

October 10 Lesson 6 (NIV)

PRAISE FOR GOD'S ULTIMATE JUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 9:1-12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 9; Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

PSALM 9:1-12

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

- ¹ I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
- ² I will be glad and rejoice in you;
I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.
- ³ My enemies turn back;
they stumble and perish before you.
- ⁴ For you have upheld my right and my cause,
sitting enthroned as the righteous judge.
- ⁵ You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked;
you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.
- ⁶ Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies,
you have uprooted their cities;
even the memory of them has perished.
- ⁷ The LORD reigns forever;
he has established his throne for judgment.
- ⁸ He rules the world in righteousness
and judges the peoples with equity.
- ⁹ The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
- ¹⁰ Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.
- ¹¹ Sing the praises of the LORD, enthroned in Zion;
proclaim among the nations what he has done.
- ¹² For he who avenges blood remembers;
he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.

KEY TEXT

He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity.—Psalm 9:8

CELEBRATING GOD

Unit 2: Called to Praise God

LESSONS 5–9

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HOW TO SAY IT

Amalekites *Am-uh-leh-kites* or *Uh-mal-ih-kites*.

Jebusites *Jeb-yuh-sites*.

Melchizedek *Mel-kiz-eh-dek*.

Philistines *Fuh-liss-teenz* or *Fill-us-teenz*.

Selah (*Hebrew*) *See-luh*.

Introduction

A. Thanks to God

Do you like to read? An affirmative answer to this question often leads directly to a second: What do you like to read? Biography, science fiction, travel journals, devotionals, scholarly

journals ... The types you enjoy are probably informed by where and how you grew up, what you enjoyed studying in school, family and friendships, etc.

One type of literature that is often overlooked, however, is poetry. Reading a poem is a daunting thing for some. Why is the grammar so strange? Why are words repeated? Why don't the lines rhyme? What does this figurative language point to? The fact is that poems can be difficult to interpret! But the Academy of American Poets has some tips that can help you delve into poetry with more confidence.

First, they say to read it out loud. This can slow you down so you can hear the inflections of your own voice. Second, pay attention to where the lines or phrases break. Third, be curious and ask questions of the poem: Who wrote it? When? Why? And finally, be OK with the fact that you won't always understand a particular poem. Sometimes it will dance outside of your grasp.

These tips can help us not only understand but also enjoy the psalms.

B. Lesson Context: Psalms 9–10

Found in Book I of the Psalter (see Lesson Context of lesson 5), Psalm 9 is one of several alphabetic acrostics scattered throughout the psalms (other examples: Psalms 119; 145). An alphabetic acrostic is one in which each verse, stanza, or other pattern of lines begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. In English, this would look like:

Line 1 begins with a word that starts with A,
Line 2 begins with a word that starts with B,
Line 3 begins with a word that starts with C, etc.

This technique helps with memorization. But sadly, that help is usually “lost in translation” as alphabets vary among languages.

The acrostic format that begins in Psalm 9:2, below, continues into Psalm 10. This suggests that these two poems were originally one. From the standpoint of content, this makes perfect sense: Psalm 9 focuses on God's deliverance of the righteous, whereas Psalm 10 dwells on God's judgment on the wicked. For the psalmist and throughout much of Scripture, these two concepts go hand in hand. God's justice entails both lifting the oppressed and lowering their oppressors (example: Proverbs 10:30).

Two other factors further suggest that these two psalms were originally one: (1) Psalm 9 has a beginning superscript that introduces the psalm, whereas Psalm 10 lacks such a feature, which all other psalms in Book I have except for Psalms 1 and 2; and (2) Psalm 9 ends with the term “Selah.” That term does not appear in the text of the 2011 *NIV*, although its presence may be indicated by a footnote. The word is likely a musical notation that indicates a pause in the recitation of a song. As a result, the old Greek translation of the book of Psalms combines Psalms 9 and 10 into one psalm. (This further results in the numbering of subsequent psalms to differ from that of our English translations until Psalm 147.)

C. Lesson Context: Superscription

Dozens of psalms begin like this one in being addressed “For the director of music.”

“A psalm of David” identifies the author. The Psalter attributes 73 of its 150 psalms to him, “the hero of Israel’s songs” (2 Samuel 23:1). The New Testament increases this tally (see Acts 1:16–20; 2:25–28; 4:25–26; Romans 4:6–8; 11:9–10).

I. Against the Wicked

(PSALM 9:1–6)

A. Praise the Lord (vv. 1–2)

1a. I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart;

The word translated *give thanks* is rendered in terms of praise elsewhere, and there is much overlap in their meanings (compare Psalm 100:4, lesson 5; also see 2 Samuel 22:50). Ancient Hebrews associated the *heart* with one’s intellect—the center of moral decision-making. So this psalm is not so much stressing an emotional reaction (the way we would if singing “from the heart”) as much as emphasizing the deliberate choice to praise God with the totality of the psalmist’s being (compare Deuteronomy 4:29).

