



## Psalm 9 - God's Power and Justice

To the leader: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.

### Introduction

Psalms 9 and 10 together follow a basically alphabetical acrostic pattern, i.e. literary compositions in which the writer has used the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as the initial letters for a sequence of verses, with Psalm 10 beginning where Psalm 9 leaves off. The acrostic is not perfect, however: several letters of the alphabet are missing or are out of order. Further, Psalm 10 lacks a title, which is unusual for this section of the Psalter. Both psalms refer to God's interest in 'the oppressed' (9:9 and 10:18), both mention 'times of trouble' (9:9 and 10:1), both call on God to 'rise up' (9:19 and 10:12), and both are sure that God will not 'forget the afflicted' (9:12 and 10:12). Thus it is not surprising that the Greek and Latin versions have these combined as a single psalm.

On the other hand, there are enough differences to justify finding two songs here: the tone of Psalm 9 is predominantly praise and thanks, while that of Psalm 10 is largely lament. Further, whereas in Psalm 9 the enemies are clearly Gentiles (vv.5-8, vv.15-16 and vv.19-20), in Psalm 10 they may be faithless Israelites, see especially 10:4 and 10:13, with 'the nations' being mentioned in 10:16 to show that the faithless are imitating the wicked Canaanites.

Thus these two psalms are probably best taken as companions placed together in light of their similarities. Psalm 9 praises God for the success of the Davidic king in defending Israel from its Gentile foes. The 'I' in this psalm is either David as the representative of the people, or each member of Israel, who celebrates the blessings that come to him by way of the whole nation's success.

The title indicates that David wrote this Psalm to God himself, generally regarded as the leader or 'Chief Musician', to a popularly known tune in his day, indicated by the Hebrew term Muth-labben. In this Psalm David celebrates the help and goodness of God with a big vision for the nations.

Some believe the title Muth-labben refers to a tune; others to an instrument upon which the song was played. Some, as in the NKJV, associate the title with the phrase 'The Death of the Son', and apply that title as the ancient Chaldee version does: 'Concerning the death of the Champion who went out between the camps,' referring to Goliath. Perhaps David wrote this Psalm remembering the victory over Goliath from the advantage of many years since that triumph.

### Psalm 9:1-2 - The Worshiper's Intent to Give Thanks.

The psalm opens with the singer's desire to thank God for his wonderful deeds.

- <sup>1</sup> I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

#### Psalm 9:1

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. David recognised that God was worthy of praise with his whole heart. His entire being should be directed in affection towards God. The biblical ideal is for the whole inner self to be engaged in loving and praising God, as confirmed by: <<***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might***>> (Deuteronomy 6:5), whether in private or in public as here.

I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. Here David described an important and often neglected way to praise God - to tell of all his marvellous works. Simply remembering and telling the great things God has done is a dutiful and wonderful way to praise him.

- <sup>2</sup> I will be glad and exult in you;  
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

#### Psalm 9:2

I will be glad and exult in you. David here described a second way to praise God, by simply finding and expressing gladness and joy in God. Such joy should be the distinguishing mark of a Christian: <<***Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy***>> (1 Peter 1:8), <<***But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed***>> (1 Peter 4:13). This is simply choosing to rest in and celebrate the goodness, greatness, and kindness of God. This is what Jesus was referring to in part when he said: <<***Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls***>> (Matthew 11:29).

I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. Here David listed a third way to praise God with the whole heart; by singing praise to the name of God. The idea is to honour and celebrate the character and nature of God, recognising him as the Most High, Hebrew *'Elyon*. God was first called Most High by Melchizedek, upon a like occasion as here by David: <<*He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything*>> (Genesis 14:19-20).

### Psalm 9:3-6 - The Enemies Have Fallen.

The psalm begins to recount the particular wonderful deeds in view, envisioning a successful campaign to protect God's people and their king from some evil scheme of Gentile powers; the victory is decisive (vv.5-6). When an Israelite sings of his just cause (v.4), he should think beyond the simple right to live unmolested by foreigners, to the very purpose of the call of Israel, namely, to be a light to the Gentiles through living faithfully in the covenant, as confirmed by v.11.

