

אקרוסטיקונים חסרים?

אבנר רמו



Several scholars suggested that certain literary techniques can be identified in the Hebrew biblical texts, but none of them was extensively used. For example: verses Gen 4:23; 5:29; Ex 29:35; and Jud 16:23-24, are rhymed, but it is not clear whether these are intentional or incidental rhymes. It should also be noted that none of the texts that are defined in the Bible as “songs” are rhymed.

In the Hebrew Bible there are several alphabetic acrostic texts. They appear in chapters 9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; and 145 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 9:2-19; 10:12-17; 25:2-22; 34:2-22; 37:1-40; 111:1-10; Ps 112:1-10; 119:1-176; 145:1-21), chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs (Pro 31:10-31); and chapters 1-4 of the Book of Lamentations (Thr 1:1-22; 2:1-22; 3:1-66; 4:1-22).

However, in only three chapters (Ps 119:1-176; Pro 31:10-31; and Thr 1:1-22), we find successive verses beginning with letters that make the complete Hebrew alphabet in its current order.

As the division to verses occurred only many years after these texts were written, in some chapters every verse starts with a different letter (Ps 25:2-21; Ps 34:2-22; Ps 145:1-21; Pro 31:10-31; Thr 1:1-22; Thr 2:1-22; and Thr 4:1-22), while in some chapters each verse contains three successive letters of the alphabet (Ps 111:1-10; 112:1-10). Yet in other chapters each successive letter of the alphabet appears in three (Thr 3:1-66), or eight (Ps 119:1-176) successive verses. In chapter 37 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 37:1-40) there is a variant of the standard

alphabetic order and the division to verses does not seem to follow a clear rule. The same can be said about Chapter 9 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 9:2-19).

Chapter 9 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 9:2-19) contains a partial (א-כ) alphabetic acrostic text, but there is no verse that starts with the letter ד (d).

We read:

גערת גוים, אבדת רשע; שמם מחית לעולם ועד.
האויב, תמו חרבות-לנצח; וערים נתשת-אבד זכרם המה.
ויהוה לעולם ישב; כונן למשפט כסאו.

“You rebuked [the] nations, You destroyed the wicked, You blotted out their name forever and ever.

[O you] **the enemy, the ruined places came to an end forever; and the cities which you uprooted, their [very] remembrance perished.**

And YHWH is enthroned forever; He established His throne for judgment” (Ps 9:6-8).

The Greek (and the English) translators struggled with the odd verse Ps 9:7 but they did not arrive to satisfactory solutions. It is not unlikely that the first and the last words of this verse were misplaced and belong to other places.

The reading in the Book of Samuel: **“He will keep the feet of His followers, but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness”** (1 Sam 2:9), suggests that in verse Ps 9:7 the words: **תמו חרבות-לנצח; וערים נתשת-אבד זכרם** are a dental exchange error of: **דמו חרבות-לנצח; וערים נתשת-אבד זכרם** - **“ruined places became silenced forever, and the cities which you uprooted, their remembrance perished.”**

If this understanding is correct then, verse Ps 9:7 begins as expected with the letter ד (d). It is further suggested that the words deleted from the Hebrew version of this verse: **המה האויב** - **“they are the enemy”** make an independent verse that should be positioned between verse Ps 9:7 and verse Ps 9:8. Then, as expected, this additional verse would start with letter ה (h).

Chapter 34 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 34:2-22) is an alphabetic acrostic text, but there is no verse that starts with the letter ו (v).

We read

גדלו ליהוה אתי; ונרוממה שמו יחדו.
דרשתי את-יהוה וענני; ומכל-מגורותי הצילני.
הביטו אליו ונהרו; ופניהם אל-יחפרו.
זה עני קרא, ויהוה שמע; ומכל-צרותיו הושיעו.
חנה מלאך-יהוה סביב ליראיו; ויחלצם.

“Magnify (to) YHWH with me, and let us exalt His name together.

I sought YHWH, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my troubles.

They looked to Him, and were radiant; and their faces shall not be abashed.

This poor man cried, and YHWH heard, and saved him out of all his troubles.

YHWH’s messenger encamps around those that fear Him, and delivers them” (Ps 34: 4-8).

However, it is possible that the second part of verse Ps 34:6 **ופניהם אל-יחפרו** - “**and their faces shall not be abashed**” does not belong here and should appear as an independent verse, situated between verse Ps 34:6 and verse 34:7. If this interpretation is correct then this would be the verse that starts, as expected, with the letter **ו** (v).

Similarly, in chapter 25 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 25:2-21), which is also an alphabetic acrostic text, there is no verse that starts with the letter **ו** (v).

We read:

גם כל-קוֹיךָ לא יבשו; יבשו הבוגדים ריקם.
דרכיך יהוה הודיעני; ארחותיך למדני.
הדריכני באמתך ולמדני-כי-אתה אלהי ישעי; אותך קויתי כל-היום
זכר-רחמיך יהוה וחסדיך: כי מעולם המה.
חטאות נעורי ופשעי-אל-תזכר:

“Also those that hope for You shall not be ashamed; ashamed should be those that deal treacherously without cause.

Convey to me your ways, *YHWH*; teach me Your paths.

Guide me in Your truth, and teach me; for You are the God of my salvation; [for] You I hoped all day long.

YHWH remember Your compassions and Your mercies; for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions” (Ps 25:3-7).

Probably the reading in the Book of Isaiah: **יהוה חננו, לך קוינו** - “*YHWH*, be gracious to us; for You we hoped” (Is 33:2), persuaded the Greek (and the English) translators that the odd expression: **אותך קויתי כל-היום** - **You I hoped all day long**” (Ps 25:5) is faulty, and it appears that they believed that here the word: **אותך** is a letter-insertion and a letter-substitution error of the word **ולך** - “**and for you.**” If this understanding is correct then the words:

ולך קויתי כל-היום should be replaced with: **ולך קויתי כל-היום** - “**And for You I hoped all day long.**” These words could make an independent verse that should be positioned between verse Ps 25:5 and verse Ps 25:6, and as expected this verse would begin with the letter **ו** (v).

In addition, verse Ps 25:18 which was expected to start with the letter **ק** (q), starts for unknown reason with the letter **ר** (r).

Chapter 145 of the Book of Psalms (Ps 145:1-21) is also an alphabetic acrostic text, but there is no verse here that starts with the letter **נ** (n). In one of the Psalms scrolls of Judean desert, after verse Ps 145:13, we read: **נאמן אלוהים בדבריו וחסיד בכל מעשיו** - “**Faithful is God in his words, and merciful in all his deeds.**” Similarly, in the Greek translation of the Bible we find here: “**Faithful is the Lord in his words, and devout in all his works.**” Yet we do not know if this is a genuine verse or a late addition.

In several alphabetic acrostic texts, the verses appear to follow different alphabetic orders. For example: in chapters two, three, and four, of the Book of Lamentations, the verses that starts with the letter **פ** (p) precedes the verses that starts with the letter **ע** (a’) (Thr 2:16-17; Thr 3:46-48, 49-51; 4:16-17).