

PSALMS

Chapter 10

Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? ²In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. ³For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. ⁴In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.” ⁵His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. ⁶He says in his heart, “I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.” ⁷His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. ⁸He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; ⁹ he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. ¹⁰The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. ¹¹He says in his heart, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.” ¹²Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. ¹³Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”? ¹⁴But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless. ¹⁵Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none. ¹⁶The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. ¹⁷O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear ¹⁸to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

Ps 10 A prayer for rescue from the attacks of unscrupulous men—containing a classic OT portrayal of “the wicked.” (CSB)

Psalm 10 begins with a sudden cry to God in lament. It may be that this distinct focus is what prompted the division of the psalm into two psalms. Psalm 10 may have a lengthy lamentation, but it is not all lamentation. It is an interesting blend of lament over the oppression of the wicked and triumphant jubilation at the prospect of divine judgment. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:1 Such language of impatience and complaint is found frequently in the prayers of the Psalter (usually “how long?” or “when?” or “why?”) It expresses the anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. (CSB)

Such questions are designed to prompt God to draw near and pay attention (cf. Ps. 22:11, “Do not be far off from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help”). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

hide Yourself. Because of the deeds of wicked men and women, it seems that God is hidden away, unwilling, at least presently, to intervene. (TLSB)

10:2–11 Accusation lodged against the oppressors. In the Hebrew the interchange of singular and plural indicates that these accusations are being lodged against wicked oppressors in general. Their deeds betray the arrogance (see vv. 2–5—so long as they prosper, v. 5) with which they

defy God (see vv. 3–4, 13; see especially their words in vv. 6, 11, 13). They greedily seek to glut their unrestrained appetites (see v. 3) by victimizing others, taking account of neither God (see v. 4) nor his law (see v. 5). (CSB)

Deeds of the wicked are listed. (TLSB)

10:2 *arrogance* – Their pride is mentioned first: it is through pride the wicked inflict suffering on the afflicted. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

wicked. Hbr *resha'im*, people who disobey God's Law and are excluded from public worship and the covenant community. (TLSB)

While the word “wicked” can refer to the “ungodly” in general, here it refers to them in their worst activities. The word is singular, but collective of wicked people, as are the words for the innocent and the afflicted. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

hunts ... caught. The psalmists often use imagery from the hunt (see vv. 8–9). (CSB)

10:3 *heart*. In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life.” (CSB)

curses. Those who acquire goods and wealth through dubious and wicked means and out of sheer greed often praise God for their gain. This praise, however, is empty and insincere. To God, it is the same as if the wicked were cursing Him. (TLSB)

10:4 The wicked man does not consider that he has God to contend with. (CSB)

The self-deluding thought that there is no God is the height of wickedness, for all of creation testifies to the existence of a Creator. (TLSB)

Such an arrogant person is convinced that God “does not require,” probably meaning that God does not call him to account for his crimes (see by contrast v. 13). In fact, the last line clarifies that he is practicing atheist. Everything the wicked schemes is characterized by the idea that there is not God to bring him to justice. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:5 *His*. The wicked's. When the wicked happen to experience prosperity, they continue in their arrogance, thinking they will continue to prosper “at all times.” It appears that the ways of wicked human beings and God's justice will never meet. However, there will be an end to the wicked's prosperity when God returns to judge both the living and the dead. (TLSB)

There seems to be no weak point, no wavering in his schemes and conduct. In fact, in his opinion, the decisions (s.v. Ps. 9:4) of God are far above him, way out of his sight. In other words, God's decisions, even if there is a God, are unrelated to him and ineffective, so the will of God is not even considered in his decisions. One may contrast the way of the righteous, for the ways and thoughts of God are ever before them (18:22, 23); but for the wicked, because there is no one preventing his evil schemes, he scorns all his adversaries. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:6 The psalmists frequently quote their wicked oppressors in order to portray how they mock God and his servants.). (CSB)

to himself. Lit. “in his heart” (also in vv. 11, 13). (CSB)

So sure is this man of himself that he actually believes that his success must go on forever. (Leupold)

shake me. Disturb my well-being, unsettle my security. (CSB)

