

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 10

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The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Psalm 10 Challenging Circumstances

Psalm 10 Introduction

Within this psalm we see that the Psalmist describes two different worldviews. On the one hand the writer is talking about himself and on the other hand he is talking about the wicked. As you and I read this Psalm we note that like him we can be confident that God will act in His time, and that we will encounter the same problem he encountered. The wicked will announce “*there is no God,*” or if there is a God that “*He has hidden His face.*” The wicked think that they can get away with oppressing the poor. In his freedom to act he may think he is sovereign, but with the Psalmist we contend that “*The LORD is king forever and ever,*” and that despite what we see in the world, ultimately God will do what is right. The two world views are seen in that the wicked bases himself on past experiences ‘I have gotten away with it before,’ while the Psalmist deepens his life of faith and waits for the LORD.

Psalm 9 and 10 have some similarity; some keywords come back in both Psalms and in both there are opponents; the wicked, but in Psalm 9 this is an external enemy, the nations surrounding Israel, whereas in Psalm 10 the wicked are within the community.

*** In both Psalms there will be the downfall of the opponent. In Psalm 9 they get trapped and entangled in their own traps (see comments on Psalm 9:16). This forms the confidence in faith for the Psalmist in Psalm 10, that the wicked that are among the community will also suffer a parallel fate (10:2). The opponents are described as גוֹיִם (*goyim*), the ‘foreign’ foes (Psalm 9:5; 10:16). Together with this Psalm it might be better to see these as the uncircumcised of the heart (Jeremiah 9:25-26), from among the Gentiles and the Jews.

Commentary

Psalm 10:1-2

- 1 Why, O LORD, do You stand far away?
Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?
- 2 In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;
let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

Comment

This is not a murmur or a complaint against God, but rather a desire to know why, in the light of his present hopeless condition, the LORD is far off. The Psalmist asked God why, especially in light of the wicked one’s action, do you hide Yourself? This is in contrast to Psalm 9:10 where it says *You will not forsake*. This was not just a problem for the Psalmist, as we also see the same reflected by Peter, “*do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*” (1 Peter 4:12). And so too for our time, if we would write our Psalm, our song of deliverance, it too might include the question, “Where are You Lord? I need you, for those that trouble me are many and all around me.”

Psalm 10:3-4

- 3 For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,
and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.
- 4 In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;
all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

Comment

This is a good example of Proverb 16:18, “*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*” Their claim “*there is no God*” is repeated twice more by David in Psalms 14 & 53, and in both cases he adds the phrase “*the fool says in his heart*” and so they curse and renounce the LORD. They even think He does not exist. Yet they are “נָבָל” (*nabal*) foolish, perhaps better translated as a combination of *wicked* and *stupid*. A clear Biblical example of this is the story of Nabal and yes he was a fool (1 Samuel 25).

Psalm 10:5

5 His ways prosper at all times;
Your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
as for all his foes, he puffs at them.

Comment

The wicked ways are (or appear to be) continually flourishing, and he is not even aware of the elevated ruling against him, *he* even dares to *puff at them*. This expressed the thought that the wicked one knows of the heavenly court, yet is openly scornful and contemptuous of it. The heavenly court is also seen in Psalm 82 where God sits in judgement over the judges.

Psalm 10:6-7

6 He says in his heart,
“I shall not be moved;
from generation to generation I shall not meet adversity.”
7 His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

Comment

He reasons to himself “I won’t meet trouble, not now, not ever.” The wicked curse maliciously with false oaths (compare Job 31:30) and by being untruthful (the same thought comes back in Psalm 59:12). It is almost a summary statement as the wicked is being described here as the anti-torah man (Exodus 23:1), who gives false reports etc.

Psalm 10:8-9

8 He sits in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places he murders the innocent.
His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
9 he lies in ambush like a lion in his thicket;
he lies that he may seize the poor;
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.

Comment

The trap he sets is by the wayside, the place of thieves and robbers. The meanness of the wicked culminates in the murder of the one who is innocent of the crimes mentioned above, like the man who gets trapped by the lies and deceit of the conman. The wicked carefully build an ambush and pounce on the innocent, seeking to devour him (1 Peter 5:8), as a skilful hunter drawing them deeper into his web of deceit. The repetition of the *poor* (עָנִי) is reminiscent of the poor in Matthew 5:3, that is the *poor in spirit*, the humble, the innocent ones.

