

PSALM 82

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 82

A Psalm of Asaph

This psalm was written for the use of persons in power, for the instruction of kings and princes, judges and civil magistrates; according to Kimchi, it was written about the times of Jehoshaphat, who appointed new judges throughout the land; those that were before having been very corrupt, to whom he gave a charge agreeably to the purport of this psalm, (~~<449E>~~2 Chronicles 19:5-7), but it seems rather to be written by Asaph, in the times of David, under a spirit of prophecy, and has respect to the times of Christ, when there was a great corruption among the judges and rulers of the Jews, both civil and ecclesiastic. The Syriac version calls it, “a reproof of the ungodly Jews”; our Lord cites a passage out of it in vindication of himself from their charge of blasphemy, (~~<610E>~~John 10:34-36).

Ver. 1. *God standeth in the congregation of the mighty*, etc.] The Syriac version renders it, “in the congregation of angels”; they are mighty, and excel in strength, and there is a large company of them, even an innumerable one, and who surround the throne of the Majesty on high. Christ, who is God over all, was among those on Mount Sinai, and when he ascended to heaven; and with these he will descend when he comes a second time, (~~<198E7>~~Psalm 68:17,18 ~~<510E>~~2 Thessalonians 1:7,8). The Targum interprets it of the righteous thus,

“God, whose majesty (or Shechinah) dwells in the congregation of the righteous that are strong in the law.”

It may be better understood of such as are strong in the Lord, in the grace that is in Christ, and in the exercise of grace upon him; who are gathered out of the world unto him, and unto distinct societies and congregations; in the midst of which God is, where he grants his presence, bestows the blessings of his grace, and affords his divine aid and protection; and where Christ the Son of God is, and will be to the end of the world. The words may be rendered, “God standeth in the congregation of God”^{f1181}: that is, in his own congregation, his church and people; but it seems best of all to

understand the words of rulers and civil magistrates, of the cabinet councils of princes, of benches of judges, and courts of judicature; in all which God is present, and observes what is said and done; perhaps reference may be had to the Jewish sanhedrim, the chief court of judicature with the Jews, consisting of seventy one persons; in the midst of which Christ, God manifest in the flesh, God in our nature, stood, and was ill used, and most unjustly judged by them, of whose unjust judgment complaint is made in the next verse:

he judgeth among the gods: which the Syriac version renders “angels” again; and so Aben Ezra interprets it of them, who are so called, (^{<4985>}Psalm 8:5 97:7), but rather civil magistrates are meant, the rulers and judges of the people, who go by this name of “elohim”, or gods, in (^{<1206>}Exodus 21:6 22:18), and are so called because they are the powers ordained of God, are representatives of him, are his vicegerents and deputies under him; should act in his name, according to his law, and for his glory, and are clothed with great power and authority from and under him; and therefore are before styled the “mighty”. Among these Christ, the Son of God, judges, to whom all judgment is committed; he qualifies these for the discharge of their office, he directs them how to judge, and all the right judgment they make and do is from him, “by” whom “kings”

reign, and princes decree justice; by whom princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth; and to whom they are all accountable, and will be themselves judged by him another day, (^{<3085>}Proverbs 8:15,16) so the Targum,

“in the midst of the judges of truth he judges.”

Ver. 2. *How long will ye judge unjustly*, etc.] 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, in which they had long continued, and which was an aggravation of their sin; this is very 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; they judged wrong judgment, or judgment of iniquity, as Aben Ezra renders it, both in civil and ecclesiastical things; their judgment was depraved concerning the law, which they transgressed and made void by adhering to the traditions of the elders; they passed an unrighteous judgment on John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ,

rejecting his baptism, and calling him a devil; and upon Christ himself, adjudging him to death for crimes he was not guilty of; and upon his followers, whom they cast out of the synagogue; the character of an unjust judge see in (~~<Q18D>~~Luke 18:2),

and accept the persons of the wicked? gave the cause in favour of them, and against the righteous, because they were rich, or related to them, or had bribes from them, contrary to the law in (~~<F16G9>~~Deuteronomy 16:19), 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, (~~<R172b>~~John 7:24).

Selah. (See Gill on "~~<Q18D>~~Psalm 3:2").

Ver. 3. *Defend the poor and fatherless*, etc.] Or, judge ^{f1182} them; such as have no money to enter and carry on a suit, and have no friends to assist and advise them, and abide by them; these 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, (~~<Q104>~~Psalm 10:14 68:5), such a righteous judge and good magistrate was Job; (see ~~<R19D>~~Job 29:12),

do justice to the afflicted and needy; or "justify" ^{f1183} 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 ~~<B1915>~~Leviticus 19:15 ~~<R20D>~~Deuteronomy 25:1 ~~<Q1715>~~Proverbs 17:15).

Ver. 4. *Deliver the poor and needy*, etc.] From his adversary and oppressor, who is mightier than he, and draws him to the judgment seat; when it is not in his power to defend himself against him, and get out of his hands, unless a righteous judge will show a regard to him and his cause; and sometimes even an unjust judge, through importunity, will do this, as everyone ought, and every righteous one will:

rid them out of the hand of the wicked; this was what the poor widow importuned the unjust judge for, and obtained, (~~<Q18B>~~Luke 18:3-5).