1b. I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

To the upreach action of “will give thanks” in the previous half-verse, the psalmist adds one of outreach: *will tell of* indicates his intention to bear public witness. The sweeping basis of *all your wonderful deeds* undoubtedly includes the facts of creation (Genesis 1) and providential favor on Israel (example: Deuteronomy 4:34).

Though we often use words such as *wonderful* and *awesome* in exaggerated or overstated ways, it’s quite difficult to do so with regard to God’s acts! Think of the scientific laws he created to keep our world functioning and habitable. We take these for granted in daily life. But if we stop to ponder them, we will be stunned to realize (again!) what God has done for us—both for humanity in general and us in particular.

2a. I will be glad and rejoice in you;

Be glad and *rejoice* are parallel terms; the underlying Hebrew words are also found together in 1 Samuel 2:1; Psalms 5:11; 68:3. Such repetition made it easier to remember songs. That was especially important in a culture where the average person may not have been able to read and write. Such repetition therefore was not mere redundancy.

2b. I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.

Using the word *name* as the psalmist does here was often a respectful way of referring to God himself (examples: 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 92:1). The name that God revealed to Moses and to Israel was Yahweh (Exodus 3:14), which is behind the designation “Lord” in Psalm 9:1a, above. This name tells us something about God: he is unchanging. What he has revealed about himself is who he is (compare Mark 12:26–27; 1 John 4:8).

By calling God *Most High*, David acknowledged that this God is above all other so-called gods, earthly kings, and whatever threat may confront God’s people. Melchizedek, king of Salem, was the first recorded to use this honorific for God (Genesis 14:18–20). This same Melchizedek was honored as a precursor to Christ (Hebrews 7:1, 11, 17; compare Psalm 110:4). Only this God could enact the plan of salvation that is the source of our greatest joy and hope.

B. Fall of Enemies (vv. 3–6)

3. My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you.

The psalmist now introduces battle imagery. Given the psalm's attribution to David (see Lesson Context: Superscription), the *enemies* we are meant to think of were likely David's own, of which there were plenty. The Amalekites (example: 1 Samuel 30), the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6–7), and the Philistines (example: 5:17–25) all suffered defeats because God was with David.

Those idolatrous nations perished on account of God's interceding on Israel's behalf. This more literal translation of *you* makes obvious the respectful way David referred to God himself (see Psalm 9:2b, above). God directed mighty waters (Exodus 15:10), toppled walls (Joshua 6:16, 20), hurled hailstones (10:11), and extended daylight (10:1–15).

4. For you have upheld my right and my cause, sitting enthroned as the righteous judge.

Whichever battles David referred to weren't about expanding his own power or padding his coffers. These are causes that no king should assume to be pleasing to God. God champions only a *right* and a *cause* if these things are pursued from right motives and with just action.

Proper verdicts must be rendered because God himself is a just *judge*. Though God sometimes maintains a person because he or she is righteous, it is more precise to say that God has achieved the good that the righteous person represents. In other words, because the accused represents God's cause in God's way, God is certain to judge in favor of that person for being in the right.

5. You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.

The nations and *the wicked* are used as parallel terms here. The Hebrew words being translated occur together again in Psalm 9:17 (see also Jeremiah 25:31). This indicates that David was not writing about the Israelites' own sins. While it is good to keep in mind that unholy people can lead God's people astray, this must be balanced by remembering his concern for all peoples. Far from being a purely New Testament concern (example: Matthew 5:45; John 3:16), God's intention to bless all nations is embedded in the covenant he made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3).

David does not name his enemies, nor need he do so. When a person is in God's protective presence, the size, nature, and names of enemies are irrelevant. This fact lends this psalm a universal appeal. Future generations can apply it to their own worship experiences. It also suggests that the *name* of the enemy has already been forgotten.

6a. Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies, you have uprooted their cities;

Although David does not specify the *enemies* that are to suffer *endless ruin*, other texts suggest this might be a reference to the Amalekites (see Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:19). This marks a significant contrast between how God treats his people and how he treats the unrepentant of any nation. He makes no promise to save a remnant from nations like the Amalekites. When their wickedness reached a boiling point, God acted in righteous judgment.

God's people experience judgment differently, however. We undergo it as temporary discipline, meant to form us into the image of Christ (Hebrews 12:5–7, 11, quoting Proverbs 3:11–12; compare Psalm 94:12; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

6b. even the memory of them has perished.

The idea here is that destruction of enemies will be so complete that no one will even remember *them* (compare Psalm 34:16). Graves are normally indicated with some kind of marker as a monument of remembrance, or memorial. The wicked won't have even that.

II. For the Oppressed

(PSALM 9:7–12)

A. Celebrating God's Judgment (vv. 7–8)

7. The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment.

In contrast to the wicked nations that are to be forgotten, *the Lord reigns forever. His throne* is the place from which he both judges and rules over all creation. God's people must cling to him. They must not ally themselves with evil. Doing so puts them in danger of experiencing the *judgment* meant for the nations.

8. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity.

Judgment without *righteousness* yields injustice (Amos 5:12; etc.). Such a state of affairs is all too common. But God always *judges* with perfect *equity* (compare Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6), which is a model for us (Leviticus 19:15; 1 Timothy 5:21; James 2:1).

