

A Cry for Justice
Special Focus Session
January 21, 2024

A Cry for Justice

The Point: Join God in seeking justice, including justice for unborn children.

Session Passage: Psalm 10:1-4,12-18

The Setting for Psalm 10. It is probable that Psalms 9 and 10 were actually one psalm originally written by the same author. Several internal clues in both psalms lead to that conclusion. For one, Psalm 9 is attributed to David in its superscription. Psalm 10, however, has no superscription. Another clue is that both psalms contain similar phraseology and word usage. Perhaps the most telling indicator of their mutual origin is that together they form an acrostic (though incomplete). Each verse begins with a successive Hebrew letter (cf. Ps. 119). The two psalms differ in their emphases. Psalm 9 is mostly a hopeful song of thanksgiving, and Psalm 10 is essentially a lament and prayer for the Lord to bring judgment on the wicked who scorned God's law and exploited the poor and needy in Israel. That may explain why they were separated at some point.

Psalm 10:1-4

Connection to The Point: Instead of pursuing injustice like the wicked, we are to pursue God.

Lord (v. 1). David began this section of his poem addressing God by His covenant name. That name is spelled with four Hebrew consonants, YHWH, as revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14-16), and was probably pronounced *Yahweh*. It emphasizes both God's self-existence and self-sufficiency. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. God's name *Yahweh* in many Scripture translations is substituted with the term "Lord" (in small caps), following the practice of the Jews who substituted the word *Adonai* (meaning "lord" or "master") for *Yahweh* because they feared saying God's name lest they mispronounce it.

Why do you stand so far away? (v. 1). David lamented, asking rhetorically why it seemed the Lord had abandoned His people in their time of trouble. He used the anthropomorphic image (that is, applying human characteristics to God, see Ps. 74:10-11) of God standing at a distance when they desperately needed His help.

Why do you hide in times of trouble? (v. 1). David dug in deeper asking why God seemed to be in hiding when they were suffering. His questions are clearly emotional and reflect the immediacy of their problems. These questions are not intended to express doubt about God's knowledge, power, or motives. Rather they are intended to provoke the Lord to act in accordance with His own promises to His people. David simply could not understand how the Lord could stand by and let evil forces succeed against His faithful followers.

Arrogance (v. 2). The term (*gaavah*) can be used positively or negatively. In its positive sense, it could describe someone's majesty or glory. Negatively, as used here, it means pride or haughtiness.

The wicked (v. 2). The "wicked" or "wicked one" (v. 3) refers to all those ungodly ones who bring suffering on the afflicted and innocent. *The wicked* represent a whole class of evil doers. They are characterized by an attitude of pride and arrogance, thinking they are superior to others. Scripture consistently warns against pride, the opposite of humility and wisdom (Prov. 3:5,7; 6:16-17; 15:25,33). The wicked in this case foolishly turned from the Lord and His laws to pursue their own ungodly desires.

Relentlessly pursue (v. 2). This verb (*dalaq*) means “to burn” or “to pursue hotly.” It suggests a pursuit such as hunting dogs chasing down wild game. The wicked ones are malicious, blasphemous, and ruthless in their dealings with others they view as being of lesser standing than themselves. These evil ones do not tolerate the godly among them but pursue and attack them relentlessly. (Verses 8-11 highlight some ways the arrogant pursue their victims.) Even unborn children are among the innocent victims people sacrifice for their own convenience.

Caught in the schemes they have devised (v. 2). Most Bible commentators and Bible translations interpret this statement as David praying that the arrogant wicked ones will suffer the same end as those whom they attack. They will be caught in the ungodly schemes they themselves plotted. They will be victims of their own devices, entwined in their own webs of deceit. Other commentators and translations apply this clause to the victims of the wicked ones. They are trapped in the schemes the wicked have devised against them. The Hebrew is unclear as to which stance is correct. Both are valid translations or interpretations of the verse. In either case, David condemned the wicked ones’ evil plots against God’s faithful.

Boasts (v. 3). The Hebrew term (*halal*) has the meaning of “praise,” “give thanks,” or “glory in.” Not only arrogant and violent, such a wicked person is actually proud of himself for being that way. He boasted in the past and now still brags about the evil cravings of his heart which motivate his life and actions. In doing so he literally glorifies himself instead of the Lord. Nonetheless, his boasting will not continue indefinitely.

Greedy (v. 3). The term for *greedy* (*batsa*) refers to one who gains or profits by violence. It is another synonym for the wicked one David condemned.

