

The God Who Holds The Responsible Responsible

Psalm 82

Introduction: 1) There is a theological principle that helps us understand the rightness and justice of the judgment of God: “Revelation brings responsibility. The more you know, the greater is your responsibility.” In other words there will be both degrees of punishment and reward at the judgment bar of God.

2) Psalm 82 brings to light another theological principle that sounds a similar, but not identical note: “Responsibility brings accountability. The greater your responsibility, the greater is your accountability.”

3) To say it like the Lord Jesus in Luke 12:48, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.”

4) Psalm 82 is a psalm of Asaph, one of King David’s 3 chief musicians.

- It is short (8 vs.) and difficult to analyze with any degree of certainty.
- It has been classified as a New Year hymn celebrating the Lord as Judge of all the earth. The latter observation is clearly correct.
- Others see it as a prayer song or lament to God about the lack of justice being administered on the part of those in positions of authority and responsibility.

5) Regardless of its occasion and context, it is a call to give an account, of all who stand in positions of power and authority over others. Certainly the psalmist has in his sight “the mighty” of his day. However, no one of us who hold positions of power and influence dare neglect the challenge of the words we find in this text.

I. God will judge those in authority.

82:1

- Verse 1 is an interpretive challenge to say the least. Examine several translations and you will see a number of different renderings of the original Hebrew text.

NKJV: “God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.”

NIV: “God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the gods.”

NASV: “God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers.”

HCSB: “God has taken His place in the divine assembly; He judges among the gods.”

The Message: “God calls the judges into His courtroom; He puts all the judges in the dock.”
- One can see the repetition of the word “gods” in several translations. This is the best rendering of the Hebrew word *Elohim*. Now the crucial and challenging question: who are the gods? 5 options have been offered:
 - 1) Human rulers or judges of Israel (Leupold,; Maclaren)
 - 2) Demon spirits, the principalities and powers (Kidner)
 - 3) Pagan deities (Van Gemeren)
 - 4) Foreign rulers
 - 5) Israel at time of the giving of the law (Carson)
- In my judgment, and it is a humble and cautious one, I believe #1 above to be the best understanding. It is indeed possible for the word *Elohim* to be used in this way. As divine representatives on earth, the word *Elohim* emphasizes both the source and nature of their authority.

- The God of Israel holds court to send a clear and clarion call to the leaders of Israel. The message:
 - 1) I alone am God.
 - 2) I will judge you and hold you accountable for the manner in which you judge, especially the way you judge the hurting and less fortunate. You who judge be warned: You too will stand at the bar of judgment: the judgment bar of God!

II. God will condemn those who are unjust

82:2-7

- God begins the proceedings in his divine courtroom. What follows in vs. 2-7 is a blistering indictment of these judges who have failed to exercise their positions of responsibility with grace and goodness, fairness and equity.
- They had neglected the powerful truth of Micah 6:8, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”
- The indictment against these earthly judges is of a 4-fold nature.

1) God judges those who show partiality.

82:2

- These men judge unjustly. In particular, they are partial to the wicked.
- They play favorites in their courts and so God asks them with a rhetorical flair, “How long?!” Apparently this had been going on sometime and God is tired of watching it happen.
- Prejudice and partiality based on racial, social, gender or economic distinctions is wrong anyplace and anytime and for anyone. This is even more so for the one who claims Jesus Christ as their Lord, hence James charges his

readers in 2:1 of his letter, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”

2) God judges those who shun the poor.

82:3-4

- 4 penetrating imperatives, words of command, make crystal clear what God expects of all who find themselves in positions of responsibility, leadership and authority.
- 1) “Defend the poor and fatherless”
 - *HCSB* says, “Provide justice for the needy and the fatherless.” Those who have no voice, you be their voice. Those who have no advocate, you be their advocate. Orphans in particular are of special concern to our God in heaven.
 - Remember we were poor in spirit and spiritually fatherless until our “Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous,” took up our cause (1 John 2:1)!
 - 2) “Do justice to the afflicted and needy”
 - The afflicted are those opposed by the wicked of v. 2.
 - The needy (*HCSB* “destitute”) are those with nothing in their hands, with no place to turn. They are at the mercy of others for help and deliverance.
 - 3) “Deliver the poor and needy”
 - Here the key word is “deliver.” The *NIV* and *NASV* has “rescue.” They are in a helpless situation that will require the salvation action of another on their behalf.
 - If they are not rescued they will certainly perish.

