

Psalm 82 NKJV

A Psalm of Asaph

Introduction: The whole point of Psalm 82 is that earthly judges must act with impartiality and true justice, because even judges must stand someday before **the Judge**. Verses 6 and 7 warn human magistrates that they, too, must be judged: “I said, ‘You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.” This passage is saying that God has appointed men to positions of authority in which they are considered as gods among the people. They are to remember that, even though they are representing God in this world, they are mortal and must eventually give an account to God for how they used that authority.

This psalm is concerned with the problem of unjust judges. The content of the psalm may be analyzed as follows: God Himself arrives for the hearing (verse 1), the accusations are delivered (verses 2-5), God sets forth His verdict (verses 6-7), and the psalmist presents a petition for God’s judgment over the entire earth (verse 8). The study will cover the following parts of Psalm 82:

- 1. The Assembly of World Leaders Before God (82:1).**
- 2. The Evaluation of World Leaders by God (82:2-7).**
- 3. The Replacement of World Leaders with God (82:8).**

A. The Assembly of World Leaders Before God (82:1)

Verse 1 - God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.

a. The scene opens with God having called the world leaders together. Asaph gives us the picture of God standing in authority.

God is the Lawgiver, He is also the Judge (Isaiah 33:22), and the Judge of all the earth does what is right (Genesis 18:25). He presides over the congregation of Israel and over the judges of the nation. It is an awesome occasion: He is standing and about to announce His decision (Isaiah 3:13-15).

Isaiah 3:13-15 The Message

God enters the courtroom. He takes his place at the bench to judge his people. God calls for order in the court, hauls the leaders of his people into the dock: “You’ve played havoc with this country. Your houses are stuffed with what you’ve stolen from the poor. What is this anyway? Stomping on my people, grinding the faces of the poor into the dirt?” That’s what the Master, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, says.

b. **He judges among the gods:** God’s standing amid these **mighty** ones is to bring judgment **among** them. The word **gods** here are *Elohim*, the plural for the generic word for *god* in Hebrew. The idea of God judging **gods** has led to several suggestions regarding the identity of these *Elohim*, these **gods**.

- *Elohim* is often used to describe the true God, Yahweh. It is in the plural to describe both the majesty of His person, and to be a hint of the triune nature of God, being One God in Three Persons.
- *Elohim* is sometimes used as the plural of pagan deities, the false gods of the nations.
- *Elohim* is sometimes used in reference to angelic beings.
- *Elohim* is here best taken as a reference to human judges, who stand in the place of God in their ability to determine the fate of others. These “gods” (*Elohim*) are people who have been given the awesome responsibility of representing the Lord on earth and interpreting and applying His law.

B. The Evaluation of World Leaders by God (82:2-7)

God questions the unjust judges in verse 2.

**Verse 2 - How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?
Selah**

These are the words not of the psalmist, but of the divine Person that stands in the congregation of the mighty, and judges among the gods. Calling the unjust judges to an account and reproving them for their unrighteous proceedings and perversion of justice. This is applicable to the rulers and judges of the Jewish nation in the times of Christ, who had long dealt very unjustly, and continued to do so.

a. How long will you judge unjustly? As God calls together this assembly of judges, He did not do it to compliment them or pay them honor. He did it to confront them for judging **unjustly** and for showing **partiality to the wicked**. This confrontation shows that God Himself is the Judge at the ultimate Supreme Court.

b. Show partiality to the wicked? Showed favor towards the wicked, and against the righteous, because they were rich, or related to them. Or had bribes from them, contrary to the law in (Deut. 16:19).

Deuteronomy 16:19 New Living Translation

You must never twist justice or show partiality. Never accept a bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly.

Case Study 1- Judging Jesus unjustly:

So, the judges among the Jews, in Christ's time, judged according to appearance, the outward circumstances of men, and not righteous judgment, as our Lord suggests (John 7:23-24).

²³ For if the correct time for circumcising your son falls on the Sabbath, you go ahead and do it so as not to break the law of Moses. So why should you be angry with me for healing a man on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly.”

History of Circumcision Covenant: In Genesis 17 God changes the name of Abram to Abraham and tells him that he will be a father of many nations. Here is what God tells Abraham about the circumcision covenant:

John 17:9-14

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. ¹⁰ This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. ¹¹ You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. ¹³ All must be circumcised.

Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant.”

The circumcision would happen on the 8th day regardless of the Sabbath because that was the covenant God made with Abraham and the people did not want to break the law; but Jesus is stating how can you do what you do on the Sabbath and get angry with me when healing a man. Almost a double standard but we know that there was those that would find any fault in Christ Jesus.

c. Selah: The idea of God calling the judges of the earth into special judgment is worthy of sober reflection. “This gives the offenders pause for consideration and confession.” (Spurgeon)

(Verses 3-4) God commands the unjust judges to actions.

Verse 3 - Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy.

a. Defend the poor and fatherless: God’s instruction to the judges of this earth is to do their duty in defending those who are often treated unjustly. In Asaph’s day the poor and the fatherless were often the targets of unfair treatment. It was the job of the judges to defend them and to do justice to the afflicted and needy.

The poor and the fatherless should be taken under the care and wing of judges. Their cause should be attended to, and justice done them. Their persons should be protected, and their property defended and secured for. Since they are called gods, they ought to imitate him whose name they bear, who is the Father of the fatherless, the Judge of the widows, and the helper of the poor that commit themselves to him (Psalm 10:14).

b. Do justice to the afflicted and needy: Or “justify” them. Pronounce them righteous, give the cause for them, not right or wrong, nor because they are poor and needy, but because they are in the right. For, if wicked, they are not to be justified, this is an abomination to the Lord (see Lev. 19:15).

Leviticus 19:15 New Living Translation

“Do not twist justice in legal matters by favoring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly”.

