

PSALM 94



GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

July 31, 2022 – THE GOD OF VENGEANCE

I. GENRE: Lament to the Divine King Couched in Wisdom

- A. Ps 94 reads very differently than all of the other divine king psalms (93-100), yet it clearly has a place among them.
- B. While Yahweh is never called “King” in this psalm, He is clearly called upon to execute judgment as the divine Judge (vv. 1-2, 23).
- C. The opening verses (1-7) strike the note of lament. But the psalmist is utterly confident in God’s eventually righting of the wrongs he sees.
- D. In addition to lament, the psalm also includes a section of wisdom (vv. 8-11, 12-15), testimony (16-19), and confession of trust (20-23).

II. SETTING

- A. **AUTHOR:** Unknown.
- B. **BACKGROUND**

1. No historical events are mentioned.
2. The song indicts corrupt rulers (most likely local judges) who take advantage of widows, orphans, and migrants (v. 6).
3. Poetic elements of style (such as the staircase-like building of lines in vv. 1-2) may be evidence that this song was written sometime during the first temple period (c. 970 BC – 586 BC).

C. USAGE

1. There is no historical or liturgical heading to the psalm.
2. After the exile, this ps was read every Wednesday in the temple.

PSALM 94 <small>© 2002, M. Scott Bashor</small>					
Purpose: The psalmist appeals expectantly to Yahweh, the Judge of all the earth, to execute justice for the oppressed. While the psalmist laments the persecution of evil doers, he recognizes the wisdom of waiting on divine justice & teaches others to wait expectantly on Him.					
Genre: Lament to the Divine King couched in Wisdom Author: Unknown Date: Perhaps the 1 st temple period, c. 970 – 586 BC Note: Most subsections begin with rhetorical questions.					
CALL TO THE DIVINE JUDGE TO STOP OPPRESSION vv. 1-7	INSTRUCTION ABOUT THE JUDGE: COUNSEL FOR THE WICKED & THE RIGHTEOUS vv. 8-15	CONFIDENCE IN COMING JUDGEMENT: CONFESSION OF YAHWEH'S GRACE & JUSTICE vv. 16-23			
Cry to Yahweh, the Judge of the Earth vv. 1-2 Appeal to God to Manifest Righteous Vengeance v. 1 Call for Yahweh to Bring Justice on Proud Enemies v. 2	Description of the Proud Enemies vv. 3-7 Prolonged Boasting of Their Wickedness vv. 3-4 Appeal to Yahweh to Intervene after So Long v. 3 Description of Their Boasting v. 4	Challenge Presented to the Wicked vv. 8-11 Call for the Spiritually Stupid to Pay Attention v. 8 Reasoning with Them about the Perception of the Creator v. 9 Reasoning with Them about the Judge's Superior Knowledge v. 10 Comparison of Yahweh's Superior Knowledge to Man's v. 11	Encouraging Counsel for the Righteous vv. 12-15 Blessing on the One Who Learns from Trials vv. 12-13 The Goodness of Divine Instruction through Chastening v. 12 The Relief God Brings from Oppression v. 13 The Certainty of Divine Reversal of Unrighteousness vv. 14-15 Yahweh will not Abandon His People v. 14 Yahweh will Establish Justice & the Righteous v. 15	Testimony of Yahweh's Personal Help vv. 16-19 Introduction: The Psalmist's Helpless Crisis v. 16 Public Acknowledgment of Yahweh's Help v. 17 Praise for Yahweh's Upholding Grace v. 18 Praise for Yahweh's Consolations amidst Anxiety v. 19	Confession of Trust in Yahweh's Deliverance vv. 20-23 Yahweh Not Aligned with Wicked Powers v. 20 Orchestrated Efforts to Bring Down the Righteous v. 21 Confession of Trust in Yahweh as a Rock v. 22 Confidence in Yahweh's Eventual Destruction of the Wicked v. 23
Proud Belief in God's Indifference v. 7	Proud Belief in God's Indifference v. 7	Proud Belief in God's Indifference v. 7			

3. According to Jewish tradition, the Levites were singing Psalm 94 the moment the Babylonians invaded the temple in 586 B.C., cutting them down before they could finish singing v. 23.

D. PLACEMENT

1. Pss 91-100 are all “orphan” psalms, having no author listed.
2. Pss 93-100 are often called the Theocratic Psalms because they praise Yahweh as the ultimate King of Israel and of all the earth.
 - a. Ps 94 has long been considered an outlier to this section since it does not specifically refer to God as “king.”
 - b. But Ps 94 fits in with the logic of the psalms around it.
 - (1) Ps 94 provides balance to the triumphalism of Ps 93 in which God is depicted as the King high above all opposition. He truly is, but that doesn’t mean that the victory is always experienced by God’s people.
 - (2) The judgment scenes envisioned in Ps 94 prepare the reader for the counsel about judgment given in Ps 95.
3. Pss 93 and 95 share common words and concepts with Ps 94.
 - a. Lifting up / Rising up (93:3 and 94:2)
 - b. Majesty / Pride (93:1 and 94:2)
 - c. Pounding / Crushing (93:3 and 94:5)
 - d. Throne (93:2 and 94:20)
 - e. Do / Work (94:4 and 95:9)
 - f. Know (94:11 and 95:10)
 - g. Upright of heart / Err in their heart (94:15 and 95:10)

III. STRUCTURE:

- A. There are 6 subsections: cry (1-2), lament (3-7), confrontation (8-11), encouraging counsel (12-15), testimony (16-19), & trust (20-23).
 1. Most subsections begin with rhetorical questions (3, 8, 16, 20).
 2. Each of these sections appears in pairs, creating 3 major sections of thought.
- B. The center verse (12) speaks of God’s blessing on those who patiently wait and endure difficulty and grow through it.
 1. This verse anchors the poem with a note of confidence in the midst of oppression and difficulty.
 2. Since there are 23 vv. (the same number as the Heb. alphabet), some have considered this song as a non-alphabetic acrostic (cf. Lamentations 5). Acrostic poems are often instructional, and the center verses (12) is clearly the heart of the song’s instruction.

IV. NOTES & APPLICATION

- A. **The God of Vengeance.** While the theme of God exacting vengeance is found throughout Scripture, 94:1 is the only time the exact phrase “God of vengeance” appears. It does not speak of revenge but exact justice.
- B. **Rhetorical Questions.** Ps 94 is loaded with rhetorical questions. These appear not only at the beginning of sections (3, 8, 16, 20) but also for extended sections (8-10). Over 25% of the psalm asks questions to prompt the reader to think.
- C. **Bracketing.** Various words or concepts appear at the start and end of sections to create brackets of thought. For instance, Yahweh is referred to as “God” in both vv. 1 and 22-23.
- D. **God’s Knowledge.** The enemies think that God doesn’t see their actions, but the psalm calls on them to think again. The same word for “heed” closes v. 7 and opens v. 8.
- E. **God’s Timing.** God’s justice/judgment does not always come as we might desire. But from an eternal perspective, justice delayed is not necessarily justice denied.