Psalm 10:10

10 He crouches, he bows down,
and the helpless fall into his mighty claws.

Comment

The Hebrew here is difficult and this is reflected in the multitude of translations that vary greatly. So in this translation (JPS) we see once again the image of the lion that pounces on the poor. He is now described as the one who is deserted and falls into the strong claws. Again it reflects the imagery we see in 1 Peter 5 where it talks about the adversary and here too this fits well, the wicked reflect their father.

Psalm 10:11

11 He says in his heart,
“God has forgotten,
He has hidden His face,
He will never see it.”

Comment

Thus even if the wicked does acknowledge God, he continues to slay the poor (the righteous) for his thinking is: *God has forgotten* them, the Lord no longer concerns Himself about the faithful, He does not want to know.

But this is contrary to God’s way of thinking. Listen to these words in Zechariah 7:9-10 “*Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.*” This is the summary of the commandments in Exodus 22:21-24, 23:9 and Deuteronomy 24:14-18 & 27:19. The claim of the wicked was not true then and is not true today. Despite our suffering, which is often for our growth (James 1:2-4), God does hear the cries of the broken hearted (Psalm 34:17-18).

Psalm 10:12-13

12 Arise, O LORD; O God,
lift up Your hand;
forget not the afflicted.
13 Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart,
“You will not call to account”?

Comment

“Arise, O Lord” are like the words of Moses in Numbers 10:35, where Moses prays for God’s enemies to be scattered. Here too the prayer is for God to arise and lift up His hand, with the request for God to demonstrate who He is. It was His hand that was against Egypt (Exodus 7:4) and brought deliverance for Israel. Just as the Lord looked after Israel, the Psalmist asked the Lord to confirm that He would look after the poor, the orphan and the widow. This fits well with the next line where the wicked announce that they have abandoned God, and so believe that God will not call them to account. It sounds the same as an atheist today, who claims that ‘there is no god’ and says that even if there was a god, they would question and denounce him. I am reluctant to name Stephen Fry or Richard Dawkins, yet their outrageous statements do come to mind. They think they can question God when they arrive at heaven’s gates.

Psalm 10:14

14 But You do see,
for You do note mischief and vexation,
that You may take it into Your hands;
to You the helpless commits himself;
You have been the helper of the fatherless.

Comment

Contrary to the thoughts of the wicked, God not only sees what happens, He then sees *to* the need. He does observe and requires an account from them into His hands.

God is the helper of the orphan, for God will not abandon the poor in spirit. Even in tumultuous times He remains our refuge and our strength and a very present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46).

Psalm 10:15

15 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
call his wickedness to account till You find none.

Comment

The breaking of the arm is metaphorical. The arm here symbolises strength, and so he requests that God paralyse their power to do mischief. (Psalm 37:17 & Job 38:15). Interestingly, ‘the wicked and evildoer’ are put into two categories, as if to say that there are those who are actively wicked but there are also those who enable it to happen. The Psalmist asks God to remove all of them.

Psalm 10:16

16 The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations perish from His land.

Comment

In contrast to the removal of the wicked, the LORD is the eternal King, whose kingdom will be truly universal and never end (Zechariah 14:9; Daniel 7:14 & Revelation 11:15). The nations will be removed from the Promised Land, which is His land. He will judge the nations according to how they treated His people Israel and how they divided His land (Joel 3:2).

Psalm 10:17-18

17 O LORD, You hear the desire of the afflicted;
You will strengthen their heart;
You will incline your ear
18 to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

Comment

In the conclusion the Psalmist expresses the prayer of faith, that his request does not remain unanswered, that justice will be done to the orphan (Psalm 10:14) and the downtrodden (Psalm 9:9). Secondly, he asks God to strengthen them in their ponderings (the heart is the seat of thinking in Jewish classical thought).

The phrase “*Incline your ear*” is the shortened version of “*Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see,*” as found in Isaiah 37:17. It represents that God gives His full attention to the problems of the orphan and the oppressed.

The concluding line “*so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more*” refers to the unregenerate man, very much in line with the first man in 1 Corinthians 15:47.

Conclusion

In this Psalm the author complains to the LORD about the wicked oppressing the poor. He prays for the remedy and appeals to the Judge and finally expresses his confidence that the Lord will reign. A second request is for the Judge to incline, pay careful attention to the afflicted.

Selah

Shalom in Messiah

Paul & Sue