B. Seeking God's Refuge (vv. 9–10)

9. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

This verse offers some interesting similarities to and differences from Psalm 10:1: "Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

In Psalm 9:3–8, David was concerned with the fall of the unrighteous. Now in 9:9 the focus changes to address the reversal of fortune *for the oppressed* (compare 1 Samuel 2:8; Luke 1:52–55). The Hebrew word translated "oppressed" occurs only four times in the Old Testament: here and Psalms 10:18; 74:21; and Proverbs 26:28. But what kind of oppression is in view—or does it matter?

One way of exploring this question is to examine what words are used to translate those four instances in the Greek version of the Old Testament, then see how the New Testament uses those words. When we do so, we conclude that the idea is usually along the lines of one's lower-class status in life (compare Matthew 11:29; Luke 1:52; Romans 12:16; 2 Corinthians 7:6; 9:9; 10:1; James 1:9; 4:6; and 1 Peter 5:5).

The rich and powerful want to keep it that way! This implies that powerful persons are oppressing the weak. The oppression they inflict or allow parallels the phrase *in times of trouble* (compare Psalms 10:1; 41:1; 59:16). But the *refuge* available in God carries the imagery of elevated terrain (compare 2 Samuel 22:3), the safest place to build a city. This psalm draws on "protection themes" seen prominently in the Law of Moses (example: Deuteronomy 24:14–22) and the books of prophecy (example: Hosea 6:6). Such themes carry over into the New Testament (Matthew 5:1–12; James 1:27; etc.).

With such unified testimony across Scripture, Christians must be united in concern for the poor and oppressed. The church must not let political partisanship dictate its agenda. Instead,

we must heed Scripture's specific testimony regarding God's concern for the poor, regardless of which directions the political winds are blowing.

10. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Those who *know* the Lord—really know his character and have experienced his goodness—will put their *trust in* him. They make choices that are in line with God's will, not their own. To know in this sense is not a matter of mere belief in God's existence (see James 2:19). Rather, it's about making godly choices—choices that may seem foolish to the world (1 Corinthians 1:18–31). We follow a God whose ways are not those of humans (Isaiah 55:8–9). Such people actively *seek* God (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Seeking God is not some sort of "I'll know it when I see it" search for life's meaning. Rather, it asks the question, "What does God want from me in this situation?" To answer such questions involves searching the Scriptures, where God has revealed his will for people. It's about trusting the Spirit to aid in understanding and discernment. Seeking God means giving him control over the direction of our lives.

C. Praise Again (vv. 11–12)

11. Sing the praises of the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done.

In response to God's overthrowing the unrighteous and upholding those who trust him, David appropriately called the people once again to *sing ... praises*. David had been addressing his own thanks to God (see Psalm 9:1–2, above). But here he explicitly invited the people to join in the praise of thanksgiving.

Although the two imperatives here may sound quite generic, their application must have been in reaction to something specific. It doesn't seem adequate to say that God does wonderful things and stop there. As with David, we should *proclaim ... what he has done*. For the original audience, this could have included celebrating work that God had done in founding their nation, delivering them from their wilderness wandering, and granting the promised land.

In the audience's more recent memory, it probably included David's military conquests. *Zion*, a synonym for Jerusalem, had been part of Jebusite territory until David captured it (2 Samuel 5:6–7). The mountain became associated with David's palace and later with the temple (1 Kings 8:1; Psalm 2:6). The latter association links Zion closely to the Lord (see Psalms 20:2; 74:2).

12. For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.

In celebrating his deliverance, David did not lose sight of who brought it about: God did. In avenging *blood*, God proved his concern for justice. He is a God who so values life that he both offers abundant life through Jesus (John 10:10) and requires a reckoning from those who destroy life (Genesis 4:10; 9:5–6). God never grows deaf to *the cries of the afflicted*. He will administer justice. Just as God heard when the Israelites cried to him from their slavery in Egypt (Exodus 2:23–25), so he hears all today who are held captive by violence, by injustice, by sin. But we must call on him in faith, trust, and repentance.

Conclusion

A. The Answer to Oppression

Oppression comes in all shapes and sizes; it is a global epidemic. The God of Israel did not ignore oppression, and neither should his people of any era. But we must not be lured by the fearmongering ways of this world. Careful attention to Scripture is the answer. Only such study will yield a biblical view of oppression. Psalm 9 offers one small window in that regard. It shows us that those who know, trust, and seek the one true God have a powerful ally who fights for them.

For Christians, this energizes us to spread the gospel; the accounts of the person and work of Jesus are ever new. But we need not stop with the events of Scripture. What wonders has God worked in our lives? Have we grown tired of telling those stories? Are we even experienced in telling those stories?

May we boldly proclaim the God we know and trust so that our hope may indeed become the hope of this world.

B. Prayer

Lord, thank you for all the reasons we have to praise you! We thank you for hearing the cries of your oppressed people; open our ears that we may hear them as well. Embolden us to proclaim the gospel to others so all the world may join us in praising you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Seek, trust, and know
the righteous God of justice.¹