- <sup>3</sup> When my enemies turned back,  
they stumbled and perished before you.
- <sup>4</sup> For you have maintained my just cause;  
you have sat on the throne giving righteous judgement.
- <sup>5</sup> You have rebuked the nations, you have destroyed the wicked;  
you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.
- <sup>6</sup> The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins;  
their cities you have rooted out;  
the very memory of them has perished.

### Psalm 9:3-6

When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before you. In the first two verses of this Psalm David described general reasons for praising God, reasons that are always valid. Now he recounted a reason more specific to his present circumstances; he praised God for the way that the Most High defeated his enemies.

David saw God move against his enemies by defending him on the *principle* of right and wrong in his conflict. This reveals that the God of David - that is, the God of the Bible - is not dispassionate regarding right and wrong among men; that he is not always neutral in human conflict. It is entirely true that men may *think* God is on their side when he is not, and that it may be that God is against *both* parties in

a dispute. Nevertheless, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David could say: **For you have maintained my just cause.** This is also in line with Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple: *<<If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the Lord towards the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause>>* (1 Kings 8:44-45).

**You have sat on the throne; you have rebuked the nations; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.** David saw God in action among the Gentile nations, and righteously judging the wicked. By implication, it can be seen that David also justified and defended the righteous; that is, himself in the present situation but as a representative of all who are righteous in the sight of God.

The past tenses are prophetic perfects, a feature of the OT; they describe coming events as if they have already happened, so certain is their fulfilment and so clear the vision.

**You have blotted out their name for ever and ever.** This probably a reference to what is generally held to be the register kept as the book of life: *<<Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous>>* (Psalm 69:28), *<<Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven>>* (Luke 10:20), *<<Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life>>* (Philippians 4:3), *<<And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books>>* (Revelation 20:12).

**The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins.** Here David shifted his focus from speaking directly to the Lord to now addressing the enemies whom the Lord had defeated. David assured them that their evil work of destruction would end in futility. The metaphor of a judgement-seat is exchanged for a triumphant description of the destructions fallen on the land of the enemy, in all of which God alone is recognised as the one achieving the victory.

### **Psalm 9:7-10 - The Lord's Just Rule Is His People's Security.**

The singer celebrates the security of God's righteous rule. To speak of God's throne (v.7) is to remember his awesome might; to speak of justice, righteousness, and uprightness (vv.7-8) is to remember the good and holy ends for which God wields his might, namely, to protect those who call upon his name (v.10) and to achieve his purpose of bringing light into a world in darkness.

7 But the Lord sits enthroned for ever,  
he has established his throne for judgement.

#### Psalm 9:7

The Lord sits enthroned for ever. It might have been expected that David would set himself in contrast to the wicked; yet he was wise and humble enough to know that God would judge the wicked more for being his own enemies instead of David's. The terms sits and throne continue the idea of v.4, as does the concern with just judgement and righteousness (v.8).

8 He judges the world with righteousness;  
he judges the peoples with equity.

#### Psalm 9:8

That Israel's God judges the world and all its peoples would be a bold claim if he was not the same God who made heaven and earth and all that is in them. In this particular case the judging is punitive, but this need not be true in every case and at all times, as confirmed by: <<*He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*>> (Isaiah 2:4).

He judges the peoples with equity. David looked forward to the eventual and ultimate rule of God over all nations. This would be the perfect expression of God's righteous judgement. The psalm is a great pattern of praise on a far too much neglected level today. God is praised so much for his mercy. That is right, but it is a good thing to recognise his righteous rule, and to praise him for that. One thousand years after David's time, the Apostle Paul quoted this line on Mars Hill: <<*he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed*>> (Acts 17:31).

9 The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.

#### Psalm 9:9

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed. Here David was grateful that God did more than judge the wicked; he also was a refuge and support for those oppressed by the wicked: <<*He subdues the ancient gods, shatters the forces of old; he drove out the enemy before you, and said, 'Destroy!'*>> (Deuteronomy 33:27). God's judgement involves vindicating the oppressed, the people of Israel seen as weak and needy. This psalm grew out of an occasion in which the Gentile rulers sought to oppress them.

The rare word rendered **times of trouble** or extremity occurs only here and in Psalm 10:1. It means a cutting off, i.e. of hope of deliverance. The notion of distress intensified to despair is conveyed.

