

Psalm 94

Prayer during the Day Wednesday Week 4

This is a lament against those who perpetrate injustice, foolishly thinking that God does not notice. The psalmist is pleading with YHWH 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 YHWH.

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 68:5

There is no title in the Hebrew text.

**¹YHWH, avenging God,
avenging God shine
forth!**

A jealous and avenging God is YHWH, YHWH is avenging and wrathful; YHWH takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. YHWH is slow to anger but great in power, and YHWH 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: ‘YHWH 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: ‘YHWH 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 YHWH.

In the ancient Near-East the sun-god was worshipped as the god of justice. The same thought is behind the psalmist asking YHWH 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 YHWH are ten thousand times brighter than the sun; they look upon every aspect of human behaviour.

– Sirach 23:19

- ²Rise up, O judge of the earth; give to the proud what they deserve!**
³YHWH, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?
⁴They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast.
⁵They crush your people, YHWH, and oppress your heritage.
⁶They kill the widow and the stranger, they murder the orphan,
⁷and they say, 'YHWH does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.'

The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a murderer.
 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

- ⁸Pay attention you, you dullest of the people; fools,**
when will you be wise?
⁹He who placed the ear, does he not hear?
He who formed the eye, does he not see?
¹⁰He who educates the people, will he not discipline them?
He who instructs, will he not know?
¹¹YHWH knows our thoughts, that they are but an empty breath.

Paul quotes verse 11 in 1Corinthians 3:20.

Here we have quite a positive understanding of divine discipline, 'giving respite' from our struggles. 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).

'I' in verse 17 translates the Hebrew *nepeš*.
 See the article 'Being' in the Introduction.

- ¹²Happy* is the person whom you discipline, YHWH, to whom you teach your law*,**
¹³giving respite from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.
¹⁴For YHWH will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage.
¹⁵The innocent will win back their rights; there will be a future for the righteous* of heart*.
¹⁶Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against evildoers?
¹⁷If YHWH had not been my help, I would soon have lived in the land of silence.

God sustains us

¹⁸When I thought, 'My foot is slipping,' your kindness*, YHWH, held me up.

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 YHWH.

– Jeremiah 31:20

I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.

– Proverbs 8:30

¹⁹When the cares of my heart* are many, your consolations cheer my soul*.

'My soul' translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction.

Can you ignore these divine consolations?

– Job 15:11

The New Testament, too, speaks of God's consolation.

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.

– 2Corinthians 1:3-6

Forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

– 2Corinthians 2:7

God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more ... In this we find comfort. In addition to our own consolation, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you.

– 2Corinthians 7:6-7,13

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 YHWH: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed.

– Jeremiah 21:11-12

Thus says YHWH: 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 YHWH.

– 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.

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.

²²But YHWH has become my stronghold, my God the rock of refuge for me.

²³He will repay them for their guilt and wipe them out for their wickedness; YHWH our God will wipe them out.