

## Psalm 9-10

Psalm 9 – Office of Readings Monday Week 1

Psalm 10 – Office of Readings Tuesday Week 1

Remembering the ways in which God has demonstrated his power and love for his people in the past, the psalmist is moved to gratitude. By bringing about the defeat of Israel's enemies, God has revealed himself as a just judge who 'has not forsaken those who seek you' (verse ten). The psalmist prays that God will act again now against those who are causing his suffering (verse thirteen). The prayer of thanks and petition in the first section of the psalm (Psalm 9) gives way to a lament in the second section (Psalm 10). God is slow to respond to his cry. Those who are acting contrary to God's justice are getting away with it; indeed, they are flourishing. In spite of this, the psalmist reiterates his faith in God as the one who hears the cry of the oppressed.

That these two psalms are to be read as a single unit is indicated by the acrostic structure: the first letter in each line of the first stanza (9:1-2) begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet [א]; the first letter of each line of the second stanza (9:3-4) begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet [ב], and so on through the whole of Psalm 9-10. It is kept as one piece in the Greek Septuagint Bible where it is numbered as Psalm 9 – a numbering which was continued in the Latin versions and so in the liturgy. We will observe other differences in numbering between the Hebrew and Greek-Latin-liturgy versions of the psalms (see Psalms 114-116 and 146-147), but this difference here is the reason for the liturgical numbering being regularly one behind that found in most modern bibles, which number the psalms according to the Hebrew numbering.

YHWH is portrayed as King-Judge who sees (9:13; 10:14) and hears (10:17; who does not remain hidden at a distance (9:12; 10:1,11-12); who remembers (9:12); who interrogates the guilty (9:12; 10:4,13); who sits in judgment (9:4,7); who rises to give his verdict and sentence (9:10; 10:12); whose verdict favours the innocent and leads to praise (9:1,2,11,14). The title reads: 'To the leader: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm\* of David'. 'Muth-labben' was probably a popular song at the time and provided the tune for the psalm.

### Part One: Psalm 9:1-20 (Hebrew and Greek 9:2-21)

[א] [ʾālep]

**<sup>1</sup>I give you thanks, YHWH\*, with all my heart\*;  
recounting all your wonderful deeds.**

**<sup>2</sup>In festive jubilation, I will celebrate you,  
sounding your name in music, O Most High.**

[ב] [bēt]

**<sup>3</sup>As my enemies are turned back,  
they stumble and perish before you.**

**<sup>4</sup>You passed judgment\* in my favour,  
seated on the throne, O just\* judge.**

[ג] [gîmel] note verse 7 before verse 6

<sup>5</sup>You have chastised the nations, you have destroyed the wicked,  
blotting out their name forever.  
<sup>7</sup>YHWH sits enthroned forever,  
issuing judgment\* from his throne.

[ג] dāleṭ is missing

[ה] [hē]

<sup>6</sup>The enemy is destroyed, memory of them has perished.  
You razed to the ground their cities;  
<sup>8</sup>He judges the world with justice\*;  
with fairness he governs the nations.

[ו] [wāw]

<sup>9</sup>YHWH is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of danger.  
<sup>10</sup>They put their trust\* in you, all who acknowledged your name,  
for you, YHWH, do not forsake those who seek you.

[ז] [zayin]

<sup>11</sup>Sing praises to YHWH, who dwells in Zion,  
declare his deeds to the people.  
<sup>12</sup>He who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted\*.

[ח] [ḥēṭ]

<sup>13</sup>Be gracious\* to me, YHWH. Look how oppressed\* I am.  
You are the one who draws me back from the gates of death,  
<sup>14</sup>so that I may recount your praises at the gates of Zion,  
and celebrate your deliverance.

The Hebrew for ‘praises’ in verse 14 is t<sup>e</sup>hillâ [תְּהִלָּה], a word that occurs 30 times in the psalms. This is the word used to describe the psalm scroll: ‘the praises’.

[ט] [ṭet]

<sup>15</sup>The nations have fallen into the pit that they dug;  
in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught.  
<sup>16</sup>YHWH makes himself known by executing judgment\*,  
and the wicked are snared by what they themselves have done.

A Meditation. Selah\*

## Human mortality

[י] [yōd] note verse 19 before verse 18

**<sup>17</sup>The wicked shall depart to Sheol,  
the nations that forget God.**

**<sup>19</sup>Rise up, YHWH! Do not allow the insolence of mortal human beings;  
in your presence let the nations be judged.**

‘Mortal human beings’ translates the Hebrew <sup>ע</sup>nôš [עֲנוֹשׁ]. See also 9:20 and 10:18. It refers to human beings, often with the focus on human frailty and mortality. In Psalm 8 <sup>ע</sup>nôš and ben’ādām [בֶּן אָדָם] are used interchangeably:

What are we [<sup>ע</sup>nôš] that you are mindful of us,  
mortal human beings [ben’ādām] that you care for us?

– Psalm 8:4

Similarly in the following texts:

I, I am he who comforts you;  
why then are you afraid of a mere mortal [<sup>ע</sup>nôš],  
a human being [ben’ādām] who fades like grass?

– Isaiah 51:12

They have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek.  
They are not in trouble as are others [<sup>ע</sup>nôš];  
they are not subject to calamities like other people [ben’ādām].

– Psalm 73:4-5

As for us mortal human beings [<sup>ע</sup>nôš], our days are like grass;  
they flourish like a flower of the field.

