

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Psalm 139

TITLE: The biography of your life.

(Psa 139:16) you saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in your book, before any of them ever began.

INTRODUCTION

What if there were a library that contained the life history of every person living – a record of birth, growing up, parents and family, education, marriage, or singleness, career, achievements, yes, even thoughts.

What if you were given access to your personal record.

You open the book and it amazes you that everything about your life is recorded accurately, and in great detail; your joys, hardships, friendships, etc.

You read, intrigued – even events you have forgotten are written down, even things no one knows about.

You continue reading up to the present – December 2019 – the end.

But no – there are still pages and pages – maybe a few, maybe many more pages.

What does this mean?

It dawns on you that there is a record not only of your past, present **but your future and probably the end of your life.**

Now tell me, what would you do if you found this book?

Would you close the book and put it back on the shelf?

Or won't you be tempted to turn to the next page, just the next page, and the next page?

Won't you want to know what you will face in 2020?

Maybe just a quick scan.

Let's be honest, how many of us would not be tempted?

I think that most people would like to know what lies in their future [not necessarily death] – that is why they will visit fortune-tellers and consult horoscopes.

And here we are entering another decade; 2020.

Is it not natural to want to know what the coming year holds?

Personally, or what is going to happen to SA in this coming year – yes, it is possible to make some educated guesses based on the facts before us, for example, if the government does not take some strong, brave and wise decisions, things will get worse, you do not need to be a fortune-teller to know this, only those blinded by ideological blinkers can't see this.

Personally, some of us know there are some difficult times ahead—new challenges, concerns, uncertainties, possible major life changes.

So, perhaps you would like to just turn a few pages, so that you can be prepared.

Only natural - just human nature.

The truth is there is such a book which contains a detailed record of our lives, birth, life and death.

The Psalm we are going to look at this morning refers to this;

(Psa 139:16) Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

And that is not the only place in the Bible that confirms that our lives are planned and we are not subject to impersonal forces, like the stars, or energies in the universe or luck.

(Job 10:8) Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether.

(Job 10:9) Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust?

(Job 10:10) Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese?

(Job 10:11) You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews.

(Job 10:12) You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.

(Job 10:13) Yet these things you hid in your heart; I know that this was your purpose.

(Job 12:10) In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

(Job 14:5) Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,

(Ecc 5:19) Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.

(Act 17:24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (Act 17:25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

(Act 17:26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

(Act 17:27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

(Act 17:28) for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

This morning I am going to look at **Psalm 139**, which I hope will give us comfort as we face another year, filled with uncertainties.

I am not going to read right through the psalm at the beginning, I am going to read it a section at a time and seek to explain it.

If you are familiar with Psalm 139 you will know that has some amazing truths about God and his providence in our lives and has been a source of comfort to many believers over the years;

E J Young an OT scholar has written,

Psalm 139 is one of the grandest of all the Psalm, for it brings us face to face with the majesty and power of God. Immediately it exalts God as all knowing and omnipresent, and clearly shows that all of man's life is in God's hands. The Psalm is a prayer and brings us right away to a contemplation of God's omniscience, particularly as this has to do with the Psalmist himself.

Yet, this psalm has also been a source of perplexity, and I am referring specifically to **verses 19-24**.

That is where I am going to begin – **let's read**.

(Psalms 139:19) Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!

(Psalms 139:20) They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain!

(Psalms 139:21) Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

(Psalms 139:22) I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

What does that sound like?

How do you reconcile this with Jesus' command to love our enemies,

(Mat 5:43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

(Mat 5:44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

(Mat 5:45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

(Mat 5:46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

And what about what Paul wrote in Romans 12,

(Rom 12:14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

(Rom 12:19) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

(Rom 12:20) To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

(Rom 12:21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This sounds like a direct contradiction.

And what does this have to do with what the psalmist was writing about?

These verses sound out of place, somehow, after contemplating glorious truths about God, his knowledge, his protection and care – to calling his enemies names.

