

Psalm 94: Kingship in the “hurly-burly” of life

Background

Book 4 of the Psalms (90-106)

As we noted last week, **Book 3** contained “problem psalms” that would fit with scholars dating its compilation during the Exile. **Book 4** follows with the great encouragement needed to move forward and rebuild after the Exile, whether dated shortly before or after their return. (Remember that the date of compilation does not indicate when each psalm was written.)

Book 4 begins with the only psalm attributed to Moses (90), and ends with two storytelling psalms reviewing the history of God’s working in Israel (105), and Israel’s resistance to God’s working (106). In the center is Psalm 95, one of two Invitatory Psalms used in daily Morning Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. It is an effective summary of Israel’s dilemma and ours: whether to trust our King and Shepherd in the wilderness of life.

Psalms 93-100—The hymns of the Great King

(Much of the following section is adapted from *New Bible Commentary*, G.J. Wenham et al., ed., pp. 547-550.)

This group of psalms underlines **the theme of the Lord’s kingship**. About the King in the Psalms:

In the portrait of the King in the Psalms we have either the most blatant, unrealistic flattery of the successive kings of David’s line, or else the expression of a great ideal, a mirror of the truth held up before each king in turn, awaiting the One in whom all will be fulfilled. (p. 487)

The eight psalms go together in pairs:

Psalms 93, 94: The King over all the earth

Psalms 95, 96: The King over all gods

Psalms 97, 98: The King in the hearts of his people

Psalms 99, 100: The King in his own character

At first glance, Psalm 94 may not seem to fit the kingship pattern. In 94:2, however, it uses the “king-equivalent” word *Judge*. While Psalm 93 pictures the king with his effortless sovereignty over nature, Psalm 94 shows the Judge exercising his authority in an “already and not yet” world.

In calm, credal solemnity the Lord's people acclaim his kingship (Psalm 93) and in the hurly-burly of life they experience how he rules the world (Psalm 94). (p. 547)

Psalm 94

While our faith rests in the “untroubled sovereignty” of **Psalm 93**, in life we find all kinds of real difficulty. This lament psalm starts out with a prayer for God to act. As Timothy Keller says:

God is the avenger of those who have been oppressed in every age, and he will judge those who use the power of their money to enhance their lives at the expense of others. (*The Songs of Jesus*, p. 232)

The psalmist is oppressed in word (v. 4), deed (vv. 5-6), and by a philosophy of life (v. 7) “which does not necessarily deny God’s existence, but thinks of God as inactive, non-interventionist, and irrelevant.” (p. 548, NBC))

How do you respond to the situation laid out in vv. 1-7? How have you reflected the philosophy in v. 7 either consciously or in practice?

In vv. 8-12 we are reminded how foolish the philosophy of v. 7 is, and to take comfort in the fact that God perceives, acts, and knows every human thought.

Reflect on this outline of Psalm 94, showing its concentric development:

- A. The God who vindicates (vv. 1-2)
- B. Arrogant words of the wicked (vv. 3-7)
- C. Rebuke of the wicked (vv. 8-11)
- C. Blessing of the wise (vv. 12-15)
- B. Personal lament on account of the wicked (vv.16-21)
- A. Confidence in the vindication of God (vv. 22-23)

Compare 94:10 with 94:12. What blessing do wise people experience (people who cooperate with God’s work in their lives)?

What is your experience with listening to and responding to divine instruction, with being taught and disciplined by God’s way of living (law/torah)? Read Hebrews 12:7-11.

Our awareness of God’s presence and activity in our lives often fluctuates and changes over time. How and when has God instilled confidence/trust in Him in you? (94:16-19 and 22-23) What do you need from him now?