Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School Placerita Baptist Church 2006

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Psalm 82 — Rulers Rebuked

1.0 Introducing Psalm 82

- Psalm 82 has a similar theme to that of Psalm 58, a Davidic psalm dealing with corrupt officials.
- Martin Luther penned a lengthy exposition of Psalm 82 in which he dealt with the issues raised by corrupt German officials as well as the Peasants' War of 1525.
 - ✓ "Therefore, as there is no greater jewel in the world than a Godfearing lord, so there is no more hurtful plague in the world than a godless lord."—Martin Luther, "Psalm 82," trans. by C. M. Jacobs, in *Selected Psalms II*, vol. 13 of Luther's Works, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 60.

2.0 Reading Psalm 82 (NAU)

82:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

God takes His stand in His own congregation;

He judges in the midst of the rulers.

82:2 How long will you judge unjustly And show partiality to the wicked?

Selah.

- **82:3** Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.
- **82:4** Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver *them* out of the hand of the wicked.
- 82:5 They do not know nor do they understand;
 They walk about in darkness;
 All the foundations of the earth are shaken.

- **82:6** I said, "You are gods,
 - And all of you are sons of the Most High.
- **82:7** "Nevertheless you will die like men And fall like *any* one of the princes."

82:8 Arise, O God, judge the earth!

For it is You who possesses all the nations.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 82

3.1 Outline

- **I.** Revealing the Supreme Judge (v. 1)
- **II.** Rebuking the Lesser Judges (vv. 2-7)
- **III.** Requesting Judgment (v. 8)



- v. 1 "God takes His stand in His own congregation"
 - In Genesis 37:7-8 Joseph's sheaf stands while the sheaves (representing his brothers) bow down to him.
 - In Amos 9:1-4 the Lord stands beside the altar as He pronounces judgment.
 - There is evidence that a king would stand to state the charges against the accused and to pronounce judgment—especially when the venue was located in the Temple (see 2 Kings 11:14; 23:3).
 - Compare Revelation 10:1-7.
- v. 1 "He judges in the midst of the rulers"
 - Verse 1 forms an inclusio with verse 8 ("Arise, O God, judge the earth!"), opening and closing the psalm with the theme of judgment.
 - God appoints and judges rulers—Numbers 27:16-18; 1 Samuel 13:14; Daniel 2:21.
- v. 1 "rulers"
 - The Hebrew is '*elohim*, which is normally translated as "God" or "gods."
 - Commentaries and translations present four major interpretations:
 - ✓ Pagan deities (NET Bible, Davidson, VanGemeren—Ugaritic poems about Baal).
 - ✓ Demonic spirit beings = "principalities and powers" (New Living Translation, Kidner, Tate—Job 1:6; 2:1; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Daniel 10:12-13; Ephesians 6:12).
 - ✓ The people of Israel (Wilcock—verse 6, "sons of the Most High," and Exodus 4:22).
 - ✓ Human judges and rulers (NAU—Exodus 21:6; 22:8-9; cp.
 2 Chronicles 19:6) of Israel (Perowne, Boice) or of all nations (Luther, Spurgeon, Lawson).



- vv. 3-4 "the weak and fatherless"
 - In addition, the following pairs are identified: "the afflicted and destitute" and "the weak and needy."
 - True justice preserves the rights of the marginalized.
 - See Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 31:9 (words of king Lemuel); Jeremiah 22:15-16 (about Shallum, the son of Josiah, king of Judah); Zechariah 7:9-10; James 1:27.
- v. 5 "All the foundations of the earth are shaken."
 - See Psalm 11:3 (where a unique word is used in the Hebrew for "foundations") and the study notes on that psalm.
 - "This is a right description of all godless governments, whether overt godless governments like that of the former Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, or more subtle godless governments like our own. A government that does not acknowledge God and try to govern according to the responsibilities for it that God has laid down will inevitably succumb to the three perils listed in this verse. First, ignorance. It will not perceive what is happening or what to do about it; events will outstrip its ability to cope. Second, inept action. When it does act, it will operate 'in darkness,' and its programs and policies will be ineffective. Third, the foundations of common life will be shaken. . . . Our most basic institutions, like the courts, public schools, and even government itself, are in turmoil, and it is increasingly unsafe even to walk on our streets."—James Montgomery Boice, Psalms, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 2:678.
- v. 6 "You are gods"
 - Jesus Himself interprets and applies Psalm 82:6 in John 10:35-36.
 - Jesus understood the 'elohim here as human (Israelite) rulers/judges—the strongest argument for the fourth view listed above in the notes on verse 1 ("ruler").
- v. 7 "you will die like men"
 - This phrase does not indicate that the '*elohim* are not human (cp. Acts 14:11).
 - Instead, God declares that the human rulers are just that, mere humans, subject to death (Ezekiel 28:1-9; cp. 1 Corinthians 4:9).
- v. 8 "Arise, O God, judge the earth!"
 - See 1 Chronicles 16:33: Psalms 96:13: 98:9.
 - Compare Matthew 6:10.
- v. 8 "possesses all the nations"
 - See Psalm 2:8.

4.0 Singing Psalm 82

There Where the Judges Gather Tune: "The Church's One Foundation"

- 1 There where the judges gather A Greater takes His seat; "How long," He asks the judges, "Will ye pronounce deceit? How long respect the persons Of them of ill repute? How long neglect the orphaned, The poor and destitute?
- 3 He speaks, "I named you rulers, Sons of the Most High God, But you shall die as mortals, And perish by My rod."
 Arise, Thou God of judgment, Thy sovereignty make known; For Thine shall be the nations, The peoples Thou shalt own.
- 2 "Deal justly with the needy,
 Protect the fatherless,
 Deliver the afflicted
 From those who would distress.
 But you are wholly blinded,
 You do not understand;
 Therefore foundations totter,
 Injustice rocks the land."

— Author unknown



5.0 Praying Psalm 82

- Lord, cause the rulers of my nation to act with justice. [v. 2]
- Cause me to act justly with those in need. [vv. 3-4]
- Father, may Your kingdom come, so that Your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. [v. 8]

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6.0 Applying Psalm 82

- Ultimately, human rulers and judges receive their authority from God alone.
- Rulers and judges who fail to administer justice will answer to God.

"In John 10:34, when accused of blasphemy, our Lord appealed to Psalm 82:6 by saying, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?" In so doing, Jesus was demonstrating that the title could be attached to certain men "to whom the word of God came" (Jn 10:35), and therefore there could not be any prima facie objections lodged against his claim to be divine. There was a legitimate attachment of the word ${}^{\prime}el\bar{b}h\hat{i}m$ to those people who had been specially prepared by God to administer his law and word to the people."

— Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Saying of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 279.