<sup>10</sup> And those who know your name put their trust in you,  
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

### **Psalm 9:10**

**And those who know your name put their trust in you.** David understood that the help of God was not given just because God favoured some and opposed others. It was because his people have relationship with him, i.e. **know your name**, they have faith in him, i.e. **put their trust in you**, and they endeavour to find him, that is, **those who seek you**.

**For you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.** David recognised, as all people should, that God keeps his promises and does not give up on his people: <<*Because the Lord your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them*>> (Deuteronomy 4:31), and: <<*Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'*>> (Hebrews 13:5).

To **know** God's **name**, to put **trust in** him, and to **seek** him are all ideals of OT piety, of which the people of Israel often fell short, as do most Christians today. Here the people are viewed in terms of their ideal.

### **Psalm 9:11-12 - A Call for God's Faithful to Sing His Praises.**

The singer urges the people of God to make his praises known to the world.

<sup>11</sup> Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion.  
Declare his deeds among the peoples.

### **Psalm 9:11**

**Sing praises to the Lord.** David exhorted others to do what he had already done in this Psalm - to praise the Lord.

**Who dwells in Zion.** Zion can be used to indicate the city of Jerusalem, where God has put his name and will one day dwell forever; the whole country of Israel; or indeed anywhere where his people are.

**Declare his deeds among the peoples.** A similar expression is found in: <<*O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples*>> (1 Chronicles 16:8), <<*O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples*>> (Psalm 105:1), <<*And you will say*

*on that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted>> (Isaiah 12:4); and the idea found again in: <<For this I will extol you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name>> (Psalm 18:49), and: <<Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples>> (Psalm 96:3). God called Abram and Israel for the sake of the whole world, and one function of passages like these is to cultivate in Israel a yearning for the time when the Gentiles would receive the blessing; Paul cites a number of texts to this effect in Romans 15:8-12 in order that the Roman Christians might see that such a time has now come.*

**This should be seen as one of the primary roles of the Christian in whatever circumstances they may find themselves.**

<sup>12</sup> For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

### Psalm 9:12

Mindful of them, namely, of the oppressed people of Israel (v.9), whose blood God avenges when the Gentiles would spill it unjustly: <<O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear>> (Psalm 10:17), <<Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones>> (Isaiah 49:13).

### Psalm 9:13-14 - A Prayer for Relief.

In these verses the song moves to a prayer for deliverance from affliction. The previous threat (vv.3-6) makes it clear that others are yet to come, while the decisive victory has displayed God's commitment to protect and preserve his people. The result of God's answer to the prayer will be further praise in worship, as confirmed by vv.1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord.  
See what I suffer from those who hate me;  
you are the one who lifts me up from the gates of death,  
<sup>14</sup> so that I may recount all your praises,  
and, in the gates of daughter Zion,  
rejoice in your deliverance.

## Psalm 9:13-14

Be gracious to me, O Lord. David had just considered that God remembered the cry of the humble. Now David wanted God to remember him in his season of trouble: See what I suffer from those who hate me.

The gates of death; the gates of daughter Zion. The contrast between the gates of death and the gates of the New Jerusalem is very striking; songs of praise should be excited to the highest and most rapturous pitch by the double consideration of whence the singers are taken. Daughter Zion was a term frequently used for both Jerusalem and the people of God; for example: <<*This is the word that the Lord has spoken concerning him: She despises you, she scorns you – virgin daughter Zion; she tosses her head – behind your back, daughter Jerusalem*>> (2 Kings 19:21), <<*This very day he will halt at Nob, he will shake his fist at the mount of daughter Zion, the hill of Jerusalem*>> (Isaiah 10:32), <<*For I heard a cry as of a woman in labour, anguish as of one bringing forth her first child, the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, ‘Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!’*>> (Jeremiah 4:31), <<*From daughter Zion has departed all her majesty. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer*>> (Lamentations 1:6), <<*Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish; it was the beginning of sin to daughter Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel*>> (Micah 1:13), <<*Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!*>> (Zephaniah 3:14), <<*Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord*>> (Zechariah 2:10), and: <<*Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!*>> (John 12:15).