He does not think he can be moved (s.v. Ps. 62:2), that is, shaken from his course of action; and with this sense of security, he believes that he will never have to face adversity or misfortune, not now, not in generations to come. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:7 *mouth ... tongue.* St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Let divine fear transfix your flesh, that the desire of the flesh may not deceive you. It flatters, but under its tongue is suffering and sorrow; it weeps, but betrays; it betrays to catch the poor when it has attracted him” (*SLSB*, p 184). (TLSB)

curses and lies and threats. The three most common weapons of the tongue in Israel’s experience – For the plots and intrigues of enemies, usually involving lies to discredit the king and bring him down. (CSB)

curses. † Many ancient Near Eastern peoples thought that by pronouncing curses on someone they could bring down the power of the gods (or other mysterious powers) on that person. They had a large conventional stock of such curses. (CSB)

lies. Slander and false testimony for malicious purposes (see, e.g., 1Ki 21:8–15). (CSB)

10:8 *ambush.* A tactic most characteristic of the wicked, who are hostile without warning. (TLSB)

One thinks of people who might seem to follow the letter of the law in their judicial proceedings, but pervert justice in the process, as in the judicial murder of Naboth over his vineyard (1 Kings 21). In this case there actually was a slaying of an innocent man, but it was made to look like a proper legal decision and all deigned to satisfy the greed of Ahab for Naboth’s property. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:9 As a young shepherd, David had been attacked by lions (see 1Sa 17:34–35). But it is also a convention in the Psalms to liken the attack of enemies to that of ferocious animals, especially the lion. (CSB)

poor. Those who have few resources to defend themselves make the easiest targets. (TLSB)

10:10 *helpless are crushed* – The weak and afflicted are simply overwhelmed. This is the psalmist’s portrayal of the attacks of the wicked. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:11 The psalmists frequently quote their wicked oppressors in order to portray how they mock. The arrogance with which the wicked speak (see 17:10), especially their easy dismissal of God’s knowledge of their evil acts and his unfailing prosecution of their malicious deeds, is frequently noted by the psalmists (see v. 13; 12:4; 42:3, 10; 59:7; 64:5; 71:11; 73:11; 94:7; 115:2; see also Isa 29:15; Eze 8:12). (CSB)

Verse 11 repeats the theme of verse 4, but with additional force. He says in his heart that “God has forgotten.” This suggests that he allows for the existence of a God, but not a God who intervenes in human affairs. To say God “has forgotten” means that he did not act on it. He adds

that God “hid his face” and never saw it, i.e., that God has withheld his favor from the afflicted and did not pay attention to the need. His thinking is that if there is a God he either could or would not intervene. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:12–15 Prayer that God will call the wicked to account. (CSB)

10:12 *Arise*. Hebrew idiom frequently prefaces an imperative calling for immediate action with the call to arise. (CSB)

Calling for God to arise is a way of calling for God to begin to act now (s.v. Ps. 3:1). It is a very human idea to call to arise, and it is a bold idea because it calls for God to cease his apparent indifference and inactivity. The appeal for God to lift his hand is a call for divine intervention. In fact, the act of lifting the hand could be interpreted as a divine act of hostility against the wicked. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Forget – The request that God not forget is a reversal of the false assumption of the arrogant and an appeal based on the confidence that God does not forget the afflicted (9:12). It is actually a call for God to remember i.e. to act on behalf of his afflicted people. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

helpless. Those at the mercy of the oppressors (see v. 9). (CSB)

The afflicted are people who trust in the Lord and cry out to him for help. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:13 *Why ... ? Why ... ?* Such language of impatience and complaint is found frequently in the prayers of the Psalter (usually “how long?” or “when?” or “why?”). It expresses the anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. (CSB)

The appeal is based on God’s honor, which has been challenged by the blasphemies of the wicked. Why has the wicked person reviled God? Why should that be allowed to go unanswered? Why should the wicked be allowed to think that God will not call his sin into account? The psalmist’s reason for God to intervene concerns the reproach of God’s honor which is brought on by the insolence of the wicked in his apparently successful schemes. When God rescues his people, he will also rescue his reputation. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:14 *but you do see* – In this verse the psalmist acknowledges that God is aware of the problem and is about to recuse them. The wicked did not think God saw their wicked deeds, but the psalmist affirms that he did, for he always sees what people are doing (he is aware, and he is involved; see Pss. 33:13; 80:15). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

take it into Your hands. To deal with it. (TLSB)

