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## **Psalm 94**

Walter E. Keller

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## **Psalm 94**

(ESV)

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, God of vengeance,  
O God of vengeance, shine forth!**
- <sup>2</sup> Rise up, O judge of the earth:  
repay to the proud what they deserve!**
- <sup>3</sup> O LORD, how long shall the wicked,  
how long shall the wicked exult?**
- <sup>4</sup> They pour out their arrogant words:  
all the evildoers boast.**
- <sup>5</sup> They crush your people O LORD,  
and afflict your heritage.**
- <sup>6</sup> They kill the widow and sojourner,  
and murder the fatherless;**
- <sup>7</sup> and they say, "The LORD does not see;  
the God of Jacob does not perceive."**
- <sup>8</sup> Understand, O dullest of the people!  
Fools, when will you be wise?**
- <sup>9</sup> He who planted the ear, does he not hear?  
He who formed the eye, does he not see?**
- <sup>10</sup> He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke?  
He who teaches knowledge –**
- <sup>11</sup> The LORD – knows the thoughts of man,  
that they are but a breath.**
- <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD,  
and whom you teach out of your law.**
- <sup>13</sup> to give them rest from days of trouble,  
until a pit is dug for the wicked.**
- <sup>14</sup> For the LORD will not forsake his people;  
he will not abandon his heritage;**
- <sup>15</sup> for justice will return to the righteous,  
and all the upright in heart will follow it.**
- <sup>16</sup> Who rises up for me against the wicked?  
Who stands up for me against evildoers?**
- <sup>17</sup> If the LORD had not been my help,  
my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.**
- <sup>18</sup> When I thought, "My foot slips,"  
your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.**
- <sup>19</sup> When cares of my heart are many.  
your consolations cheer my soul.**
- <sup>20</sup> Can wicked rulers be allied with you,  
those who frame injustice by statute?**

- 21 They band together against the life of the righteous  
and condemn the innocent to death.**  
**22 But the LORD has become my stronghold,  
and my God the rock of my refuge.**  
**23 He will bring back on them their iniquity  
and wipe them out for their wickedness:  
the LORD our God will wipe them out.**

**Psalm 94** calls upon Yahweh as the God who punishes the evil. The ESV, LBW and RSV translation, “God of vengeance,” suggests that God is vindictive. Hence it is better to use the translation of the JPS, “God of retribution,” because the Psalmist asks only for what is fair, namely, that God justly punish those who have become arrogant before God, who have killed the weak and defenseless, and who imagine that God does not see or care. To people who are so foolish the Psalmist offers the instruction of verses 8-15. God does see and he does care; God knows and will punish the guilty; God will vindicate his People. Then the Psalmist offers his own experiences as an object lesson in the justice of the LORD (verses 16-22). He ends with the confident expectation that Yahweh will wipe out the wicked for their wickedness (verse 23).

In the New Testament Jesus warns us against any double standard in making judgments when he says, “With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Matthew 7:2). And St. Paul shows us how the appeal to the Law of God and to the justice of God can boomerang on our heads, when he concludes his argument in Romans 3:19, “Whatever the (universal) Law of God says, it speaks to those who are under the Law (namely, all people), so that every mouth may be stopped and whole world may be held accountable to God.” Therefore Christians, because they recognize the God of retribution, will appeal to the forgiving and redeeming God who reveals himself in the life and work of Jesus. With such faith I can afford, as it were, to ask God to punish the wicked, even and especially when that circle of wickedness includes me; for in Christ, God’s work simultaneously razes the old me as it raises the new me. That wider notion of God’s action is called “the righteousness of God,” or the Gospel.

**Prayer to accompany Psalm 94:**

Lord Jesus, do not abandon your people, nor ignore the power of the enemy against your Church. Grant that those who suffer for the sake of justice may find consolation in the cross and be filled with your joy now and forever. Amen.