Abrupt – see verse 18 and then verse 22

This is one of, what we call **imprecatory psalms, means curses. Im prec a tory**

In these psalms the psalmist curses his enemies and asks God to judge and severely punish his enemies.

Psalms 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109.

(Psalms 3:7) Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! You have slapped all my enemies in the face. You have smashed the teeth of wicked people.

Here is gloats because God has slapped his enemies in the face and smashed their teeth.

(Psalms 35:8) Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it! And let the net that he hid ensnare him; let him fall into it--to his destruction!

Imagine praying like this in a prayer meeting, *“Father please smash the corrupt politicians and businessmen in their faces so that their teeth are broken.”*

(Psalms 55:15) Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.

In Psalm 109, the psalmist prays the God will bring his enemies to judgment and

(Psalms 109:7) When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! (Psalms 109:8) May his days be few; may another take his office! (Psalms 109:9) May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! (Psalms 109:10) May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! (Psalms 109:13) May his posterity be cut off; may his name be

blotted out in the second generation! (Psalms 109:17) He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him!

(Psalms 137:7) Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!" (Psalms 137:8) O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! (Psalms 137:9) Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!

Many Christians have asked why these psalmists interject lofty thoughts about God with sudden words of anger and passion: *'Lord, kill the wicked!' 'Smash their babies heads against the rock'*.

Let me explain as we specifically deal with this psalm – which will perhaps help you to understand these imprecations.

I have found that the commentaries on this psalm struggle to reconcile these verses with the whole theme of this psalm.

They either consider these verses as a kind of addendum, a kind of postscript, a bit of a jarring note that does not really fit in, that must somehow be explained or toned down.

In doing this, it seems to me they have missed what I believe is the most important part of the psalm, that in fact explains the rest of the psalm.

¶ In the first place, notice who wrote this psalm – David.

¶ Secondly, it is David's prayer – what were the circumstances that led him to pray?

It is always important, if we are going to understand the psalms, to consider the context the Psalmist found himself in.

Well what kind of circumstances caused David to pray like this to God?

It should be quite obvious that David was surrounded by enemies, notice in **verse 19b**, he addresses his enemies.

It is obvious that they were slandering him but also, they are using God's name to slander David – they were misusing God's name **verse 20**

It is also obvious that David saw their hatred of him as a manifestation of hatred for God.

Let me draw your attention to an important point; David was writing as God's anointed King.

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So what historical situation can we connect this to?

We are not certain, but it could be when Saul sought to kill him, or it could be when Absalom rose against him, or the times when he faced Israel's enemies.

Whatever the circumstances, one thing is clear David was in a difficult place in his life.

He was under grave threat, his life was threatened, and in these circumstances David had a few alternatives, he could actually deal with his enemies, which in some cases he did, but here, for some reason, he had no alternative but to turn to God.

It seems to me that is where we must begin if we are going to understand this psalm.

This is not just a psalm of praise and worship where the psalmist extols the omnipresence and omniscience of God – it was a desperate cry to the one who knows and hears.

What precedes verses 19-22 forms the ground or motivation for his prayer, the reason why David wrote this psalm.

See principle in Psalm 109; (Psalms 109:4) In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer.

Betrayed by others, he turns to God.

Now David's prayer is based on what he knew about God.

God knew all about him and cared for him – this gave him confidence to cast himself upon God to protect and vindicate him.

So he turns to the God, who knows all things, so in a hard situation, David, instead of falling into despair or seeking to take personal vengeance, reminds himself of certain truths about God.

So what was it that gave David the confidence to entrust himself to God – it was of what he knew about God, what we can call the **attributes or character of God** – how God has revealed of himself to us, showing us what kind of God he is.

A person's character is vital – good or bad, trustworthy or devious, dependable or unreliable.

Even in human relationships you need to know what sort of person you are dealing with, especially if you need to trust that person – e.g., would you trust

What does David tell us about God that encourages him to utter the words in verse 19-22?

