



## Psalm 10 - Prayer for Deliverance from Enemies

### Introduction

Psalm 10 is a lament, designed for cases in which 'the wicked hotly pursue the poor' (v.2). These wicked could be faithless, wealthy Israelites (v.4 and v.13), and the poor are the defenceless pious. While it was the task of the Davidic king to ensure justice, by force if necessary, it was the task of the general public to pray, and thus to use a psalm like this.

Because this psalm has no title, and is placed in the midst of several psalms that do, and because it shares some similar themes with Psalm 9, some commentators and theologians have thought that it was originally the second half of Psalm 9. There are more reasons to doubt this than to believe it; this psalm rightly stands on its own as a psalm of lament at the seeming prosperity of the wicked, but ultimate confidence in the judgements of God.

### Psalm 10:1-11 - Why Do You Let the Wicked Get Away with It?

Beginning with a blunt question to the Lord, the song details the ways in which the wicked make the helpless poor suffer, while they themselves prosper. These wicked are boastful and greedy; they renounce the Lord (v.3) and feel secure from divine judgement (vv.4-6 and v.11). They look for opportunities to destroy the innocent in order to advance their own interests (vv.8-10). The question of why God 'stands far off' (v.1) does not stem from doubting God but from believing that he is reliable and just. It is this faith that leads to perplexity over how God can tolerate such conditions among his people.

- <sup>1</sup> Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
- <sup>2</sup> In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor —  
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

## Psalm 10:1-2

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Here the psalmist asked a question well known to those who follow God; the concern and sometimes anxiety over the seeming inactivity of God. The psalmist felt that God was far off and did even hide himself away from them in times of trouble.

Why do you hide yourself. Is God ignoring cries for help by remaining apparently absent in times of trouble or does he simply allow things to take their natural course? Other Scriptures that reflect upon this include: <<*Give ear to my prayer, O God; do not hide yourself from my supplication*>> (Psalm 55:1), <<*Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse*>> (Proverbs 28:27), <<*When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood*>> (Isaiah 1:15), and: <<*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*>> (Isaiah 58:7).

In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor. This explains why the psalmist was so troubled by the seeming inactivity of God. He saw the wicked, proud man who not only persecutes the poor and approves of other sinners doing so; he also sins against God by renouncing the Lord (v.3) and does not seek God: <<*For they have crushed and abandoned the poor, they have seized a house that they did not build*>> (Job 20:19). God is in none of his thoughts.

Men do not seek God; this is a great sin. Men do not think about God; this also is a great sin. Man has obligations to God as his creator and sovereign, and it is a sin to neglect them. Man commits these sins because of his proud countenance; ignoring God is an expression of one's independence and perceived equality, or even superiority to him.

Let them be caught in the schemes they have devised. This was the prayer of the psalmist regarding the wicked. In other psalms this is a confident expectation, such as: <<*The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught*>> (Psalm 9:15); here it is a heartfelt prayer.

<sup>3</sup> For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart,  
those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord.

<sup>4</sup> In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, 'God will not seek it out';  
all their thoughts are, 'There is no God.'

## Psalm 10:3-4

Those greedy for gain curse. Curse is literally ‘blesses’ and is used euphemistically for cursing God, as in: <<*And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, ‘It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.’ This is what Job always did*>> (Job 1:5).

To renounce the Lord is a theme often articulated in Scripture, such as: <<*And the Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?’>> (Numbers 14:11), and: <<*Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the Lord, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged!*>> (Isaiah 1:4). It appears again here in v.13. It is where God’s own people faithlessly ‘despise’ him, the same Hebrew word translated renounce.*

In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, ‘God will not seek it out’. The proud boastings and lewd blessings of the wicked have been received in evidence against him, and now his own face confirms the accusation, and his empty heart cries aloud against him. They vainly believe that God will not seek justice against them but: <<*be sure your sin will find you out*>> (Numbers 32:23b).

