

Psalm 94: God's Judgment



Psalm 94 (93) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4.....271)

This is a lament against those who perpetrate injustice, foolishly thinking that God does not notice. The psalmist is pleading with the Lord to intervene to protect the innocent and wipe out the wicked. It is the second psalm in the series Psalm 93-99 which focuses on God as King-Judge. The king has two main functions: to protect the people (symbolised by the sword) and to administer justice (symbolised by the sceptre). Human rulers fail to act justly; not so the Lord.

‘Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’(Genesis 18:25).

‘Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation’(Psalm 68:6).

Lord, reveal yourself, our avenging God!
Rise up, O judge of the earth.
Give to the arrogant
what they deserve!

‘A jealous and avenging God is the Lord,
the Lord is avenging and wrathful;
the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries
and rages against his enemies.

The Lord is slow to anger but great in power,
and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.’

(Nahum 2-3)

When God says: ‘Vengeance is mine, and recompense’ (Deuteronomy 32:35), we are being told that it is for God, not us, to punish the guilty. When we hear it said: ‘The Lord will avenge the blood of his servants, and repay the enemy’ (Deuteronomy 32:43), we are being told that God punishes those who assassinate his servants. God passes the sentence and punishes the guilty. When we read: ‘The Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring’ (2Samuel 4:8), we are being told that the army has executed the sentence ordained by the Lord.

In the ancient Near-East the sun-god was worshipped as the god of justice. The same thought is behind the psalmist asking the Lord to ‘shine forth!’

‘Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth’(Psalm 50:2).

‘God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden’(Habakkuk 3:3-4).

‘For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings’(Malachi 4:2).

‘His fear is confined to human eyes and he does not realise that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun; they look upon every aspect of human behaviour’(Sirach 23:19).

How long, Lord, how long will the wicked strut around?
They bluster and boast, flaunting their evil behaviour.
They crush your people, Lord,
and they oppress your land.

They kill the widow and the stranger.

They murder the orphan.

‘The Lord is blind,’ they say.

‘The God of Jacob sees nothing.’

‘To take away a neighbour’s living is to commit murder;
to deprive an employee of wages is to shed blood.’

(Sirach 34:25-27)

Pay attention you fools, you stupid people!

When will you understand?

Does God who made the ear not hear?

Does God who made the eye not see?

Does God who corrects the nations not punish?

Does God who teaches humankind lack knowledge?

The Lord knows our thoughts,

how empty they are.

1Corinthians 3:20

Blessed are those whom you discipline, Lord,
those to whom you give your law.

They find comfort when times are bad,
while a grave is being dug for the wicked.

Lord, you do not forsake your people.

You do not abandon your heritage.

The innocent will win back their rights.

There will be a future for the righteous of heart.

- a positive understanding of divine discipline, ‘giving comfort when times are bad. This is in contrast to the usual presentation of trouble being divine punishment for sin. We are reminded of Jesus’ invitation to come to him with our burdens and find rest for our souls (see Matthew 11:28).

Who rises up for me against the wicked?
Who sides with me against those who do evil?
Without your help, O Lord,
I would be lying silent in the grave.

When I feel myself slipping,
your love, Lord, supports me.
When the cares of my heart are many,
your consolations lift my spirit.

You shall be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees'(Isaiah 66:12)

'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord'(Jeremiah 31:20)

'I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.'
(Proverbs 8:30)

'Can you ignore these divine consolations?'(Job 15:11).

2Corinthians 1:3-6

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering.’

How can you side with corrupt officials
who do injustice under cover of law?
They band together against the just,
condemning the innocent to death.

The prophets speak out against injustice, especially
the injustice that hides behind the law and tries to
cover itself with the semblance of justice.

‘You who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes’(Isaiah 10:1).

‘How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of
YHWH is with us,’when, in fact, the false pen of
the scribes has made it into a lie?’(Jeremiah 8:8)

‘O house of David! Thus says the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed’(Jeremiah 21:11-12).

‘Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place’(Jeremiah 22:3).

‘Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord’(Jeremiah 22:15-16).

An essential component of justice is the restoration of the rights of those to whom justice has been denied and restitution for injustice caused them. To fail in this would be to be an accomplice in the crime of injustice.

You, Lord, are my strength,
my God, my rock of refuge.
It is your will to turn their evil against them.
Their own deeds bring on their destruction.

Gregory of Nyssa comments: 'Once evil is destroyed, there will no longer be evil people. Everything will be formed according to Christ, and only his image will shine forth in us.'