Let us read and I will explain – notice this psalm can be divided into 4 or 5 sections, each focusing on a specific attribute of God.

1-6 God's Omniscience [Knows everything].

There is tenderness expressed in the opening of this psalm (Psalms 139:1) To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

(Psalms 139:2) You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

(Psalms 139:3) You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

(Psalms 139:4) Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

(Psalms 139:5) You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

The word 'Know' occurs seven times – vv1, 2, 4, 6, 14, 23.

We use the word 'know' in different ways – e.g., to know about – to know casually – however, 'to know' is used in the Bible to describe the sexual relationship in marriage [Adam knew] – it speaks of intimate, loving knowledge – that is the word David uses to describe his relationship with God – how God knew him.

David knew he was not addressing, some form of deity, some impersonal power, but One who knew him and loved him.

One with whom he had a personal relationship and who was intimately involved in his life.

The greatness of God touches David's life.

God knew everything about him.

From his outward activities to his inner thoughts and motives – God sees him as he is.

His actions – when he sat down and when he got up v2].

When he got up to go somewhere and when he lay down [v3].

God even knew what he was going to say before he said it – even random words spoken on the spur of the moment [v4].

God knew his every thought.

To be quite honest we do not even know ourselves like this, (Jer 17:9) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

(Matthew 10:29) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

(Matthew 10:30) But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

(Matthew 10:31) Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Even more, God's hand was continually upon him.

V5 – *'You cup your hand over me'*.

Hedge = a protective barrier – God hedged David on every side so that nothing could happen to him without the permission of God.

God actively guided him – ensured that he did not stray far – [my own life].

It is no wonder that David is amazed, astounded – who was he, a mere human being, who was God, the eternal, infinite, God of the universe.

Think of this: watch the great men and women going around greeting the common people, they shake hands, but no eye contact, no personal interest, you are just a number – but, the Creator, the God, knows you and knows me personally and intimately.

Quote verse 6.

(Psalms 139:6) Your knowledge of me is too deep; it is beyond my understanding.

7-12 God's Omnipresence – means that God's very presence surrounds him. READ

(Psalms 139:7) Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

(Psalms 139:8) If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

(Psalms 139:9) If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

(Psalms 139:10) even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

(Psalms 139:11) If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"

(Psalms 139:12) even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

David expressed 2 human responses to God's intimate knowledge of him:

1. FEAR: For someone to know us like this, especially a holy God – what would be our normal reaction be?

Fear – knowing my deepest secrets and sins and weaknesses – human reaction.

Think of Peter's reaction to Jesus after he saw an amazing miracle; (Luk 5:8) When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!"

So our first reaction – run away, hide.

That is what happened with Adam and Eve, they hid away from God.

But David knows there is nowhere to hide from God.

Remember how Jonah thought he could run away from God, but even as he took to the sea, God was there and it was in the belly of the big fish, that he knew there was no place to hide.

But there is another response.

2. COMFORT.

It is quite clear that although there was a degree of fear, he stopped running, he ran to God, drawing comfort from the fact that God was with him, wherever he may be, whatever situation he finds himself in.

No-where to hide – yet, there is one place to hide, in the presence of God.

He knows God will not abandon him, he knows God is always with him.

Psa 32:7 You are my **hiding** place; you will save me from trouble. I sing aloud of your salvation, because you protect me.

God is active and present in every place.

Even in the dark places of our lives God is present.

God is active and present in every place – he can never escape God's holding hand.

Like Adam and Eve, David knew that God would not abandon him.

There was a time, when as a result of his terrible sin, he ran away, hid from God, until God sent Nathan to confront him and bring him back.

Although David was not full aware how God could cover his sin, he trusted God.

We know how it is possible for sinners to hide in God because he made a way to deal with our sin and continue working in our lives.

