

Psalm 10 • Characteristics of the Wicked

Introduction

The Septuagint published Psalm 9 and 10 as a single Psalm, but we can see by the major change in emphasis why they might be handled as two separate teachings. At the very least, however, the reader should familiarize themselves with the main features of Psalm 9. In this Psalm what may be most useful is how it serves our understanding of the difference between someone specifically designated as “wicked” versus other similar-sounding categories such as “sinner”, “unbeliever”, “evildoer” or the like. While there may be overlapping qualities between related spiritual conditions, each one is addressing a specific circumstance, and when it comes to “the wicked”, it is important to understand that their particular lifestyle is both premeditated in their actions against man and fully aware of their attitude toward God.

¹Why do You stand afar off, O LORD?
Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?
²In pride the wicked hotly pursue the afflicted;
Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: If Psalm 10 is actually a continuation of Psalm 9, what was the main gist of Psalm 9?

A: God’s inevitable judgment on the nations.

Q: How has the emphasis shifted in Psalm 10?

A: Instead of addressing the sins of the group, it is now speaking to the sins of the individual—“the wicked”, or the individual behavior which characterizes the whole group.

Q: What is the biblical definition of someone who is “wicked”?

A: This term could also be translated as “criminal”. It is someone who is found legally guilty of violating God’s Law.

Q: According to v.2, what is the major factor motivating “the wicked”?

A: “Pride”.

Q: What does it mean that they “pursue the afflicted”?

A: The timing of their behavior is purposely inflicted when the faithful are most vulnerable, during times of trial or duress.

Q: And how does v.2 reveal that what they inflict is premeditated and purposeful, and not just by chance?

A: “...the plots which they have devised”. The very definition of a “plot” is something consciously undertaken which must be planned or “devised”.

Application: Just as society knows that someone pursuing a life of crime does so consciously and in full awareness that they are breaking secular law, so the spiritually wicked consciously engage in violating God’s Law.

³For the wicked boasts of his heart’s desire,
And the greedy man curses and spurns the LORD.
⁴The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him.
All his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

[Read v.3-4]

Q: In English, the classic definition of “boasts” is understood as “brags”, but what is the meaning of the underlying Hebrew term, “halal”?

A: It is a word which is often rendered “praise” when in reference to God, but when directed toward one’s self is conveying the idea of self-praising.

Q: How would this speak to the statement, “All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God’” in v.4?

A: The wicked pursue an avenue of self-deification, of attempting to replace God with their self.

Q: How would that tie into their also being designated as “the greedy man” who “curses and spurns the LORD”?

A: It is something Scripture associates not only with sensuality, but idolatry.

⁵His ways prosper at all times;
Your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
As for all his adversaries, he snorts at them.

⁶He says to himself, "I will not be moved;
Throughout all generations I will not be in adversity."

⁷His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression;
Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness.

⁸He sits in the lurking places of the villages;
In the hiding places he kills the innocent;
His eyes stealthily watch for the unfortunate.

⁹He lurks in a hiding place as a lion in his lair;
He lurks to catch the afflicted;
He catches the afflicted when he draws him into his net.

¹⁰He crouches, he bows down,
And the unfortunate fall by his mighty ones.

¹¹He says to himself, "God has forgotten;
He has hidden His face; He will never see it."

Q: What is the sequence provided which defines the spiritual process by which "the wicked" are formed?

1. "...boasts of his heart's desire". Puts himself in God's place.
2. "...curses and spurns the LORD". Opposes and rejects God.
3. "...does not seek Him". Ignores God.
4. "...There is no God". Ultimately denies God.

Application: The wicked take out their **hostility** toward God on those most **friendly** to God because they are actively **opposed** to God both inwardly and outwardly.

[Read v.5-11]

Q: What is the chief characteristic of "the wicked" which is being expressed in v.5-6?

A: They are fixated solely on this life, believing themselves to be successful because of their worldly success at elevating their self.

Q: How does this act as a segue between the previous section and this overall list of their behaviors in this section of the Psalm?

A: It completes their act of self-deification in that they do not operate as if they will ultimately be accountable to God, but consider themselves the master of their own fate, acting accordingly in this life.

Q: How are v.7 & 6 providing related characteristics?

A: They refer to his "mouth" and "eyes", the two things which always betray a person's actual lifestyle.

Q: What is the nature of his "mouth"?