So that I may recount all your praises. David wanted God to rescue him so that he could give God all the more praise, and all the more passionately to rejoice in God’s salvation. Again, the idea is that David has much more than his own benefit and well-being in mind. Even his deliverance is a way for God to bring more glory to himself. David did not see his rescue as the final goal; the goal was always God’s greater glory.

Rejoice in your deliverance. It is a good thing for the melancholy to become a Christian; it is an unfortunate thing for the Christian to become melancholy. If there is any man in the world that has a right to have a bright, clear face and a flashing eye, it is the man whose sins are forgiven him, and who is saved with God’s salvation: <<*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit*>> (Psalm 32:1-2).

## Psalm 9:15-18 - God Protects the Needy by Defeating the Wicked.

The song again celebrates how God defends the poor by defeating their oppressors. Here the wicked (vv.16-17) are expressly those Gentiles who oppose God's purposes (v.15 and v.17), while the needy and poor are the people of Israel under threat (v.18).

- <sup>15</sup> The nations have sunk in the pit that they made;  
in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught.
- <sup>16</sup> The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgement;  
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Higgsion.  
Selah

## Psalm 9-15-16

The nations have sunk in the pit that they made. David understood the triumph of God to be so complete that his enemies are ensnared in the same trap they set for others. Even the best plans and efforts of those who oppose God end up serving his purpose. This pattern is demonstrated again and again in the Scriptures.

- Esau and Isaac plot against the purpose of God and end up serving it.
- Joseph's brothers fight against the plan of God only to further it.
- Hamaan built a gallows for Mordecai the Jew, only to be executed upon it himself.
- Judas betrayed Jesus and became himself a fulfilment of prophecy.

**This of course never justifies the evil that men do; although the betrayal of Judas sent Jesus to the Cross, he himself was rightly called the son of perdition, the one destined for destruction, for his evil work: <<While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled>> (John 17:12).**

There is nothing that a wicked man does that is not against his own interest. He is continually doing himself harm, and takes more pains to destroy his soul than the righteous man does to get his saved unto eternal life. This is a weighty truth; and the psalmist adds: Higgsion; Selah. Meditate on this; mark it well.

The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgement. The greatness of God is demonstrated by the way he can both use the plans and efforts of the ungodly, while also bringing righteous judgement upon them.

17 The wicked shall depart to Sheol,  
all the nations that forget God.

### Psalm 9:17

Here, Sheol refers to the hell, the final, tortuous place of the second death: <<*Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire*>> (Revelation 20:14-15). It is the destination for the wicked, also described as all the nations that forget God. Refer also to the comments made on Psalm 6:5.

18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten,  
nor the hope of the poor perish for ever.

### Psalm 9:18

The needy shall not always be forgotten. David expresses a beautiful contrast here. The wicked try to forget God; yet the needy and poor, here describing the godly who are oppressed by God's enemies, are not forgotten.

Nor the hope of the poor perish for ever. God has always had a special place in his heart for the poor and they can always put the hope in him through his Son: <<*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*>> (Luke 4:18-19).

### Psalm 9:19-20 - Prayer for God to Judge the Nations.

By referring to these Gentiles as mortals (v.19) and human (v.20), the song contrasts their schemes with the just and good plan of God himself.

19 Rise up, O Lord! Do not let mortals prevail;  
let the nations be judged before you.

20 Put them in fear, O Lord;  
let the nations know that they are only human. Selah

### Psalm 9:19-20

Previously in this Psalm David expressed a firm confidence in God's judgement of the wicked and his vindication of the righteous. Yet David did not allow this expectation to make him passive or fatalistic in regard to the outworking of God's plan. Instead he boldly prayed: Rise up, O Lord! Do not let mortals prevail.

Let the nations be judged before you; let the nations know that they are only human. David again expressed his confidence in God's judgement of the wicked: <<*Let the nations rouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the neighbouring nations*>> (Joel 3:12). Yet this did not lead David to a hatred of mankind or unhealthy joy in punitive judgement. His real hope was that the display of God's judgement would teach the nations their proper place before God - to be but mortals. This is a place of humility, and as David has already noted in this psalm, the humble are remembered before God (v.12). This was a prayer for God to reach the nations through the display of his just judgement.