the Psalms and told the worshipers what he was going to do in the next several verses; that is, praise God for what He has done and for Who He is.

## TRUSTING GOD

<sup>3</sup>When my enemies turn back, They stumble and perish before You. <sup>4</sup>For You have maintained my just cause; You have sat on the throne judging righteously. <sup>5</sup>You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever. <sup>6</sup>The enemy has come to an end in perpetual ruins, And You have uprooted the cities; The very memory of them has perished. <sup>7</sup>But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, <sup>8</sup>And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity. Psalm 9:3-8 (NASB95)

In these six verses David related some specifics of WHAT God had done and he pointed out several attributes of God's character that explained WHY He acted as He did on behalf of His people. We see in verse three what God did - made David's enemies turn back. In verse four we find the attribute of being a righteous judge as the explanation. In verses five and six we find that the Lord brought an end to the wicked and did so because He is eternal. We also see that David found confidence in the future in that the Lord will continue to judge the world according to His character of righteousness.

We are not told what the specific situation was that inspired David to write this Psalm. Some have related this Psalm to the events surrounding the death of Goliath when the Philistines turn back: "And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled." (1Sam 17:51) While this Psalm is not generally regarded as Messianic, others would relate the incident in the Garden of Gethsemane when those who came to arrest Jesus fell back when they came upon Him and He identified Himself. One could also relate these verses to the overthrown of the anti-Christ by the returning Christ in the end times, but that seems to be a stretch in the intent.

Of more direct application to our present-day lives, we see an obvious reason we can praise God: He has given us victory over the enemy of our souls. That which David experienced in physical victories finds fulfillment in our spiritual life. We are no longer under the condemnation of the law of sin and death, but have been set free by the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1-2) The strongholds of the enemy can be pulled down and this is part of the continuing ministry of the church (corporately) and the saints (individually).

We can be thankful for the victory we have in Christ Jesus. We can live our lives as conquerors because we are in Christ and Christ is in us and we can look forward with confidence to the future. The ultimate expression of the reign of God will be in the millennial kingdom that is to come and in the New Jerusalem after the final judgment. Before that time we must have Christ reigning in our hearts and then we will see the expression of His Lordship in obedient lives.

One of the problems in our present-day world that we lament is that God is continually being forced out of our culture and we are becoming (or have become) a godless society. The root of the problem is found in lives of those who confess and profess the name of Jesus but do not have Him established as Lord of their lives. We can hardly expect the Lord to reign in our culture if He does not reign in the lives of His people.

## TURNING TO GOD

<sup>9</sup>The LORD also will be a stronghold for the oppressed, A stronghold in times of trouble; <sup>10</sup>And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You. <sup>11</sup>Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion; Declare among the peoples His deeds. <sup>12</sup>For He who requires blood remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the afflicted. Psalm 9:9-12 (NASB95)

If we look first at verses nine and ten, we see a promise of what we can expect going forward in our relationship with the Lord and why we have faith in that promise. The promise is that when trouble and oppression come, the place of refuge (or safety) is in the Lord Himself. He is the stronghold or fortress. The reason why we trust in that promise is because we know the

character (name) of the Lord. That raises the question of “how do we know His character?” The answer to that is because the Lord has never forsaken those who seek after Him.

The world criticizes the church for having “blind faith.” However, as David observed, we have a reason for our faith. The people of God look to Him for refuge because they have found God to be there for them when trouble comes. God’s faithfulness to those who know Him engenders more faith in the believer. As we act on the measure of faith that has been dealt to us (Romans 12:3), then we see evidence of the faithfulness of God that causes the little faith we have to grow into greater faith.

The idea expressed in verse 11 is parallel to that in verse one. While verse one instructs us to tell of His wonders, verse 11 tells us the extent of the proclamation: to all the nations. This proclamation to the nations could be a warning to those who were enemies of Israel or an encouragement to those who put their trust in God. The character attribute mentioned in the next verse is that God’s justice will avenge those who are afflicted. This is why we don’t have to bother ourselves with taking vengeance since God has promised to do that for us.