All their thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’ God is not in his thoughts, at least not in the way they should be for he thought much, but he had no thoughts for God. Amid heaps of chaff there was not a grain of wheat. The only place where God is not is in the thoughts of the wicked. This is a damning accusation; for where the God of heaven is not, the lord of hell is reigning and raging, leading unrepentant sinners to eternal hell.

- 5 Their ways prosper at all times;  
your judgements are on high, out of their sight;  
as for their foes, they scoff at them.
- 6 They think in their heart, ‘We shall not be moved;  
throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity.’
- 7 Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;  
under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.

### Psalm 10:5-7

Their ways prosper at all times. Here the Psalmist protested to God; not only did the wicked seem to enjoy constant prosperity, but did so because God's judgements are far above, out of his sight. One might imagine the psalmist thinking, 'If only God would demonstrate his judgement to this wicked man, he would change his ways.' This may sound like a complaint against God and in some sense is; yet it should more so be seen as a complete confidence in God's rule and authority. The psalmist recognised that the wicked could never prosper unless God allowed it; so he appealed to God to not allow it.

We shall not be moved. It is galling to the pious when the impious feel safe in their impiety.

Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression. Paul uses the Greek from the LXX wording of this verse in Romans 3:14 as part of his proof that <<*both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin*>> (Romans 3:9b); this text supports his case about the Jews.

- <sup>8</sup> They sit in ambush in the villages;  
in hiding-places they murder the innocent.  
Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
- <sup>9</sup> they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert;  
they lurk that they may seize the poor;  
they seize the poor and drag them off in their net.
- <sup>10</sup> They stoop, they crouch,  
and the helpless fall by their might.
- <sup>11</sup> They think in their heart, 'God has forgotten,  
he has hidden his face, he will never see it.'

### Psalm 10:8-11

They sit in ambush in the villages. Those who oppose God are often more willing to impose their beliefs on the unsuspecting than believers are willing to share the Gospel message in their communities. This is a frequent theme in Scripture: <<*The wicked watch for the righteous, and seek to kill them*>> (Psalm 37:32), <<*If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent*>> (Proverbs 1:11), <<*For scoundrels are found among my people; they take over the goods of others. Like fowlers they set a trap; they catch human beings*>> (Jeremiah 5:26), and: <<*The faithful have disappeared from*

*the land, and there is no one left who is upright; they all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets>> (Micah 7:2).*

**They murder the innocent.** Another characteristic of the wicked man is seen in how he is a bully, focusing his violence against the weak, i.e. the innocent, the helpless, and the poor. He is not manful or honourable enough to openly fight those who might effectively fight back: <<*As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the road to Shechem, they commit a monstrous crime>> (Hosea 6:9).*

**Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless.** Helpless is a word only found in this psalm (v.8, v.10, and v.14), which has received various explanations, but is probably derived from a root meaning to be black, but has nothing to do with skin colour, and hence comes to mean miserable, hapless, or the like.

**God has forgotten.** In the mouth of the wicked, this would attribute a weak memory to God, or perhaps indifference to human suffering. Either way it is blasphemy; the faithful mention it to God in order to stir him to action that would prove the wicked to be in the wrong (vv.12-14).

#### **Psalm 10:12-15 - A Prayer for God to Protect the Helpless.**

In view of the dreadful situation, the song asks God to defend the defenceless and afflicted. These verses repeat many words from the first section, such as ‘mischief’ in v.7 and v.14; ‘forget’ v.11 and v.12; ‘see’ v.11 and v.14; ‘renounce’ v.3 and v.13; ‘helpless’ v.8, v.10 and v.14; and ‘wicked’ vv.2-4, v.13 and v.15, in order to show that God’s action is a direct answer to the injustice described.

<sup>12</sup> Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand;  
do not forget the oppressed.

<sup>13</sup> Why do the wicked renounce God,  
and say in their hearts, ‘You will not call us to account’?