Appeal to God’s righteous rule (see 5:4–6). – The assumption included in this thought is, of course, that those who commit their case into the hands of the Almighty have not done so in vain. (Leupold)

The helpless person leaves it to the Lord, who has been a helper to the orphan, perhaps the most vulnerable person, the one with the fewest resources. The word “helper” often describes God; it

means that he is able to do for people what they cannot do for themselves (s.v. Ps. 46:10). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:15 *Break the arm.* Destroy the power to oppress. (CSB)

The idea of breaking the arm means to break their power (cf. Ps.44:3). The prayer is for God to destroy their ability to attack; the arm being used in carrying out the schemes. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

call him to account. Humble his arrogance (see v. 13) with your righteous judgment. (CSB)

In this verse “seek out” would have more of the idea of “avenge” or “requite” (p:12), although “call to account” (as in 10:13) covers that. The point of the line is that the wickedness disappear. If God seeks it out and destroys it, then it will no longer be found. This may not seem like an appropriate prayer for NT believers; nevertheless, if believers pray for the Lord to come quickly, they are calling for him to come and judge the world and remove wickedness entirely. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:16–18 The psalmist’s confidence in the righteous reign of the Lord – A common feature in the prayers of the Psalter is a concluding expression of confidence that the prayer will be or has been heard (as in 6:8–10; 7:10–17; 10:16–18; 12:7; 13:5–6 and often elsewhere. Here David’s confidence becomes a testimony to God’s people.). Reference to the nations (v. 16) and to the humbling of proud man (see v. 18; see also 9:19–20) suggests links with Ps 9. As the conclusion to Ps 10, this stanza expands the vision of God’s just rule to its universal scope and sets the purging of the Lord’s land of all nations that do not acknowledge him (see v. 16) alongside God’s judicial dealing with the wicked oppressors. Both belong to God’s assertion of his righteous rule in the face of man’s arrogant denial of it. (CSB)

Tyrants, dictators, and empire builders will answer to God for the misery they spread both among their own subjects and among the nations they attack. Criminals will not escape the justice of God, even if they escape earthly justice on a technicality. Wealthy oppressors who exploit their workers and underpay them will be paid back in full by God. (PBC)

10:16 *the Lord is king forever and ever* – In the course of this prayer the assurance of the writer grew step by step until it finally rings out boldly and strongly. (Leupold)

The psalmist proclaims that the Lord is king for ever and ever, in contrast to the temporary wickedness of people who are in the earth. The point is that this present evil age is temporary and limited, but the Lord’s reign is eternal and universal. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

nations. Reference to the Canaanites, who, due to their wickedness, had been crushed and ceased to exist. (TLSB)

10:17 *you hear* – By hearing God is establishing their hearts, that is giving them new courage and a brighter outlook for the future. (Leupold)

The next two verbs of the verse are imperfects, “you establish” and “you hearken.” These imperfects may be classified as progressive imperfects, describing what God is now doing as a result of having heard – he is encouraging them and paying attention to their cries. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

10:18 *justice for the fatherless and oppressed* – The verb “judge” carries the sense of vindicate, for the orphan and the oppressed are the most vulnerable victims of the wicked oppression. If God destroys the wicked, the innocent victims will not only be rescued but vindicated in their faith in the Lord. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

who is of the earth. Who is not God and so constitutes no ultimate threat (see 49:12, 20; 56:4, 11; 62:9; 78:39; 103:14–16; 118:6, 8–9; 144:4; Isa 31:3; Jer 17:5). (CSB)
Emphasizes that human beings are mere creatures and, as such, are nothing compared to God’s power. (TLSB)

By calling them mortals of the earth, the psalmist pours contempt on them, indicating they are just mortal. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Ps 10 The psalmist confidently prays that God will root out those who are wicked and take advantage of the weak and poor throughout Israel so that they “may strike terror no more” (v 18). Such behavior, David reminds us, will be called into account. There is hope, however, whether we have taken advantage of the weak or have been the victim of oppression. The Lord has compassion on those oppressed by sin. • In mercy, Lord, bring “justice to the fatherless and the oppressed.” Eradicate terror and injustice from the earth. Forgive us, and come quickly to establish Your kingdom. Amen. (TLSB)