– Psalm 103:15

[כ] [kap]

**<sup>18</sup>For the needy\* shall not always be forgotten,  
nor the hope\* of the poor be forever frustrated.**

**<sup>20</sup>Strike them with terror\*, YHWH;  
let the nations know that they are but mortal [<sup>ע</sup>nôš].**

**Selah\***

**Part Two: Psalm 10:1-18** (Greek Psalm 9:22-39)

Though the alphabetical structure continues, there is a striking change of tone, which may account for its being given a separate number in the Hebrew Massoretic Text.

[לָ] [lāmed]

**<sup>1</sup>Why, YHWH\*, do you stand far off?**

**Why do you hide yourself in time of trouble?**

**<sup>2</sup>The arrogance of the wicked is fired up against the poor\*;  
they are caught in the intrigues that they themselves have devised.**

• pride

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

– Proverbs 16:18

• scheming

You are plotting destruction. Your tongue is like a sharp razor, you who deal in deceit.

– Psalm 52:2

They speak of you maliciously, and rise up against you for evil!

– Psalm 139:20

[מֵ] [mēm]

**<sup>3</sup>For the wicked boast of their ambition  
and the greedy are full of self\* adulation.**

• boasting

They trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches.

– Psalm 49:6

• ambition and greed

Do not rely on your wealth or say, ‘I have enough.’

Do not follow your inclination and strength in pursuing the desires of your heart.

Do not say, ‘Who can have power over me?’

– Sirach 5:1-3

• craving for possessions

Your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood,  
and for practising oppression and violence.

– Jeremiah 22:17

• The word ‘self’ in ‘self adulation’ translates the Hebrew *nepeï*. See the article ‘Being’ in the Introduction.

Flattery is on their lips, but their heart is set on their gain.

– Ezekiel 33:31

The evil lives of the proud

[נ] [nûn]

**<sup>4</sup>The wicked despise YHWH:  
‘There is no god to whom I must give an account!’  
<sup>5a</sup>What machinations!  
Their lives are forever twisted.**

Compare the following:

When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I promised on oath to their ancestors, and they have eaten their fill and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, despising me and breaking my covenant.

– Deuteronomy 31:20

Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken YHWH, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged!

– Isaiah 1:4

If favour is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness;  
in the land of uprightness they deal perversely and do not see the majesty of YHWH.

– Isaiah 26:10

[נ] [To begin with a sāmek requires an alteration to the text]

**<sup>5b</sup>They have removed your judgments\* from their consciousness  
and defied all who disagree with them.  
<sup>6</sup>They think in their heart\*: ‘I will never be shaken,  
nothing will get in my way!’**

Leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.

– Isaiah 30:11

[פ] [pēh] - should be after נ]

**<sup>7</sup>Their mouths regurgitate deceit and fraud;  
their tongues are nests of malice and lies.  
<sup>8a</sup>They sit in ambush in the villages;  
they murder the innocent under cover of secrecy.**

Though wickedness is sweet in their mouth, though they hide it under their tongues, though they are loath to let it go, and hold it in their mouths, yet their food is turned in their stomachs; it is the venom of asps within them. They swallow down riches and vomit them up again; God make them vomit them out of their bellies.

– Job 20:12-15

Bread gained by deceit is sweet, but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel.

– Proverbs 20:17

[ע] [‘ayin]

**<sup>8b</sup>Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;  
<sup>9</sup>they lurk in secret like a lion in its den;  
 they lurk that they may seize the poor\*;  
 they kidnap the poor\*, luring them into their net.**

We find Peter using this image:

Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.  
 – 1Peter 5:8

[צ] [To begin with a šāḏēh requires adding ‘The innocent’]

**<sup>10</sup>The innocent, bowed down, oppressed,  
 cannot sustain the violence of the wicked.  
<sup>11</sup>They think in their heart\* ‘God has forgotten,  
 he has hidden his face, he will never notice.’**

The psalmist knows that they are wrong. God has not forgotten!

He who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.  
 – Psalm 9:12

[כ] [kōp]

**<sup>12</sup>Rise up, YHWH; O God, extend your hand;  
 do not forget the oppressed\*.  
<sup>13</sup>Why should the wicked spurn God, and say in their hearts\*,  
 ‘He will not call us to account’?**

Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.  
 – Micah 5:9

[ר] [rēš]

**<sup>14</sup>But you do see! Indeed, you observe trouble and grief,  
 that you may repay those responsible.  
 You make it your business to take note of evil.  
 You are the helper of the orphan.**

Commit the direction of your life to YHWH. Trust in him. He will act.  
 – Psalm 37:5

Commit your work to YHWH, and your plans will be established.  
 – Proverbs 16:3

Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.  
 – Psalm 68:5

YHWH watches over the strangers. He upholds the orphan and the widow.  
 – Psalm 146:9

In you the orphan finds mercy.  
 – Hosea 14:3

[שׁ] [šin]

**<sup>15</sup>Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoers;  
so that if anyone seeks them out, they will not be found.**

**<sup>16</sup>YHWH is king forever and ever;  
the nations shall disappear from his land.**

YHWH sits enthroned forever, issuing judgment from his throne.

– Psalm 9:7

[ת] [taw]

**<sup>17</sup>YHWH, you hear the longings of the poor\*;  
you strengthen their hearts\*, you listen to them,  
<sup>18</sup>to protect the rights of the orphan and the oppressed.**

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.

– Psalm 57:7

They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in YHWH.

– Psalm 112:7

If you direct your heart rightly, you will stretch out your hands toward him.

– Job 11:13

God's care for the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed, and the marginalised, is highlighted in Jesus' parable of the final judgment:

The king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ...

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

– Matthew 25:34-36, 41-43

**<sup>18b</sup>Never again may they sow terror,  
mortal human beings made from the earth.**

'Mortal human beings' translates the Hebrew 'עֲנוֹשׁ (see Psalm 9:19).