



Bible Study
Biblical Theology of Psalms
Lesson 10: Psalm 10

INTRODUCTION

Psalm Summary:

Psalm 10 looks to God's universal reign to come to the earth to rid the earth of the wicked and establish righteousness.

Outline

1. 1-11 Call and Complaint
2. 12-15 Prayer of Petition
3. 16-18 Expressed Confidence

OBSERVATION

Psalm 10 has no superscription so we do not know the authorship or the occasion of the psalm. Many Bibles have titles for the psalm, such as: *Why Do You Hide Yourself?*, *A Song of Confidence in God's Triumph Over Evil*, or *A Prayer for the Overthrow of the Wicked*. Such titles were not a part of the manuscripts, but rather are like other general headings Bible publishers put in their Bibles. Such titles in Psalms are usually a summary of the first verse of the psalm, or an attempt to title it by its major theme.

Some traditions within Judaism have viewed untitled psalms to have been placed after a psalm by the same author. So, Psalms 9 and 10 would be viewed as complementary and both psalms of David. We cannot be certain of that being the case though.

Psalm 10 is a lament psalm. It begins with a call addressed to God (1). The psalm proceeds to state a complain with a lengthy catalog of abuses by the wicked (2-11). It has a prayer of petition asking God to act (12-15), and ends with expressed confidence that God will act to rid the earth of the wicked (16-18).

Psalm 10 features vivid imagery using various devices such as metaphor, simile, etc. It depicts the inner and outer doings of the wicked, speaking of heart (3), countenance (4), thoughts (4), sight (5), heart (6), mouth (7), tongue (7), sitting (8), eyes (8), lying in wait (9), heart (11 & 13), and arm (15). The psalms counters this understanding of the wicked with the understanding and actions of God: face (11), see (11), hand (12), seen (14), hand (14), heard (17), and ear (17).

Walk Through Psalm 10

Verse 1 does not have God's name, but it is a direct address call to God. The two lines are questions roughly asking the same thing, creating a repetitive emphasis. The implication of the question is that God is not acting to execute judgment on the wicked. It is like asking, "How long?" The questions reveal an expectation that God will judge because of his character and his promises. We see example of such promises in Psalm 2, where God reveals determination of judgment on the wicked.

Verses 2-11 give the complaint portion of the lament with a catalog of the thoughts and deeds of the wicked. These verses alternate speaking about the attitudes and actions of the wicked toward God and toward their fellow man. The wicked's actions toward man focus on persecuting the poor and scheming against them (2), murdering the innocent (8), exploiting the poor (8), and laying traps and catching the poor (9-10). The victims of the wicked are further referred to as the fatherless (14), the humble (17), and the fatherless and oppressed (18).

The wicked acts against God as he calls evil good against God's judgment and blesses the covetous (3). He is proud and does not seek God or think of him (4). His wickedness is unrestrained in schemes and actions because he does not regard God as relevant to him. He puts God's word, the revelation of God's will, out of his sight and mind (5), so God's revealed will does not figure in his plans. He thinks himself safe from God (6). He misinterprets God's longsuffering to mean that he will never suffer consequences, since he hasn't yet suffered them (11).

Verses 12-15 ask God to act in justice toward the wicked. Verse 12 asks God to rise up in judgment and this has come up in earlier psalms (Psalms 3:7; 7:6; 9:19). Asking God to rise in judgment is asking God to take vengeance on the wicked. It recalls Moses' prayer when the camp of Israel would move. Moses asked God to rise up and go before them to remove their enemies before them (Numbers 10:35).

Verse 13 asks another why question. This refers to the wicked's proud assertion that God will not require, or hold them to account for their deeds. Verse 14 gives a statement on God's righteousness. God does see the acts of the wicked despite their thinking he does not (11). God's hand will repay their ways. It reminds us of those who put their trust in God, particularly the weak and vulnerable. It expresses God's commitment to avenge the weak, fatherless, widows, poor, etc., just as God's character is revealed in the law (Exodus 22:21-27; Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

Verse 15 is an imprecatory prayer asking God to break the arm of the wicked. The arm speaks of power and glory and the means of working. The line further asks for the wicked to be called to account for their doings. The call counters the proud assertion of the wicked that God will not call them to account (13). The second part of the phrase is equivalent to saying until God has removed all the wicked from the earth.