Verse 4 - Deliver the poor and needy; Free *them* from the hand of the wicked.

a. Deliver the poor and needy: If they are to be a good judge, then they must help those who are not able to help themselves. The wicked seem to pick on the poor and needy because they cannot help themselves. These judges need to remember that their time is coming. They will have to stand before the Lord Jesus on judgement day. They will be judged in the same manner they judged others.

b. Free them from the hand of the wicked: One characteristic of the **wicked** is that they prey upon **the poor and needy**. It was the divinely directed duty of judges to **free** the vulnerable from those who oppressed them.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah gave similar wise instruction to judges in 2 Chronicles 19:6-7 New Living Translation:

⁶ and he said to them, “Always think carefully before pronouncing judgment. Remember that you do not judge to please people but to please the Lord. He will be with you when you render the verdict in each case. ⁷ Fear the Lord and judge with integrity, for the Lord our God does not tolerate perverted justice, partiality, or the taking of

God exposes the weakness of the unjust judges in verse 5.

Verse 5 - They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable.

“**Darkness**”: Signifies both intellectual ignorance and moral iniquity.

a. They do not know, nor do they understand: This should best be understood as a reference to the unjust judges themselves. Despite their high standing and higher opinion of themselves, they are often ignorant and easily overestimate their own understanding.

b. All the foundations of the earth are unstable: When judges walk in the **darkness** of their arrogant pride, the lives of everyday people are uncertain and unstable, as if the ground that should be firm under their feet is shaking. When leaders rule unjustly, the divinely established moral order which undergirds human existence is undermined.

Verses 6 and 7 God pronounces judgment on the unjust judges.

Verse 6 - I said, “You *are* gods, And all of you *are* children of the Most High.

a. **You are gods:** These human judges stood in the place of the gods’ above other people. They had the opportunity and the authority to change people’s lives with a word, or sometimes even to end a life. God, in effect, invests His authority in human leaders for the stability of the universe (compare Rom. 13:1-7 on the submission to authorities).

Case Study 2 – Judging Jesus unjustly:

In [John 10:34-39](#) Jesus quoted [Psalm 82:6](#) in a debate with religious leaders when they accused Him of claiming to be God in a sinful, wrong way. Jesus reasoned, “If God gave these unjust judges the title ‘gods’ because of their office, why do you consider it blasphemy that I call Myself the ‘Son of God’ in light of the testimony of Me and My works?”

John 10:25-36 New Living Translation

²⁵ Jesus replied, “I have already told you, and you don’t believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father’s name.

²⁶ But you don’t believe me because you are not my sheep.

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me,

²⁹ for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand.

³⁰ The Father and I are one.”

³¹ Once again the people picked up stones to kill him.

³² Jesus said, “At my Father’s direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?”

³³ They replied, “We’re stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God.”

³⁴ Jesus replied, “It is written in your own Scriptures that God said to certain leaders of the people, ‘I say, you are gods!’

³⁵ And you know that the Scriptures cannot be altered. So, if those people who received God’s message were called ‘gods,’

³⁶ why do you call it blasphemy when I say, ‘I am the Son of God’? After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world.

Jesus had just claimed to be the Son of God (John 10:25-30). The unbelieving Jews respond by charging Jesus with blasphemy, since He claimed to be God (verse 33).

Jesus then quotes Psalm 82:6, reminding the Jews that the Law refers to mere men—men of authority and prestige—as “gods.” Jesus’ point is this: you charge me with blasphemy based on my use of the title “Son of God”; yet your own Scriptures apply the same term to magistrates in general. If those who hold a divinely appointed office can be considered “gods,” how much more can the One whom God has chosen and sent (verses 34-36)?

b. And all of you are children of the Most High: In still speaking to Israel’s earthly judges, God reminded them that they – **and all** of humanity – **are children of the Most High**. This is true in the sense that every human being is made in the image of God and can be thought of as the *offspring* of God ([Acts 17:28-29](#)).

When these unjust judges denied protection and justice to the poor, fatherless, afflicted, and needy, the judges treated them as less than fully humans made in the image of God who should be regarded as God’s creation, His offspring. The judges needed to remember this.

Verse 7 - But you shall die like men And fall like one of the princes.”

a. You shall die like men: The unjust judges of Israel needed to remember that others were greater than the judges thought, and they themselves were *less* than they thought. They were like **gods** only in a symbolic sense; they themselves would **die like men** and face judgment before the Judge of all the earth. Despite being made in God’s image, they were mortal and would die like human beings.

b. Fall like one of the princes: The unjust rulers would become vulnerable to the violent deaths which often accompanied tyranny (oppression). They will be judged more harshly because they sinned in full knowledge. Even though they had a high office on this earth, they were but men, and would die as men.

Psalm 82:6-7 The Message

6-7 “I appointed you judges, each one of you, deputies of the High God, But you’ve betrayed your commission and now you’re stripped of your rank, busted.”

C. Replacement of World Leaders with God (82:8)

A prayer for God to exercise His perfect judgment.

Verse 8 - Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations.

a. Arise, O God, judge the earth: Asaph closed the psalm with a plea to God to take *His* place as the ultimate Judge. The unjust judges of Israel had their own area of authority, but God’s authority is over all **the earth**.

This prayer called upon God to do what the earthly judges would not do: properly **judge the earth**. Human judges had failed, so Asaph asked God to take judgment into His own hands.

b. You shall inherit all nations: This inheritance shows the greatness of God as judge. Earthly judges have their own greatness, but it is nothing compared to the Great Judge. This inheritance ultimately belongs to Jesus the Messiah. Asaph is calling for the Messiah who will rule all the earth justly. Jesus will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is the Righteous Judge who all will stand before Him in judgement.

References:

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