

Psalm 82 — God’s Rebuke of Corrupt Judges and the Longing for Righteous Rule

Context and Overview

Psalm 82 is a sobering message directed to human judges—those who hold positions of civil authority and power over others. In it, God confronts the failure of leadership in the face of injustice, especially their neglect of the poor and vulnerable. This psalm is not speculative theology—it’s divine correction.

Although the judges are called “gods” (Hebrew: *elohim*)¹ because of their authority and influence, God reminds them: *You may hold power for a time, but you are mortal, and you will be judged like everyone else.*

This passage also anticipates the day when God Himself will judge the earth—not with partiality, but with perfect justice.

Verse 1 — God Judges the Judges

*“God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.”* (Psalm 82:1 NKJV)

The scene opens with God presiding over an assembly of earthly rulers. They are called “gods” (*Elohim*) because they exercise authority—just as God does—but they are not divine. They are delegated agents of justice, and God is now calling them into account.

Note:

This use of “gods” refers to human judges who represent divine authority on earth. Jesus Himself referenced this verse in John 10:34 when defending His identity as the Son of God, highlighting that

¹ In Genesis 1 the word *Elohim* is translated with the singular English word “God.” Although *Elohim* is plural in form (ending in “-im,” which typically marks masculine plurals in Hebrew), it is frequently paired with singular verbs, adjectives, and pronouns when referring to the God of Israel.

Example:

“In the beginning God (Elohim) created (bara, singular verb) the heavens and the earth.”

This singular verb indicates that *Elohim* is being used as a singular subject, despite its plural form.

Here in Psalm 81:1 the word *Elohim* is used twice: once in reference to the Yahweh and once as a description of civil leaders.

- When referring to Yahweh, *Elohim* functions singularly: one God, Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer.
- When referring to pagan gods or human rulers/judges, *elohim* is used as a true plural.
- Psalm 82:1 – *“God (Elohim) stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods (elohim).”*
— The first is singular (Yahweh); the second is plural (human rulers).

The Bible affirms monotheism consistently:

Deuteronomy 6:4 –

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Yahweh Eloheinu, Yahweh echad)

Despite the plural form, *Elohim* is never used to imply polytheism when speaking of the true God. The oneness of God is central to Hebrew theology. Therefore, translations treat *Elohim* as singular when the reference is to the God of Israel.

Summary

Why is *Elohim* translated as singular?

- Because the surrounding grammar (verbs, adjectives, pronouns) is singular.
- Because it’s understood as a plural of majesty, not number.
- Because biblical context and theology consistently affirm one God.

even human judges were called “gods” because of their role. But there’s no endorsement here of the idea that humans evolve into gods. That interpretation, such as found in Mormon doctrine, misapplies this text by removing it from its context and ignoring Hebrew grammar. This psalm is about human accountability under divine scrutiny—not divine promotion.

Verses 2–4 — God's Rebuke: Defend the Oppressed

*“How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked? Selah
Defend the poor and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and needy;
Free them from the hand of the wicked.”* (vv. 2–4)

God calls out corrupt judges for showing favoritism to the powerful and wealthy while neglecting the weak. True justice doesn’t cater to influence or affluence—it protects the vulnerable. These verses reveal God's heart for justice that is impartial, compassionate, and courageous.

Personal Application:

We may not wear robes or sit in courtrooms, but we all exercise influence. In the home, at work, in community—are we people who reflect God’s heart for justice? Do we speak up for those without a voice? Are we impartial in our judgment of others? God calls every believer to reflect His righteousness in how we treat others—especially the poor, forgotten, and afflicted.

Verse 5 — A World Off Course

*“They do not know, nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.”* (v. 5)

Because justice has been twisted, the very structures of society begin to shake. When those in authority lack moral clarity, their ignorance and corruption have ripple effects far beyond their own lives.

Personal Application:

When leaders fail to uphold truth and righteousness, families, communities, and even nations suffer. This verse challenges us to pray for and hold accountable our leaders—political, judicial, and spiritual. Justice matters because injustice erodes the foundation of trust and stability in any society.

Verses 6–7 — Earthly Power Doesn’t Make You Immortal

*“I said, ‘You are gods,
And all of you are children of the Most High.
But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes.’”* (vv. 6–7)

God reminds these judges that though they carry great responsibility, they are still mortal. They will die like any other man and fall like rulers before them who misused their power.

This passage is not exalting humans to divine status—it is humbling those who think themselves untouchable. No title, office, or earthly authority exempts a person from divine accountability.

Personal Application:

No matter how much power or influence a person may have—whether in government, business, or ministry—death is the great equalizer. What matters is not how high you rise in the eyes of men, but how faithful you were in God's eyes. We all must give account (Romans 14:12).

Verse 8 — The Final Plea: God's Justice Will Prevail

*“Arise, O God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.” (v. 8)*

The psalm closes with a prayer that God would take His rightful place as Judge of the whole earth. Human courts may fail, human leaders may fall—but God will one day set all things right.

This final verse expresses a longing that still echoes today—for a world ruled not by corruption, pride, or favoritism, but by righteousness, mercy, and truth.

Personal Application:

In a world where justice often seems elusive, place your hope not in systems, but in God. Let His coming kingdom shape your values now. Live today in light of the coming judgment—where God, the Righteous Judge, will not overlook even the smallest act of injustice or mercy.

Conclusion: Be Faithful in Whatever Power You Hold

Psalm 82 is not just a rebuke to ancient judges—it is a reminder to anyone with influence or authority. Whether you lead a courtroom, a classroom, or a family table, God is watching how you lead. He desires justice that reflects His heart, and mercy that flows from His truth.

*“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?” —Micah 6:8*