

Praise God for Justice and Righteousness

Psalm 9:1-12

- ¹ I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
- ² I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.
- ³ When my enemies turned back,
they stumbled and perished before you.
- ⁴ For you have maintained my just cause;
you have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment.
- ⁵ You have rebuked the nations, you have destroyed the
wicked;
you have blotted out their name forever and ever.
- ⁶ The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins;
their cities you have rooted out;
the very memory of them has perished.
- ⁷ But the LORD sits enthroned forever,
he has established his throne for judgment.
- ⁸ He judges the world with righteousness;
he judges the peoples with equity.
- ⁹ The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
- ¹⁰ And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.
- ¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion.
Declare his deeds among the peoples.

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

Theme Statement

Israel praises and petitions the Lord for justice and deliverance. Israel trusts God to do the right thing in the face of wicked nations and on behalf of the suffering oppressed. And God does this.

Exploring the Word

This psalm addresses the varied circumstances of our daily lives and ongoing faith journeys. The psalmist expresses thanksgiving, confidence, pleas for help, and lament. God is viewed as the “Most High,” a ruler over the nations. God is a judge and vanquisher of enemies and the wicked. Finally, and very importantly, Israel’s God is also a “stronghold” for those who are oppressed, helpless, and troubled.

The psalm’s preface credits it to David. However, even though many psalms are credited to David, it is most likely that he is not the author. Including David in the preface to the psalm was an ancient way to give the psalm importance, linking it with him and his life.

Psalm 9:1-2 The people praise God

Used in Israel’s congregational worship, Psalm 9 is a dramatization of individual lament applied to Israel’s own danger from enemies, pagan nations, and the wicked. But this psalm is not pure lament. It begins with praise and confidence in God, affirming that God has worked deliverance before, and will do so again. Behind this psalm is Israel’s memory of God’s wonderful, saving deeds: the exodus, the gift of the promised land, and the rescue from exile. These are the foundation of Israel’s hope for justice.

Both verses pledge that the congregation will be certain to praise and thank God once they are delivered from the present affliction and danger. This pledge shows that Israel trusts that God will hear their pleas and act. It is likely that this psalm expresses the situation of God’s people after they returned home from exile in Babylon and faced opposition from surrounding non-Israelites and from neighboring nations (Ezra 4:1-6; Nehemiah 2:17-20).

Psalm 9:3-4 The Lord’s righteous judgment

Details about the identity of the enemies in verse 3 are lacking. But the deliverance of those who suffered is certain. God has been faithful before and will be again. Israel trusts the Lord God because God is not arbitrary or capricious. God is true to God’s word and promise. Therefore God’s judgment is righteous (just). Verse 4 describes God on God’s throne. God is the true sovereign who rules over all and is fair and equitable to all and in all situations.

Psalm 9:5-8 Lord over the nations

There is a strong contrast in these verses between earthly enemies who are temporary and vanquished and the Lord who is enthroned forever. The vision of the Lord as king over all nations is emphasized in verses 5-6. This same vision is found in the kingship psalms (95–100). The point is also made that this majestic Lord cares about Israel’s daily life and struggles. Later in Psalm 9, the Lord is the one who sees human suffering (v. 13), lifts people from the gates of death (v. 13), snares the wicked (v. 16), and does not forget the needy (v. 18).

Think of verses 5-8 as being like a hymn that reminds worshipers of the power and faithfulness of God, who has acted to save in the past and the present, and will do so in the future. Such hymns and psalms sung by Israel and by God’s people today are meant to testify to God’s majesty

and mercy, encourage people in times of trouble, and strengthen trust and faith.

Psalm 9:9-12 The Lord does not forget the afflicted

The hymn continues, telling the truth that those who sought and seek the Lord for deliverance and justice will never do so in vain. This is the worldview of Israel. The world not only originated with the God of Israel but also is held and healed by God. The wicked will not win. The Lord “avenges blood,” or holds accountable those who shed blood. This God orders life and works for justice and peace. This God does not forget the oppressed and those in trouble. This is the truth about this world, and Israel trusts it will be realized.

The Word Today

Psalm 9 gets real about life. It points to the Lord as the one who acts righteously by doing the right thing, seeking fairness and justice for the lowly and oppressed. The Lord works for justice for all, holds the wicked accountable, and blesses the whole creation with peace. The good news is that the Lord’s work continues in our troubled world today. People are still homeless, hungry, and oppressed. People still argue and lash out in anger, steal property, kill one another, and go to war. Psalm 9 is realistic about history and humankind but praises God, because God can be trusted to be at work for justice and healing.

There is an organization called MAD DADS, founded in 1989, that gets real about the need for justice, transformation, and peace. The MAD stands for “Men Against Destruction” and the DADS for “Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder.” Its membership is made up of African American dads who are working to bring healing, justice, and peace to neighborhoods in the US and

internationally. These brave, unarmed volunteers have organized midnight neighborhood patrols to keep people safe. They have confronted drug dealers, connected people with counseling, and organized job training and kids’ programs. They work with local police as they foster justice, renewal, and peace and are well respected and trusted. I saw them in action in downtown Minneapolis in 2020 as the city was reeling from the death of George Floyd. What a sign of hope and trust! On that summer night, they reached out to protesters to keep things as peaceful as possible, going back and forth between protesters and police to de-escalate the situation. One of their stated goals is to create a sense of hope for all people. One video clip from their website is of a crowd of MAD DADS in action (see their website: maddads.com). The clip shows a bystander holding a sign that reads “More God, Less Guns.” I think the writer of Psalm 9 would agree. God’s justice and harmony are the way to go.

Ponder where the oppressed, poor, and troubled are in your town or city, county, and state. What work do we need to do to bring God’s justice to these folks and situations? As we praise God, we can also serve God’s purposes by fostering justice and peace. Caution: Do not get distracted with debates about who is worthy or unworthy to receive support and help. Notice that the psalmist does not. Jesus did not either (Luke 4:14-21).

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. What do you think is the meaning of the phrase “They couldn’t see the forest for the trees”?

Exploring the Word

1. Why does Israel begin Psalm 9 with praise and confidence in God?
2. What is the setting of Psalm 9? What do we learn about it in Ezra 4:1-6?
3. Why does Israel trust God's righteous judgment?
4. Compare the description of the Lord's actions in Psalm 9:5-8 with those in Psalm 9:13, 16, and 18.
5. What is the vision of God and God's world based on Psalm 9:9-12?

The Word Today

1. Choose from the list below what you think are the three most important justice issues today:

- climate change
- low-income housing
- health care
- civil rights
- food insecurity
- civil unrest
- excessive taxation
- poverty
- lack of educational opportunity
- other: _____

2. Visit the MAD DADS website, maddads.com. What do you think about the ways these dads are working to live up to their name, Men Against Destruction Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder?
3. Sketch a sign you might hold up encouraging God's justice and peace in times of trouble.

Closing Prayer

Lord of all, we praise you for your saving power, especially through Jesus Christ. We thank you for your defense of those who live in oppression, poverty, affliction, and any kind of trouble. Empower us to care as you care and to love as you love. Work through us and your church to bring justice and peace to our world. Amen.

Further Study

Psalm 107; Micah 6:6-8

Daily Readings

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|-------------------------|------------------|
| M. Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 | F. Psalm 9:13-20 |
| T. Psalm 7:8-17 | S. Luke 4:14-21 |
| W. Amos 5:21-25 | S. Psalm 9:1-12 |
| T. Matthew 12:14-21 | |

Memorization

Psalm 9:8

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