As we see what God has done and as we have evidence that He does listen and act when we call upon Him, then our praise should acknowledge His provision. God blesses us so we will share our knowledge of Him with others (among the nations) so that all people can come to know God and to experience the salvation He has provided through the sacrifice of his Son.

In spite of knowing all this, we have lapses when we do not put our confidence and trust completely in Him. If we are even just vaguely familiar with the Biblical account of how God has interacted with mankind we know a lot of the promises that have been given and have seen evidence that He has proven His faithfulness over and over. Perhaps we need to be more sensitive to see such evidence in our own lives.

## PRAYING TO GOD

<sup>13</sup>Be gracious to me, O LORD; See my affliction from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, <sup>14</sup>That I may tell of all Your praises, That in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in Your salvation. <sup>15</sup>The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made; In the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught. <sup>16</sup>The LORD has made Himself known; He has executed judgment. In the work of his own hands the wicked is snared. Higgaiion Selah. <sup>17</sup>The wicked will return to Sheol, *Even* all the nations who forget God. <sup>18</sup>For the needy will not always be forgotten, Nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever. <sup>19</sup>Arise, O LORD, do not let 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. Psalm 9:13-20 (NASB95)

You could make the argument that the first twelve verses are preliminary to the petition that is prayed in the next verses. David started out praising what God had done and extolling His nature (name) and then moved on to expressing confidence that God would continue to act on behalf of His people in the future. It was only then that he presented his plea for help with regard to what was happening at that time in his life.

The first request is for God’s gracious mercy in view of the trouble he was facing. In some translations the specific act of mercy was for God to save his life. Other translations have the petition simply for the Lord to be gracious and then characterize God as One who saves his life. As is the case in many of David’s prayers, he promised to give credit to God for answered prayer. We probably make such promises in our prayers when we are struggling with problems. So often, when the answer comes and we are no longer in trouble, we forget to share the good news with others and many times **we** fail to recognize that the solution to the problem was an answer to prayer.

The strongest testimonies are found to come from people who have struggled with sin in

their lives and have been rescued from the destruction that sin brings. It is only by God's mercy that He saves us since we have no claim to any merit within ourselves. Such love demands our praise and our obedience to the One Who saved us.

Following the petition for help (verses 13 and 14) David then moved to an observation of the contrast between the way God deals with those who trust in Him and those who are caught up in the world system.

In verses 15 and 16 we see a general, recurring theme that can be found in various places in the Scriptures regarding the results of our actions and attitudes toward others and the impact these have on our own lives. We see it expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:1-2) where He said "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

It is sobering to realize that we influence how God deals with us by the way we deal with others.
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David noted that God is known by His justice, but He is also known by His mercy. Our response to others sets the position on the "justice-mercy" scale as to how God will respond to us.

In verses 17 and 18, David returned to the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Young's Literal Translation renders verse 17 "The wicked do turn back to Sheol, All nations forgetting God." Sheol signifies the place of torment, commonly called hell, where devils and damned spirits are consigned. This translation makes it clear that entire nations chose their destiny by their beliefs and actions. If we choose to ignore God's way in preference to our own way (setting ourselves up to be our own gods), then we choose the way of death and hell. On the other hand, if we recognize we are "but mere men" (being needy and afflicted) then we will look beyond ourselves to God and find His salvation. Unfortunately, it may require troubles, wars, natural disasters or something else to put the fear of the Lord in us so we will realize the truth of who we are.

In the final two verses of this Psalms, David had another petition regarding those who did not acknowledge God nor trust in Him. If we were to express this prayer in our own words, we might be asking God to not let godless humanism displace reverence for God in our society as the equivalent of "let not man triumph." We might also pray that God would strike the terrorists of the world with terror so that they would be forced to realize that they are not on a divine mission but are simply following the teaching of a man.

If there is a lesson for us to learn from this Psalm it might be that we can know that we can trust God for His help because of Who He is and that we should tell other of all He has done and how great He is. The other lesson is that we should be following His examples in our interactions with others. After all, Jesus did tell us that the works He did we would do also.