Paul writes, (Rom 8:32) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

(Rom 8:33) Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

(Rom 8:34) Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

(Rom 8:35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

(Rom 8:36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

(Rom 8:37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

(Rom 8:38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,

(Rom 8:39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The comfort is that no matter what we may face, God is still there – we can draw near with confidence.

In another psalm David could confidently write,

(Psa 23:4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

(Psa 23:5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

(Psa 23:6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

13-18 God's Providence. God's omnipotence as Sovereign Creator. READ.

(Psalms 139:13) For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

(Psalms 139:14) I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

(Psalms 139:15) My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

(Psalms 139:16) Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

(Psalms 139:17) How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

(Psalms 139:18) If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

How is it that the Lord knows and surrounds us, because from conception and gestation through the days of life and on awaking in eternity he is guided and protected by God.

'Inmost being' = kidneys – seat of the emotions

Knitted together = embroidered – exquisitely composed of bones, muscles and sinews and veins and arteries and other parts, all framed with such wonderful skill ...

Frame = the bony structure of the body.

Unformed body = embryo – em bree ow.

Precious = the whole sweep of thought in verses 1-12 and in particular the awesomeness of human creation.

But we know, as believers it goes back even further:

(Romans 8:28) And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

(Romans 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be the First-born among many brothers.

(Romans 8:30) But whom He predestinated, these He also called; and whom He called, those He also justified. And whom He justified, these He also glorified.

(Ephesians 1:4) according as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in in love, (Ephesians 1:5) having predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

(1 Peter 1:1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, of Galatia, of Cappadocia, of Asia, and of Bithynia, (1 Peter 1:2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

(Revelation 17:8) The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

19-22 God's justice.

The psalmist rests his situation in the hands of God.

What upsets David most, is not what the wicked are doing to him, but what they do to God – *'They maliciously defy you'*, in Hebrew clearer *'They speak of you for wickedness'*, that is 'they use your name in vain for evil'.

In other words, these are religious hypocrites.

(Joh 15:25) This, however, was bound to happen so that what is written in their Law may come true: 'They hated me for no reason at all.'

His hope rests entirely with God who knows him, the God with whom he is in relationship.

He does not ask God to give him an opportunity to kill his enemies – to take it into his own hands.

He recognises that vengeance belongs to God.

Not, Lord let me handle this – I need to see them suffering and I want to have the satisfaction of getting revenge.

23-24

David ends with some of the most well-known words in the OT 'search me'.

He began – you have searched me and now, please search me – why?

David knows his only hope is God, so the purpose of God's searching, knowing and testing is to determine whether there is any sin in him – Why?

Because he desires the presence of God, he seeks to eradicate anything in his life that might hinder his relationship with God.

He is aware that he is sinful and needs God to search him and lead him to live for him.

He speaks as a sinner -

Application

Nothing happens to us without God's knowledge and control – he not only knows he orders.

He knows because he planned it.

How to respond to the uncertainties of our lives – focus on God and his care for you - (Romans 8:31)
What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:32) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

(Matthew 6:25) "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

(Matthew 6:26) Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

(Matthew 6:27) And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

(Matthew 6:28) And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,

(Matthew 6:29) yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

(Matthew 6:30) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

(Matthew 6:31) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

(Matthew 6:32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

(Matthew 6:33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

(Matthew 6:34) "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

(Philippians 4:6) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

(Philippians 4:7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Meditate on who God is.

BIG PICTURE – GOSPEL PERSPECTIVE.

David, we know, foreshadowed Messiah and Judge, the right to call down judgment on the enemies of God.

As David was surrounded by enemies, so the Lord was likewise surrounded by his enemies, especially the religious leaders.

We are dealing here with personal vindictiveness, it is a prophetic execution of what will happen at the last day when God consigns the wicked to the lake of fire.

Are we any better than these enemies of God, of course not – these curses should fall on us, but you see, He took the curse – Galatians (Galatians 3:10) For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

(Galatians 3:12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

(Galatians 3:13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--

(Galatians 3:14) so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.