

STUDIES IN PSALMS

skilfully the story is told: with all the charms of music, introduced; with all the fascinations of ancient history, the famous and irreversible past, commenced; barbed with pointed reminiscences of old-time refractoriness; merged into the pathos of direct appeal; ascending to the height of positive mandate; coming down again to the attraction of bountiful and all-comprehensive promise; sobered by tones of Divine lament; invigorated by rapid transition from the irredeemable past to present lingering possibilities—*Oh that my people were even now hearkening!* hearkening to *counsels* which must still be maintained, *walking in ways* of obedience that must still be trodden: oh that they were! oh that they would! *Right soon would I subdue their foes*: these Syrians those Assyrians, yonder Greeks and Romans. Is there nothing here to give point to appeal and make it victorious? Only let Israel RETURN (2 Ch. 30:6-9), and all shall yet be well. No real blessing should then be too rich, too good to be bestowed on obedient Israel: *fattest wheat, freshest honey*—nothing too good!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does Rotherham feel this psalm is addressed to the northern tribes?
2. Who is Asaph? Discuss.
3. There seems to be a large number of musical instruments used in Israel's worship—why?
4. What feast is here celebrated?
5. The very worst thing that can happen to a man is described in verse 12. What is it? Discuss.
6. God has promised "honey in the rock" for His people—but upon what conditions?

PSALM 82

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Judgment of Unjust Judges.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., ver. 1, Introductory Vision. Stanza II., vers. 2-7, Reprimand of the Judges by the Judge of Judges. Stanza III., ver. 8, Closing Prayer.

PSALM 82

(Lm.) Psalm—By Asaph.

- 1 Elohim hath stationed himself in the congregation of GOD,¹ in the midst of Divine messengers² he judgeth.—
- 2 “How long will ye judge perversely, and the countenances of lawless ones uplift?”
- 3 “Vindicate ye the weak and the fatherless, the humbled and the poor see ye righted:”
- 4 “Deliver the weak and the needy, out of the hand of lawless ones make ye rescue!”
- 5 “They know not neither can they understand, in darkness they wander,— all the foundations of the earth do shake.
- 6 “I myself have said ‘Divine messengers are ye³! yea sons of the most high are ye all’!
- 7 But indeed as mankind shall ye die, and as one of the princes shall ye fall.”
- 8 Oh arise Elohim! oh judge the earth! surely thou thyself wilt inherit all nations.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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God stands up to open heaven's court. He pronounces judgment on the judges.¹

2 How long will you judges refuse to listen to the evidence? How long will you shower special favors on the wicked?

3 Give fair judgment to the poor man, the afflicted, the fatherless, the destitute.

4 Rescue the poor and needy from the grasp of evil men.

5 But you are so foolish and so ignorant! Because you are in darkness, all the foundations of society² are shaken to the core.

6 I have called you all “gods” and “sons of the Most High.”

7 But in death you are mere men. You will fall as any prince—for all must die.

8 Stand up, O God, and judge the earth. For all of it belongs to You. All nations are in Your hands.

1. Heb.: 'El.

2. Heb.: 'elohim—as in 8:5, 97:7.

3. Cp. Jn. 10:34.

1. Implied from verses 2-4 and 6. Literally, “He judges among the gods.”

2. Literally, “of the earth.”

STUDIES IN PSALMS

EXPOSITION

The introductory vision of this psalm serves the important practical purpose of teaching the Divine authority and heavy responsibility of the office of Judge among men. Judges are here (vers. 1, 6) designated by one of the names of Deity (*elohim*) in accordance with Exo. 21:6, 22:9, for the purpose of teaching—that it is from God their authority is derived; that it is his justice they are appointed to maintain; and that the wrongs of men, in being referred to them to be righted, are supposed to be referred to Divine arbitrament, and therefore should be adjusted with inflexible impartiality (Cp. Deu. 1:16, 17, 16:18-20, 1 S. 8:3, 2 Ch. 19:5-7, Amos 5:12, 15, Mi. 7:3, Isa. 1:17, 3:13-15, Jer. 21:12). At the same time, Judges are hereby reminded, that they themselves are under law, and are liable to be called to an account for the manner in which they discharge the duties of their high office. Hence the Supreme Judge here, in state, appears in their midst, and arraigns them at his bar.

The psalm, being designed for a time of corruption, deals exclusively with Judges who have long been negligent in their office. The words placed in the Divine mouth are weighty in the extreme, and worthy of being prophetically attributed to the Most High. After two lines of expostulation, asking these corrupt Judges how long their perversion of justice is to continue (ver. 2), the Divine Speech, in four strong mandatory lines, charges them to do their duty; which is made to consist in caring for such as are unable to care for themselves (vers. 3, 4). The intention of the next three lines, forming ver. 5, has been variously deciphered; able expositors being of opinion that they form a kind of Divine "aside," in which the corrupt Judges are given up as hopeless, and, with aversion, spoken of in the third person. *They know not*, &c.; nor can it be denied, that to some extent the language applies to them. Nevertheless, a divergent opinion of this verse may perhaps with good reason be maintained; since, on the one hand, it is not certain that these corrupt Judges are quite unaware of the suffering they are inflicting or of the wickedness of their partial and iniquitous decisions; and, on the other hand, an appeal to their compassion, rather than a giving them up as hopeless, seems to constitute a more telling climax to the Divine Expostulation. And when ver. 5 is looked at in this light, it will be seen that every word enhances the weight and pathos of it as a portrayal of the wrong done and the suffering caused by unjust judicial sentences. *They* (the

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sufferers) *know not, neither can they understand*—how it is that justice has failed them, who it is that is their enemy in court, what are the bribes that have been tendered and accepted to rob them of their rights. *They wander* from the Gate of Justice *in the darkness* of despair, not knowing whither to turn for redress. In fact, *all the foundations of the earth*—of civilised society—seem to be *trembling beneath their feet*:—a circumstance of which their flippant judges, though causing it, may be almost wholly oblivious, and about which, if they have knowledge, they certainly have no solicitude. This exposition of the verse has the further merit, that, without any such break as must otherwise be admitted to occur between the fifth and the sixth verse, this crowning touch of Divine Pity for the wronged and suffering, most naturally leads on, without any change of persons addressed, to the indignant protest which closes the Divine Judge's charge: "*I myself said*—by the mouth of my psalmist—*Divine messengers are ye, Yea sons of the Most High all of you;* nor do I withdraw the distinction which I designed to confer upon you; save as I now denounce you as utterly unworthy of it. *As common mortals shall ye die, yea as princes* whom I have overthrown in their rebellion *shall ye ignominiously fall.*" Some think that the very next psalm supplies the needed examples.

We seem to be carried forward on the wave of a Messianic flood as we read in the concluding couplet: As if to say, *Oh arise, Elohim, oh judge the earth*—thyself, in a clearer and nearer Divine Manifestation than at present; no longer permitting Justice to be perverted as now; and do this the rather that *all nations* are thine by right, thine by the claim of thy birth as earth's King, into the full possession of which wilt thou be pleased soon to enter.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is indeed a strange court—why?
2. Who is holding the court, i.e. who is the judge? What is the charge?
3. Why should the advice here given be heeded?
4. When justice is perverted a serious problem is faced. Read verse 5 and tell what it is.
5. The position of judge is one of great honor and responsibility, but also one that will not last forever. What should be their attitude?