Curses (v. 3). The verb *curses* (*barak*), paradoxically, can also mean “blesses.” So, in this case, this phrase could also read “the wicked one blesses the greedy man.” Either way, cursing God or blessing the greedy, the wicked man is doing evil.

Despises (v. 3). The wicked man *despises* (*naats*) or reviles (opposite of blesses) the Lord, who condemns his behavior. Because the wicked one is so full of himself, he literally hates God and worships his own ego. Consequently, his moral and ethical values are turned upside down.

Scheming (v. 4). While sometimes used in a good sense, the term *mezimmah* usually describes evil thoughts or plans.

Arrogantly thinks (v. 4). David reiterated that all the evil plotting of the wicked man is born out of his insolent pride toward God. The phrase literally reads, “The wicked, according to the height of his nose . . . ,” a somewhat humorous image of a haughty person with his nose stuck up in the air.

No accountability (v. 4). The Hebrew for *accountability* (*darash*) means “to seek or inquire.” The arrogant wicked person has no sense of being accountable to anyone for his actions. He thinks he can live any way he pleases and not worry about how it affects other people because in his mind he answers to no one.

There’s no God (v. 4). The wicked man is in essence a practical atheist. If there is no God to which he is accountable, why should it matter what he does? This is the central flaw in atheistic and naturalistic thinking. Without God there is no basis for right and wrong or for justice in the world. In any case, we need not despair when the unrighteous seem to prosper; we can trust God to do what is just and right in His own time.

Psalm 10:12-15

Connection to The Point: As Christ’s ambassadors, we can walk alongside those who are helpless.

Rise up (v. 12) At this juncture David changed his focus. He turned abruptly from lamenting about the power of the wicked over the weak to a passionate call to the Lord to act. He invoked the “Lord God” to *rise up (qum)* in the face of the success of the wicked among His people (see Ps. 9:19). This is a common theme in the Psalms. God is implored to rise up and be a warrior to intervene in human crises (Pss. 3:7; 7:6; 17:13; 132:8).

Lift up your hand (v. 12). David used another common anthropomorphism (see Ps. 10:1). Obviously, the writer knew the Lord does not have literal physical hands as do people. “God’s hand” or “the hand of God” symbolize His omnipotent power and authority (1 Chron. 29:12). In this context, God’s forceful action is the upshot of rising up. David asked the Lord to move aggressively against the wicked ones who exploit the poor and weak.

Do not forget (v. 12). David begged the Lord not to forget those good people who were helpless in a society ruled by the corrupt. Like having hands, David did not really think God is capable of forgetting anything. He knew the Lord is omniscient and knows everything. Nonetheless, the current state of affairs motivated him to subtly and humbly remind God of His divine duties.

The oppressed (v. 12). David dared to entreat the Lord to act quickly since a key element of His character is defending and avenging the oppressed. The *oppressed (anav)* are the poor, needy, and weak who are taken advantage of by the rich and powerful. David’s words here are the exact opposite of the wicked one’s skeptical assumption that God is impotent or non-existent (vv. 4,13).

Despised God (v. 13). To *despise (naats)* is to “scorn,” “abhor,” or “blaspheme.” David had already established the fact that the arrogant, wicked person holds God in utter contempt (v. 3). But now he boldly and fervently challenged the Lord to answer a provocative question: “*Why has the wicked person despised God?*” (emphasis added). In a sense he was confronting the Lord as to why He allows the wicked to get away with hating Him. David correctly recognized that the blasphemy of the wicked is an attack on the very reputation of God Himself. The term for *God is Elohim*. It emphasizes the majesty and infinite nature of God.

Demand an account (v. 13). The reason the wicked person reviles God is simply because he does not think the Lord will call him to account for his words and actions (v. 4). Again, David was seeking to prod the Lord into vindicating His own name. He well knew that the Lord is more than capable of defending Himself and His people. God will demand an accounting of the wicked for their evil deeds.

But you yourself (v. 14). David emphatically addressed the Lord directly.

Have seen trouble and grief (v. 14). David knew God can act to destroy evil because He has done it in the past. He reminded the Lord that He had witnessed the strife and suffering of His people numerous times and intervened to aid them. This was the writer’s clear expression of his faith in the omniscience of God. Nothing escapes the Lord’s notice, in the past, now, or in the future.

Into your hands (v. 14). David again utilized the image of the Lord lifting His mighty hand to defend the afflicted (v. 12). Having seen their problem, with His omnipotent power and supreme authority He could now deal with the wicked-on behalf of the oppressed.