4) “Free them from the hand of the wicked.”

Do not miss the irony of this final phrase. The wicked, whom these judges showed partiality in v. 2, are the ones who have their hands around the throats of the poor and needy in v. 4. These judges have been the enablers of the wicked against the less fortunate. Rather than defend and help the poor, they have exploited them and contributed to their plight. When it came to justice for those who needed it most, they got a big “F” on their judicial report card!

3) **God judges those who scorn His precepts** **82:5**

- Verses 3-4 explain God’s expectations for His judges, for those He places in positions of authority and responsibility.
- Verse 5 explains why they failed so miserably in their assignment. Three accusations are brought against these earthly rulers followed by a divine observation of what their unjust reign of terror has ushered in:
 - 1) “They do not know” (*NIV*, “they know nothing”). Professing to be wise, they are actually fools in the sight of God. They willingly refuse and reject the truth.
 - 2) “Nor do they understand” (*NIV*, “they understand nothing”). They live and act in ignorance. Peterson calls them “head-in-the-sand judges!”
 God’s standards, God’s rules, God’s justice, God’s way of doing things is folly to them. Who would ever get ahead in this world doing things God’s way?
 - 3) “They walk about in darkness.” The darkness here is moral not visible. Morally and spiritually they are blind. God says in

- God says in Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”
- Verse 5b sounds a similar refrain, “All the foundations of the earth are unstable, moved, shaken.” The entire world order is amuck and goes haywire when justice is thrown out the door. Confusion reigns. Injustice runs rampant. Stability is forfeited. Political and judicial uncertainty is the law of the land. Do you recognize most of the world governments of our day in that description?

4) God judges those who sin against their privilege

82:6-7

- The Big God now dethrones the little gods!
The true God now sets aside the little gods!
- I myself am the one who put you in these places of privilege. I raised you up as my earthly representatives and gave you a position that allowed you to function as little gods, even children of the Most High (*Elyon*). You were my regents on earth but now you shall: 1) die like men and 2) fall like one of the princes. You are not real Gods but mere mortals (*Adam*) and therefore you will die just like everyone else. You may have convinced yourself that you would live forever, but that is just another evidence of the folly of your own self-deception.
- Further, do a little history, Every other prince, every other ruler who has gone before you has died and passed off the scene. What makes you think you are any different?

- Hebrews 9:27 was true then as it is today: “it is appointed for men to die once, and after this the judgment.” This verse is true for everyone: rulers, kings and dictators are included.

III. God will inherit those things that are His

82:8

- The psalm concludes with a prayer for justice. Along with vs. 1, it frames the speech of vs. 2-7.
- “Rise up, O God.” Stand not only in the congregation of the mighty to judge (v.1). Stand up and judge the earth, all that is yours and under your domain.
- Why? Because it is all yours, “all the nations are your inheritance” (*NIV*), “you’ve got the whole world in your hands” (*The Message*)
- I like the insight of Derek Kidner who says, “The psalm, having traversed some of the ground which Revelation will explore, ends very much as that book ends with its “Come Lord Jesus!” (p. 299).
- Thus the gods of this earth disappear, fade away into the shadows of history. They reigned for a time but abused their positions. They will be judged for eternity, amazed at their destiny. “God,” I can hear them say, “Don’t you know who I am and what I did?” The Lord will then answer, “Yes, I know exactly who you are and what you did.” And then the words of Luke 13:27 will come to pass when Jesus said, “Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.”

Conclusion:

- One cannot help but read vs. 3-4 and see our state as sinners without Christ and what the Lord Jesus did for us. We were poor and fatherless, afflicted and needy, poor and needy, held by the power of the wicked one.

- But then came Jesus to defend and justify, to deliver and set free. Now I am rich not poor, I have a Father I am not an orphan. I am wealthy with no needs. I am free and free indeed. This is what my Jesus has done for me. Now, this is what I must do for others!