Verses 16-18 express the psalmist's confidence and hope. Verse 16 refers to God's universal

kingship, which ensures his execution of justice upon the earth. A related word is used by Moses at the end of Moses' song when God had destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exodus 15:18). God had removed the wicked from the land and he was praised for his right and his power to do so. Likewise here, God's universal kingship results in the wicked nations being removed from the land.

Verse 17 speaks of God's care and provision now for those who trust in him. They are afflicted, or humbled, by the present prosperity of the wicked oppressors. God hears and establishes, or strengthens, their hearts. He doesn't forget the humble as he prayed (12). In verse 18, God's justice will be a perfect avenging of the sufferings inflicted by the wicked, evil men and their schemes. The word for man emphasizes his mortality. God's justice will be so complete that oppressions will be removed from the earth. Man of the earth reminds us of only men in Psalm 9:20.

INTERPRETATION

What does Psalm 10 teach?

The Way of the Ungodly

Psalm 10 teaches what the way of the ungodly is. Their counsels, schemes, and thoughts are against God. The ungodly directly oppose God by praising the wickedness God abhors (3). The ungodly live lives unrestrained by God's revealed will concerning righteousness and unrighteousness (4-5, 11). Pride is described with vivid imagery. Pride of his countenance (4) is literally "height of his nose." The wicked have their nose so far up in the air they think they have no need of God, or to care about what God thinks or does. They blow air at any who oppose them (5). The evil plans, traps, and action of the ungodly are taken against the most vulnerable and weak. They exploit and take advantage of everyone they can.

God's Comprehensive Judgment

Psalm 10 teaches God's judgment will extend to the entire earth. God sees and studies the acts of the wicked in order to properly repay it (14). His judgment will be so thorough that no wicked ones will be left on the earth (15-16, 18).

The Messianic Hope

Psalm 10 ends with expression of confidence and hope in the coming kingdom of the Messiah. The Psalmist has hope and expectation of perfect justice throughout the earth, which will be accomplished because of God's universal kingship (16).

The way that justice will happen has already been revealed in Psalm 2. God sits in the heavens, referring to his universal kingship. He sees the works of the wicked and laughs at their

rage. He responds to their wicked rebellion by bringing justice to the earth. He does this by installing his Son/King on the throne of Zion (Jerusalem). These promises are why the psalmist can ask God questions like why, and how long?

The coming of the Messiah and his kingdom will result in the wicked perishing out of his land and no injustice being done in the earth (15-16, 18). Psalm 10 specifically refers to the nations in verse 16. The psalm looks forward to the time Zechariah prophesied of when the Messiah will rise up and come forth from heaven to war against the enemy nations gathered at Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:3-5, 12-15). Jerusalem will be rebuilt and secure for evermore (Zechariah 14:8-11). God's kingdom will be established on the earth (Zechariah 14:9, 16-21).

APPLICATION

What does Psalm 10 say to modern readers?

1. Understanding Psalm 10 helps us understand how to pray in light of injustices and the oppressions of evil men. Not only for the final judgment, but we can pray for expression of God's justice now. Praying for God to break the arms of the wicked would be a prayer for God to remove their power for sinful acts. It would be to pray for God to remove their ability to execute their evil plans. It would be to pray for God to break their systems of injustice they use to oppress, afflict, and prey on the weak and vulnerable. We can be assured God sees and knows. We can pray for God to end their wickedness now.
2. Understanding Psalm 10 should help us examine ourselves in light of the ways of the ungodly. Do we use people, or take advantage of people? Are we oppressive in positions of leadership, whatever those positions might be? Paul quotes from Psalm 10:7 in Romans 3:13 when proving the universal guilt of men before God. These ways of the ungodly are completely contrary to the way of the blessed man in Psalm 1, who is revealed to be God's Son and King in Psalm 2. We are to imitate him and walk like he does. So, we find plenty of opportunity in this psalm for examination and repentance.
3. Understanding Psalm 10 helps us to know what our hope is. Because God reigns in the heavens and Jesus Christ is seated at his right hand, justice will be executed upon the earth and his righteousness will fill it. That will happen when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom upon earth, when he reigns from Jerusalem.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology of the book of Psalms. Each lesson typically covers one Psalm. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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