Helpless one (v. 14). These are the same poor and needy who are the victims of the relentless pursuit of the prideful and ungodly (v. 2). They are powerless to resist the exploitation of the wicked. They can only look to God for justice.

Entrusts (v. 14). The term (*azab*) means “to loosen” or “to forsake,” here in the sense of relinquishing and committing oneself to God. Because they are poor and needy, the victimized have little to no hope of receiving justice from a corrupt society. They can only commit themselves to God and trust in His justice and mercy.

The fatherless (v. 14). Perhaps no class of humanity is more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than orphaned children. A child who has lost his or her parents is in one of the direst circumstances any person may face. The Scriptures consistently testify to God's special concern for them. God is called "a father of the fatherless and a champion of widows" (Ps. 68:5). He expects and demands that they be cared for by His people (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 24:17; 27:19; Jas. 1:27).

Break the arm (v. 15). David made known his desire for the Lord's intervention using a somewhat grotesque mental image. He appealed for the Lord to break the wicked man's arm. The word *break* (*shabar*) means to crush or shatter something to pieces. He wanted the Lord to destroy the evil doer's strength so completely that his wickedness would be totally removed from God's sight.

Psalm 10:16-18

Connection to The Point: While God will one day make all things right, we must work with God for justice now.

The Lord is King (v. 16). The image is one of *the Lord (Yahweh)* as a *king (melek)* sitting on His throne (Isa. 66:1). In answer to his earlier questions (v. 1), David here expressed his total confidence in the sovereignty of God. The Lord is indeed in total control of the situation. God is often pictured in the Psalms and other passages in Scripture as a reigning king (Pss. 24:8-10; 29:10; 47:7; 93:1; Mal. 1:14). Of course, Jesus is the King of Kings! (Rev. 17:14; see 1 Tim. 6:14-16).

Forever and ever (v. 16). In Hebrew this phrase consists of two conjoined words: *olam* (everlasting), and *ad* (in perpetuity). This double usage strongly emphasizes the infinite and eternal nature of God. He and His kingdom are without boundaries and are timeless (Ex. 15:18). Unlike the temporary existence of mortal human kings and the wicked, the Lord's reign is never ending. Jesus's reign is described this way: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

The nations (v. 16). These are the godless Gentile peoples of the earth. David may also have been referring to the wicked ones in Israel who behaved more like the pagans of the nations than those belonging to the Lord's people.

Will perish (v. 16). The Hebrew phrase literally reads "have perished from His land." However, this verb usage is what is called a "prophetic perfect." It is in the past tense but is describing something yet to happen. It expresses the confident expectation of David that the Lord inevitably will purge the pagans and the evil ones from His kingdom.

You have heard (v. 17). Here again in the Hebrew the verb is in the past tense. The Lord has heard the prayers of His humble people, but His response is yet to come. This indicates that David understood the timelessness, omnipresence, and omniscience of God. God is aware of everything and hears the prayers of His people in all times and places. Hope, patience, and persistence are required of God's people until the time when the Lord acts on their behalf.

The humble (v. 17). The *humble (anav)* are the afflicted, the poor, and the oppressed.

Strengthen their hearts (v. 17). In Hebrew thought, the *heart (leb)* was the center of a person's emotions, intellect, and will. As a result of having heard His people, the Lord will now encourage or firmly establish their innermost beings.

Listen carefully (v. 17). David reiterated the fact that the Lord was now paying close attention to the pleas of His people (Prov. 15:29). He does not just listen passively, however. He hears and He acts.

Doing justice (v. 18). God is the sovereign Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Isa. 33:22; Jas. 4:12). The Lord is also the ultimate Defender of those in need. He will vindicate the orphans, the oppressed, and the helpless. These are the people

who are most easily wronged in society. However, they are protected under God's law (Ex. 22:22-24; Deut. 10:18). The Lord will deliver to them divine justice. He will defend and vindicate them, passing judgment on their wicked persecutors and exploiters.

Mere humans (v. 18). Those who persecute the orphans, the oppressed, and the helpless, as great and powerful as they may seem to those they exploit, are nothing more than mortal human beings. They may think they are all-powerful and beyond the reach of justice, divine or human (vv. 4,13), but in the final analysis compared to the eternal King (v. 16) they are just frail creatures of the earth whom the Lord will judge and sentence for their crimes.

Terrify them no more (v. 18). Because God will execute His justice upon them, these tyrants will never again *terrify* (*arats*, to fear, dread) the weak and helpless.