

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

“JUSTICE: WHEN POWER POLLUTES”

For individual study or discussion

In Psalm 82, the curtain is pulled back on the cosmic courtroom of the Most High. God is standing in the midst of his divine council. Corrupt power is being called to account as God confronts the rulers for judging unjustly and showing partiality to the wicked (v. 2). Psalm 82 asserts that the Most High is the supreme authority over every other created power by pointing us forward to the looming biblical drama of the Last Judgment, “*Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations.*”

The Court: God as Judge Over All (v. 1)

The imagery of verse 1 is that of a celestial courtroom where a heavenly trial is taking place. The Judge is the Most High, *El Elyon*, who indicts the rulers that have failed in their jobs of administering justice.

- Who are the “gods” over whom God presides (v. 1)? (See John 10:22–36)
- In his commentary on the Book of Psalms, Christopher Ash states there is “a strong organic connection in the Scriptures between the people exercising power and the spirits that breathe in them as they do.”¹ Read 1 Samuel 16:14, 1 Kings 22:19–23, Daniel 10:12–21, 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Luke 22:3.

The Charge: Power Called to Account (vv. 2–7)

The psalm exposes the abuse of power. Rulers who favor the powerful and crush the weak are called to account by God. God’s justice is in stark contrast to the governing of wicked rulers. Paul Tripp describes God’s justice as perfect and tenderhearted: “*The weak need defense, the needy need provision, and the fatherless need protection. And in those three words, you get a definition of what [God’s] justice does: justice defends, justice provides, and justice protects.*”² And as verses 6–7 conclude, rulers who refuse to administer God’s justice will receive the sentence of death.

- Read Revelation 20:10–15. What will happen to all those who thwart God’s rule? (cf. Revelation 21:8)
- Read Ecclesiastes 5:8. When oppression and injustice take place, who is involved?
- Verse 5 states, that “*all the foundations of the earth are shaken*” because of the injustice of the rulers. Read Matthew 27:51–54. How is the earthquake at the cross a vivid and climactic demonstration of the foundations being shaken?
- How does the divine declaration of verse 6 give extraordinary dignity to these rulers who exercise God’s authority? And how does that title make them all the more culpable?

The Cry: A Deep Longing for Justice (v. 8)

In verse 8, the psalmist cries out to the Judge of the Earth for justice. It was common for OT prophets to bring messages from God’s divine council calling for “*justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*” with hope that one day righteousness and mercy would reign over the nations. Christopher Ash writes, “*The true God will send a true Son of God in whose heart breathes the true Spirit of God (given ‘without measure,’ John 3:34), and he will judge the earth in righteousness so that the true God will inherit the nations (v. 8).*”³

- Read Psalm 2 and Revelation 11:15–19. How do these passages highlight the theme of justice found in Psalm 82?
- Recall from our studies in the *Gospel of Luke*, how did Jesus characterize his mission (Luke 4:16–21)? (cf. Ezekial 34:16)
- Read Luke 4:5–6. Based on your study of Psalm 82, discuss the validity of the devil’s offer to Jesus during his temptation in the wilderness.

DATE: June 22, 2025

SPEAKER: Brian/Wil

SERIES: Summer in the Psalms

PASSAGE: Psalm 82

Family Dinner Table

A Deep Longing for Justice

Have you read Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*? In the book there is a courtroom scene that becomes the stage for a tragic miscarriage of justice. Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of assaulting a white woman, is tried by an all white jury steeped in prejudice.

Atticus Finch, the lawyer who defends Tom, presents a clear, reasoned case that exposes the lies of his accusers. The evidence is undeniable. The verdict should be obvious. But Tom is judged unjustly and the jury shows partiality to the wicked. The very ones entrusted to uphold justice bow to societal pressure and protect their privilege.

As Psalm 82 ends with the plea, “*Arise, O God, judge the earth!*” (v. 8), it’s the same deep longing for justice that we feel as Tom’s case ends—not just for a better verdict, but for a better world where God’s justice prevails.

- Lee’s story helps us feel the ache of Psalm 82. Paul Tripp describes our deep longing as, “*A cry for justice is a cry for Jesus.*”⁴ Discuss why a cry for justice is essentially a cry for Jesus.
- Read Micah 6:8. If God cares about justice and mercy shouldn’t we? Where are the weak ones in your life? Where are the needy? What about the fatherless? How can you “*do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God*” this week?

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^{1,3}Ash, Christopher. *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary, Volume 3*. 2024, Wheaton, IL. Crossway. 419–20

^{2,4}Tripp, Paul. *Psalm 82: A Cry for God’s Justice*. January 8, 2024. <https://www.paultripp.com/psalms/posts/psalm-82-a-cry-for-gods-justice>