

PSALMS

Chapter 82

¹ God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the “gods”: ² “How long will you ^a defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah* ³ Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. ⁴ Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. ⁵ “They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. ⁶ “I said, ‘You are “gods”’; you are all sons of the Most High.’ ⁷ But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.” ⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.

Ps 82 A word of judgment on unjust rulers and judges. The Levitical author of this psalm evokes a vision of God presiding over his heavenly court—analogueous to the experiences of the prophets (see 1Ki 22:19–22; Isa 6:1–7; Jer 23:18, 22; see also Job 15:8). As the Great King (see introduction to Ps 47) and the Judge of all the earth (see 94:2; Ge 18:25; 1Sa 2:10) who “loves justice” (99:4) and judges the nations in righteousness (see 9:8; 96:13; 98:9), he is seen calling to account those responsible for defending the weak and oppressed on earth. An early rabbinic interpretation (see Jn 10:34–35) understood the “gods” (vv. 1, 6) to be unjust rulers and judges in Israel, of whom there were many (see 1Sa 8:3; Isa 1:16–17; 3:13–15; Jer 21:12; 22:3; Eze 34:4, 21; Mic 3:1–3; 7:3). Today many identify the “gods” as the kings of surrounding nations who encouraged the conceit that they were actually or virtually divine beings but who ruled with lofty disregard for justice—though honoring it as a royal ideal. Others hold that the “gods” are the divine beings in whose names the kings claimed to rule (see 95:3). In any event, rulers and judges here are confronted by their King and Judge (see Ps 58). Structurally, the words of the Levite (vv. 1, 6) frame the words of God. At the very center (v. 5a; see note on 6:6) stands the most devastating judgment of all. (CSB)

This psalm alerts faithful Israelites and all believers that God concerns Himself with the care of individuals. The “gods” of v 1 have been charged with the duty of administering justice on God’s behalf. However, rather than faithfully acting as divine representatives, these “gods” have thwarted justice (vv 2–4). *Asaph*. See intros, Ps 73; 74.

Format: Vv 1–2, divine council; vv 3–4, justice; v 5, leaders lack understanding; vv 6–7, verdict of the leaders; v 8, plea for God to judge. (TLSB)

82 title See note on Ps 73 title. (CSB)

82:1 *great assembly*. The assembly in the great Hall of Justice (cf. 1Ki 7:7) in heaven (see 89:5; 1Ki 22:19; Job 1:6; 2:1; Isa 6:1–4). As if in a vision, the

psalmist sees the rulers and judges gathered before the Great King to give account of their administration of justice. (CSB)

gods. See v. 6. In the language of the OT—and in accordance with the conceptual world of the ancient Near East—rulers and judges, as deputies of the heavenly King, could be given the honorific title “god” (see note on 45:6; see also NIV text notes on Ex 21:6; 22:8) or be called “son of God” (see 2:7 and note). (CSB)

Hbr *'elohim* used in both cases. Most commentators agree that the second use of the word in this verse refers to the earthly judges and rulers whom God has established (cf Rm 13:1–14). Luther: “For we are all the children of God [v 6], ... and therefore we are gods” (AE 11:111). (TLSB)

the divine council. Also translated “congregation” or “assembly,” this refers ultimately to the Church. (TLSB)

82:3–4 In the OT a first-order task of kings and judges was to protect the powerless against all who would exploit or oppress them (see 72:2, 4, 12–14; Pr 31:8–9; Isa 11:4; Jer 22:3, 16). (CSB)

God speaks to the “gods” of v 1. (TLSB)

All too often the rulers of Israel were doing the opposite. (PBC)

82:5 *They know ... nothing*. The center of the poem (see note on 6:6). They ought to have shared in the wisdom of God (see 1Ki 3:9; Pr 8:14–16; Isa 11:2), but they are utterly devoid of true understanding of moral issues or of the moral order that God’s rule sustains (see Isa 44:19). (CSB)

When rulers ignore even the natural knowledge of God’s law and lead their people into moral darkness, they destroy the very foundations of society. (PBC)

darkness. Gr Nys: “He who has been rendered hostile to the true Light cannot keep his soul in light” (NPNF 2 5:226). (TLSB)

foundations ... are shaken. When such men are the wardens of justice, the whole world order crumbles (see 11:3; 75:3 and notes). (CSB)

Not a reference to creation, but to the foundations upon which community life is built. When neighbor fails to treat neighbor in the manner prescribed in vv 2–4, society begins to disintegrate. (TLSB)

82:6 *I said*. Those who rule (or judge) do so by God’s appointment (see 2:7; Isa 44:28) and thus they are his representatives—whether they acknowledge him or not (see Ex 9:16; Jer 27:6; Da 2:21; 4:17, 32; 5:18; Jn 19:11; Ro 13:1). (CSB)

gods. See note on v. 1. (CSB)

sons of. See note on v. 1. (CSB)

“To God above all you owe the duty to preserve sound teaching and hand it down to future generations, to defend those who teach what is right. For God demands this when He honors kings with His own name, calling them gods, saying, ‘I said, “You are gods” ’ ” (Ap XXI 44). (TLSB)

Most High. See note on Ge 14:19 (The titles “most high,” “lord of heaven” and “creator of earth” were frequently applied to the chief Canaanite deity in ancient times. Terminology and location (Jerusalem was in central Canaan) thus indicate that Melchizedek was probably a Canaanite king-priest. But Abram, by identifying Melchizedek’s “God Most High” with “the LORD”, bore testimony to the one true God, whom Melchizedek had come to know.). (CSB)

82:7 However exalted their position, these corrupt “gods” will be brought low by the same judgment as other men. (CSB)

fall. See note on 13:4 (Referring to death.). (CSB)

Because of the persistence of sinful flesh, believers enter the grave just like unbelievers do. The good news is that when God judges the earth on the Last Day, they shall yet be His inheritance (v 8) and in His council (v 1). (TLSB)

82:8 Having seen the prospect in store, the psalmist prays for God’s judgment to hasten and for the perfect reign of God to come quickly to the whole world. (CSB)

Rise up. See note on 3:7 (Hebrew idiom frequently prefaces an imperative calling for immediate action with the call to arise.). (CSB)

inheritance. Domain (see note on 79:1 – Here reference is to Israel’s homeland as the Lord’s domain.). (CSB)

Ps 82 Our Father in heaven carefully looks after each believer. No believer who suffers injustice in the world will be overlooked by God. Injustice, weakness, exploitation, continued trial and suffering—such afflictions can make the believer feel isolated and forgotten by God. Your heavenly Father has already judged you impartially by laying all of your sins upon Jesus. This provides you with salvation and endurance, even in the face of worldly injustice. • Thank You, dear Jesus, that You fully bore the justice that was once due to me. Give me Your Holy Spirit so that I may bear the injustices that are visited upon me. Amen. (TLSB)