

PRAISE FOR GOD'S ULTIMATE JUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 9:1-12

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

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Psalm 9:1-12

I. Against the Wicked

Psalm 9:1-6

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 right-
eous 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.

1a. The word translated *give thanks* is rendered in terms of praise elsewhere, and there is much overlap in their meanings.

This psalm is emphasizing the deliberate choice to praise God with the totality of the psalmist's being (Deuteronomy 4:29).

1b. 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 (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. If we stop to ponder them, we will be stunned to realize what God has done for us.

2a. *Be glad* and *rejoice* are parallel terms used in other Hebrew texts. The repetition made it easier to remember the songs.

2b. Using the word *name* was often a respectful way of referring to God himself. 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. This name tells us something about God: he is unchanging. What he has revealed about himself is who he is.

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). Only this God could enact the plan of salvation that is the source of our greatest joy and hope.

3. The psalmist now introduces battle imagery. Given the psalm's attribution to David, the *enemies* we are meant to think of were likely David's own.

4. 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.

5. *The nations* and *the wicked* are used as parallel terms here. 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, 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. 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 been forgotten.

6a. Although David does not specify the *enemies* that are to suffer *endless ruin*, other texts suggest this might be a reference to the Amalekites. 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. We undergo it as temporary discipline, meant to form us into the image of Christ (Hebrews 12:5-7, 11).

6b. The idea here is that destruction of enemies will be so complete that no one will even remember *them* (Psalm 34:16). Graves are normally indicated with some kind of marker as a monument of remembrance. The wicked won't have even that.

II. For the Oppressed

Psalm 9:7-12

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.

7. 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 not ally themselves with evil. Doing so puts them in danger of experiencing the *judgment* meant for the nations.

8. Judgment without *righteousness* yields injustice (Amos 5:12). But God always *judges* with perfect *equity*.

9. 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* (1 Samuel 2:8; Luke 1:52-55). The Hebrew word translated “oppressed” occurs only four times in the Old Testament. 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. We conclude that the idea is usually along the lines of one’s lower-class status in life.

The rich and powerful want to keep it that way! The oppression they inflict parallels the phrase *in times of trouble* (Psalms 10:1; 41:1; 59:16). But the *refuge* available in God carries the imagery of elevated terrain (2 Samuel 22:3), the safest place to build a city. This psalm draws on “protection themes” seen prominently in the Law of Moses and the books of prophecy.

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.

10. Those who *know* the Lord will put their *trust* in him. They make choices that are in line with God’s will. To know in this sense is not a matter of mere belief in God’s existence. Rather, it’s about making godly choices. We follow a God whose ways are not those of humans. Such people actively *seek* God (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Seeking God 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.

11. In response to God’s overthrowing the unrighteous and upholding those who trust him, David called the people once again to *sing . . . praises*. He 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. The mountain became associated with David’s palace and later with the temple. The latter association links Zion closely to the Lord.

12. 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 and requires a reckoning from those who destroy life. 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.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

PRAISE FOR GOD'S ULTIMATE JUSTICE

Into the Lesson

That's not fair!

Describe situations in which you've made or heard the above statement.

Decide which of the situations are serious and which are trivial. Put a [+] sign beside those deemed serious and a [-] sign beside the trivial choices.

You may not have thought much about how God feels about those who take advantage of others. Today we'll see things from his point of view."

Into the Word

Ancient Hebrew poetry uses parallelism to express and expand on the ideas the poetry presents. Write one sentence to summarize the main thought in one (only) of these pairs of verses—your choice: Psalm 9:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 11-12.

Share your summary with the class. Report your conclusions regarding God's outlook toward the oppressed and their oppressors.

Into Life

Practical Examples

For each pair of verses in today's study, think of examples of the truth expressed in the statements below.

Verses 1-2: God does marvelous works throughout the ages and in my life.

Verses 3-4: The gospel prevails over attempts to squelch it.

Verses 5-6: God rebukes the nations.

Verses 7-8: God is righteous and his judgments will ultimately prevail.

Verses 9-10: God has been a refuge for the oppressed.

Verses 11-12: God's good news requires that I share the gospel.

Based on today's study, here's how I could better demonstrate God's concern for justice:

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

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