

LESSON 11

PSALMS 82—84

PSALM 82: THE JUDGMENT OF THE JUDGES

As a psalm that grew up within the context of misguided leadership, it carries with it rebukes that sting like the words of a prophet. The high offices of public service had been occupied by unscrupulous men who had bent or ignored justice for the benefit of the wicked and had taken advantage of the poor and the weak. The civil magistrates and judges, and perhaps even the king, had misused judicial offices for unholy purposes. This abuse of power had to be condemned and judged. The psalmist cries out for God, the true Judge, to bring officials who have flaunted God's compassion and righteousness into judgment. The composition has both the elements of a psalm of wisdom and a cry for justice.

A major question that arises in the psalm is the meaning of "the gods" (*elohim*), mentioned in verses 1 and 6 in the Hebrew text. Are angels or men being castigated? Although the question has been much debated, the context and our Lord's use of verse 6 in John 10:34 make it virtually certain that the psalmist had in mind human kings and magistrates who had been guilty of using their offices for selfish ends. They are referred to as "gods" because of their elevated positions which result in a controlling influence over the people.

The crimes that were of concern to the psalmist related to social injustice, a theme that is often denounced in the preaching and writing of the prophets, such as Amos. This psalm is one more picture of the compassionate heart of God.

1. What does God want in this instance?
2. How are we to treat people?
3. What is the judgment for these judges?
4. On whose behalf is this psalmist speaking?

PSALM 83:
“COME TO OUR RESCUE”

A time of great peril had come to the nation of Israel. A confederacy of ten nations (vv. 6–8) had committed themselves to destroying her, avowing that they would blot her name out of existence. These armies were led by the Moabites and Ammonites, long-standing enemies of Israel. Cooperating with them were the Edomites, Amalekites, Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, Gebalites, Philistines, Tyre, and even Assyrians.

The time when this psalm was written is difficult to discern because the history we have of the Israelites does not contain an occasion when the nations and tribes mentioned came as a coalition against Israel.

It is possible that the psalm refers to an episode in Israel’s history which is not recorded in the Old Testament. It is even possible that the psalmist has combined, as a summary-survey report, many of the forces that had come against Israel over a period of time. Looking at the totality of their trials, he could be saying, “Lord, look at these attacks from the enemies around us which we have had to face and are even now facing.”

One truth is evident: The psalm, as a national lament, pleads for God’s help. The writer lifts up a passionate appeal to God on behalf of Israel in a time of great danger. The prayer also has the element of imprecation, since it calls for judgment to come upon God’s enemies.

5. What does the writer specifically ask for God to do to Israel’s enemies?
6. Why does the psalmist want God to punish Israel’s enemies?
7. Why does the psalmist list defeated enemies from the past?
8. How is the enemy’s plan so destructive for Israel?

PSALM 84:
LONGING FOR GOD’S PRESENCE

The writer of this beautiful psalm of praise had, no doubt, found worshiping and serving God to be his highest joy. He had moved from duty to delight, from obligation to sacred love.

The basic theme of his prayer/song is the joy and happiness of a life with God. The trips he had made to the temple to worship the living God had become his most treasured moments in life.

The psalm is punctuated by three beatitudes (vv. 4, 5, 12), which divide it into three stanzas. Each stanza revolves around the blessedness found in God. In

its reading, the reader is prompted to ask, “Who is truly blessed?” A three-part answer is given, and each part is summarized with the “blessed” pronouncement.

9. Where is the speaker’s devotion to God apparent?
10. Who does the psalmist consider to be truly blessed?
11. What can it mean to make God our “sun and shield” (v. 10)?