1. "Curses"—the opposite of "blesses", it is the picture of someone publicly kneeling to worship but engaging in the exact opposite.
2. "Deceit"—not just engaging in deception, but more towards treachery, someone engaging in an act of betrayal or opposition.
3. "Oppression"—the Hebrew word carries with it the picture of cutting into pieces.
4. "Mischief"—the intention to bring misery and hardship upon their victim.
5. "Wickedness"—the process of escalating the violation of God's Law toward the goal of idolatry where God is replaced entirely by something else.

Q: What is the nature of his "eyes"?

A: "...stealthily watch for the unfortunate". Such are proactively looking for the opportunity to surreptitiously act when their target is at its weakest.

Q: But was is the accompanying action which these characteristics are employed in v.8-10?

1. "He sits in the lurking places..." (v.8)
2. "...in the hiding places..." (v.8)
3. "He lurks in a hiding place..." (v.9)
4. "...He lurks to catch the afflicted..." (v.9)
5. "...he draws them into his net". (v.9)
6. "He crouches, he bows down". (v.10)

All of these describe the premeditated actions of someone who purposely implements their schemes against the unsuspecting when they are the most vulnerable.

Q: Who is listed in these verses as his target?

1. (v.8) "...the innocent"
2. (v.8) "...the unfortunate"
3. (v.9) "...the afflicted" (twice)
4. (v.10) "...the unfortunate"

¹²Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up Your hand.
Do not forget the afflicted.
¹³Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said to himself, "You will not require it."
¹⁴You have seen it, for You have beheld mischief and vexation to take it into Your hand.
The unfortunate commits himself to You;
You have been the helper of the orphan.
¹⁵Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer,
Seek out his wickedness until You find none.

¹⁶The LORD is King forever and ever; Nations have perished from His land.
¹⁷O LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble;
You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear
¹⁸To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed,
So that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror.

Q: How does v.11 shed light on their thinking and motives in v.5?

A: Believing God is out of their sight and mind so that their placement of self in His place escalates both their behavior toward others as well as God.

Application: A wicked personality acts in conscious and premeditated fashion toward both God and man.

[Read v.12-15]

Q: How are the targets of the previous section revisited in these verses?

1. "...the unfortunate" in v.8 & 10 is found in v.14.
2. "...the afflicted" in v.9 is found in v.13.
3. "...the innocent" in v.8 are further described as "the orphan" in v.14.

Q: How are these actions the wicked have undertaken against others summed up as resulting in their attitude toward God?

A: They have "spurned God". (v.13)

Q: What is the appropriate response which the Psalmist seeks?

A: The self-deifying wicked have acted according to their own hand, so the request is for God to "lift up Your hand" (v.12) and "break the arm of the wicked" (v.15). They have raised their hand in action toward others, God should raise His toward them.

Q: How does the request to "Seek out his wickedness until You find none" in v.15 juxtapose the list of their behaviors in the previous section of v.5-11?

A: The previous section detailed six different times their propensity to lurk, hide, and crouch in preparation of attacking the unfortunate, afflicted and innocent; here it is requested that God actively seek **them** out—that is, in turn pursue them.

Q: What seems to be missing from this request for justice which we would expect if this were a case brought before an earthly court?

A: Personal compensation.

Q: So what does it mean, "Seek out his wickedness until You find none"?

A: This is another way of asking God to deal with it to the point that there is no more of this behavior to be found in them. This is leaving the options open to the problem being resolved not just by outright physical elimination if they are so recalcitrant, but a genuine spiritual change. It leaves the result up to God.

Application: The biblical petitioner of God's justice does not seek personal compensation but the appropriate spiritual response. They know the wicked must ultimately be overcome spiritually in order for things to be resolved physically.

[Read v.16-18]

Q: What is the chief characteristic provided here which tells much about the spiritual state of a believer suffering at the hands of the wicked? Who does God listen to?

A: "...You have heard the desire of the humble..." (v.17) They are a contrast to the prideful nature of the wicked who elevate their self; the righteous always instead elevate God.

Q: What is further revealed about the nature of "the wicked"?

A: They are the "man who is of the earth". (v.18) They neither acknowledge nor seek God above or any greater thing beyond the boundaries of this life which elevates self over everything else.

Application: The wicked trust in the temporal comfort of the short-term in this life, whereas God's people trust in the long-term reconciliation of all things.