#### **Psalm 10:12-13**

**Rise up, O Lord.** The psalmist simply called upon God to take action. It might be said, “Lord, this wicked man finds comfort in the idea that you would not do anything against him: **Rise up, O Lord; lift up your hand** against this wicked man!” This is also seen in: <<*Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off>> (Micah 5:9).*

**Why do the wicked renounce God?** The psalmist answered his own question in the next lines. The **wicked renounce God** because they **say in their hearts** that God **will not call us to account.** The long-suffering of God, instead of leading such a

one to repentance, only hardens him in his iniquity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, he thinks it will not be executed at all.

It is not stated in this untitled psalm, but often assumed that David wrote it, because it is arranged in the midst of several psalms that are specifically attributed to David, i.e. Psalms 3-9 and 11-32. Yet it is known David was a man of valiant action and warrior spirit; not the kind to stand passively back while the wicked murdered and terrorised the weak and helpless. The only exception to this would be if the wicked man were in a place of God-appointed authority, such as Saul was in Israel. Perhaps this psalm was a cry of David for God to stop Saul because David knew that it was not his place to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed.

<sup>14</sup> But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief,  
that you may take it into your hands;  
the helpless commit themselves to you;  
you have been the helper of the orphan.

#### Psalm 10:14

But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief. Upon further reflection, the psalmist recognised that God has indeed seen, because he sees and cares about the trouble and grief of the poor and helpless.

That you may take it into your hands. Here is the confidence of the psalmist in God's judgements. He most certainly will repay the wicked for their sin.

You have been the helper of the orphan. Such people have always been in God's heart and are to be cared for by his people. The OT law is full of warnings about oppressing such people, such as: <<*You shall not abuse any widow or orphan*>> (Exodus 22:22), and: <<*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing*>> (Deuteronomy 10:17-18); the true Israelite will care for them. It is also reflected in the NT church: <<*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world*>> (James 1:27).

<sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers;  
seek out their wickedness until you find none.

## Psalm 10:15

Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers. The idea here is to make them powerless so that they can no longer torment the godly. Job called upon God to do just that to him if he were guilty of denying the orphans in his community: <<*if I have raised my hand against the orphan, because I saw I had supporters at the gate; then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket*>> (Job 31:21-22).

Seek out their wickedness. The psalmist asks God to do precisely what the wicked deny that he will do (v.13).

Until you find none. That is, until there is no more wickedness to account for.

## Psalm 10:16-18 - Confidence in God's Justice and Power.

The psalm concludes with confidence that God will powerfully bring justice to the oppressed.

<sup>16</sup> The Lord is king for ever and ever;  
the nations shall perish from his land.

## Psalm 10:16

The Lord is king for ever and ever. As confirmed by the very similar Exodus 15:18 <<*The Lord will reign for ever and ever*>>, where God's reign is for the sake of his people, to promote their peace and purity. Just as he removes unbelieving nations from his land, he can be trusted to purge unbelieving Israelites from it as well.

<sup>17</sup> O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek;  
you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear  
<sup>18</sup> to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,  
so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

## Psalm 10:17-18

O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek. Contrary to appearances, as in v.1, God does in fact attend to these cries for justice. This appeal has similarities to the previous psalm: <<*For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted*>> (Psalm 9:12).

You will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear. The psalmist provides a reminder that the spiritual preparation of the heart is a great gift, an answer to prayer, and a mark of God's blessing. Spurgeon comments: "Surely none but the

Lord can prepare a heart for prayer. One old writer says it is far harder work to raise the big bell into the steeple than to ring it afterwards. This witness is true. When the bell is well hung you can ring it readily enough; but in that uplifting of the heart lies the work and the labour.” God had promised to hear the pleas of such as these: <<***If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry***>> (Exodus 22:23).

Those from earth may strike terror no more is similar to Psalm 9:19-20. The Psalmist ends with assurance of God’s justice applied to the wicked. What began with a sense of despair in times of trouble has ended with calm confidence in God’s justice and victory.