Ver. 5. *They knew not*, etc.] The Targum adds, to do well. This is to be understood of unjust judges and wicked magistrates, who know not God, and have not the fear of him before their eyes, though he stands in the midst of them, and judges among them; which is the source of their unjust judging and unrighteous proceedings: for because they know not God, nor fear him, therefore they regard not men: nor do such know themselves; they are called gods, and they think they are so, and do not consider they are but men; they are the ministers of God, deputies under him, and are accountable to him: nor do they know their duty before pointed out; it is for them to know judgment, what is right, and what is wrong, that they may pronounce righteous judgment, (^{<381B>}Micah 3:2), but they do not know it, at least so as to practise it: nor did the Jewish rulers know Christ, which was the reason of their unrighteous dealing with him and with his followers; they put him to death, and so they did them, because they knew him not, (^{<411B>}1 Corinthians 2:8 ^{<616D>}John 16:2,3),

neither will they understand: the Targum adds, by way of explanation, “the law”, the rule of judgment, which judges ought to understand; so the Jewish rulers, Pharisees and Sadducees, were upbraided by Christ with ignorance of the Scriptures, and the law of God, their false glosses of which he refutes, (^{<411B>}Matthew 5:1-48 ^{<422D>}Psalms 22:29) and their ignorance was wilful and affected, they shut their eyes against light and evidence, especially with respect to Christ; they could discern the face of the sky, but not the signs of the times, (^{<416B>}Matthew 16:3), who so blind as they that will not see? and such were the Jewish rulers; (see ^{<329D>}Isaiah 42:19),

they walk on in darkness; they chose darkness rather than light, and so were blind leaders of the blind, and were wilfully so, having their eyes blinded with gifts, (^{<616D>}Deuteronomy 16:19),

all the foundations of the earth are out of course; or “shaken” or “moved” ^{f1184}: by the perversion of justice, towns, cities, commonwealths, kingdoms, and states, are thrown into the utmost disorder and confusion: as the king by judgment establisheth the land; (^{<1204D>}Proverbs 29:4), so when judgment is not executed, it is unsettled, and thrown into confusion; or though ^{f1185} “the foundation”, etc. though this is the case, yet unjust judges will go on, perverting judgment, even though, as at the deluge, the foundations of the earth were shaken and moved, for the violence, rapine, and oppression, the earth was then filled with, which Kimchi thinks is here referred to; and though a dissolution of the Jewish polity, civil and ecclesiastical, was

threatened, because of such injustice; that God would once more shake the heavens and the earth, remove their church and civil state, when they should cease to be a nation, their city be destroyed, and their temple, not one stone left upon another; and yet such was the obstinacy of their wicked judges, that they would persist their wicked ways.

Ver. 6. *I have said, ye are gods*, etc.] In the law, (^{<12206>}Exodus 21:6 22:28) or they were so by his appointment and commission; he constituted them judges and magistrates, invested them with such an office, by which they came to have this title; (see ^{<5131>}Romans 13:1), and so our Lord interprets these words, that they were gods “to whom” the word of God came, which gave them a commission and authority to exercise their office, (^{<4305>}John 10:35), or rather “against whom” it came, pronouncing the sentence of death on them, as in (^{<1307>}Psalms 82:7), to which the reference is; declaring, that though they were gods by office, yet were mortal men, and should die. The Targum is, “I said, as angels are ye accounted”; and so judges and civil magistrates had need to be as angels, and to have the wisdom of them; (see ^{<1041>}2 Samuel 14:20). Jarchi interprets it of angels, but magistrates are undoubtedly meant:

and all of you are children of the most High; the Targum here again renders it, “the angels of the most High:”

and so Aben Ezra explains it of them who are called the sons of God, (^{<1337>}Job 38:7) but men in power are meant, who, because of their eminency and dignity, their high office, post, and place, are so called; (see ^{<1001>}Genesis 6:2 ^{<19816>}Psalms 89:6).

Ver. 7. *But ye shall die like men*, etc.] As men in common do, to whom it is appointed to die, (^{<3017>}Hebrews 9:27) or as common men, as men in the lowest class of life: the wise man dies as the fool, the king as the peasant, high as the low, rich as the poor; death levels and makes all alike: or as Adam, as the first man, so Jarchi, who was lord of the whole universe; but being in honour, abode not, but became like the beasts that perish; sinning he died, and so all his posterity, even those who have the greatest power and authority on earth; (see ^{<19412>}Psalms 49:2,10,12) and not only die a corporeal death, but an eternal one, dying in their sins; as Christ threatened the Jewish rulers, Scribes, and Pharisees, if they believed not in him, (^{<4182>}John 8:21,24)

and fall like one of the princes; or the chief of them, Satan, who fell like lightning from heaven, (^{<2008>}Luke 10:18) or rather as one of the giants that lived in the old world, famous for their injustice and oppression, that fell in the deluge, (^{<0004>}Genesis 6:4) or any of the Heathen princes, tyrants and oppressors, such as are mentioned in the following psalm, (^{<1830>}Psalms 83:9,10). This may have respect to the destruction of the Jewish nation, which is called the falling of them, (^{<5111>}Romans 11:11,12) and the words may be rendered, “and ye shall fall together, equally and alike, O ye princes”^{f1186}; when the Jewish state, civil and ecclesiastical, fell, they fell with it, and together; the princes of this world then came to nought, or were abolished, they and their authority, as the Apostle Paul says they should, (^{<4006>}1 Corinthians 2:6) the sceptre then departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet; all rule and authority ceased among them, as Jacob foretold it would, (^{<0490>}Genesis 49:10).

Ver. 8. *Arise, O God*, etc.] These are the words of the prophet, or of the church, whom he represents, addressing Christ, who is God over all; that seeing there was such a corruption and degeneracy in the world, and such wretched perversion of justice, that he would arise and exert himself, and show himself strong on the behalf of his people:

judge the earth: who is the Judge of the whole earth, to whom all judgment is committed, and who will judge the world in righteousness:

for thou shalt inherit all nations; which he will do in the latter day, when he shall be King over all the earth, and the Heathen shall be given him for his inheritance, he being heir of all things; and universal justice will not take place in the world till that time comes; and therefore it is to be wished and prayed for, as by the prophet and church here.