

END OF PSALM 81

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 81

An exhortation to judges and men in power.

1. God hath stood in the congregation of gods: and being in the midst of them he judgeth gods.
2. How long will you judge unjustly; and accept the persons of the wicked?
3. Judge for the needy and fatherless: do justice to the humble and the poor.
4. Rescued the poor; and deliver the needy out of the hand of the Sinner.
5. They have not known nor understood; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth shall be moved.
6. I has said: you are gods, and all of you the sons of the most high.
7. But you like men shall die; and shall fall like one of the princes.
8. Arise, O God, Judge thou the earth: but thou shalt inherit among all the nations.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 81

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "God hath stood in the congregation of gods: and being in the midst of them, he judgeth gods." The holy Prophet pronounces that God is always present with judges when they are delivering their judgment, and that he sits in judgment on theirs. A consideration that would prove highly useful to judges, if they would seriously consider that all causes will be judged in the sight of the supreme Judge. "God hath stood;" is always present in his majesty, though invisible; "in the congregation of gods;" in the assembly of the judges when they meet to sit in judgment; and, while they are judging the people, he, "in the midst" of them standing by, judges the judges themselves.

2. "How long will you judge unjustly; and accept the persons of the wicked?" Whether this is the language of the Prophet reproving the judges for not reflecting on the fact of God's presence at their judgments, and thus judge wrongfully; or whether it is the language of God, who, on assisting at the trials, and examining the decisions, reproves the corrupt judges for their principal and most frequent crime, their regard of persons, which causes them to decide unjustly, is uncertain, but, because it is the Holy Ghost who speaks through the mouth of the Prophet, and because it seldom happens that a poor man, however just, meets with favor or partiality; and it is quite the other way with the rich man, no matter how much in the wrong; he, therefore, censures them most severely for such regard of persons. "How long will you judge unjustly?" How long will you persevere in this sin of unjust judgment? And he assigns the principal cause of their doing so when he says, "and accept the persons of the wicked;" for, hence all the unjust judgments, the judges not looking to the merits of the case, but that the favor of the rich and powerful, who themselves sin by the fact of wishing the judges to lean to them instead of to justice. To "accept the persons of the wicked," then, means to pronounce sentence, not according to the justice of the case, but according to the wishes of one party, be he friend, benefactor, or relation.

3. "Judge for the needy and fatherless: do justice to the humble and the poor." Having censured vice of regard of person, he now adverts to the oppression of the poor, which judges are guilty of when a deferred justice to the poor, or when they decide unjustly against them, for fear of displeasing their more powerful adversaries. "Judge for the needy and the fatherless." Freely entertain, diligently discuss, and, for fear they may suffer by protracted litigation, decide as quickly as possible on the case of the poor; and especially of the orphans. This, however, supposes that they have justice at their side; for, in Leviticus 19, we read, "respect not the person of the poor nor honor the countenance of the mighty, but judge thy neighbor according to justice." The meaning, then, is not to judge at all times in favor of the poor, but, when he shall have justice at his side, that the judge shall take care to make it appear, and not to allow him to be oppressed by the influence of his adversaries.

4. "Rescue the poor; and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner." The judge does not discharge his duty by giving a just decision if he does not compel the rich and the powerful to make restitution to the poor and the needy, either by restoring what they took from them, or by compensating them for their losses through defamation or litigation; and he therefore says, "rescue the poor" from the powerful, "and the needy" from the same sinner. A repetition for the sake of impression. In this point especially, should judges and princes show their power in protecting the poor. By so doing, they conciliate God and the people; but as they generally do not, the Prophet adds:

5. "They have not known nor understood: they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth shall be moved." He now deplores the willful blindness of those judges, whose injustice is the cause of all the confusion all over the world. For, as the Lord himself says, "if the salt lose its flavor, with what shall it be salted?" And again, "if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great will the darkness itself be?" So we can say of those who administer justice, if justice be not found in them, where will it be found? Injustice will reign supreme. "They have not known nor understood." They took no trouble to inquire into the facts nor the law of the case. Such ignorance caused them "to walk on in darkness;" to give erroneous decisions, like one going astray in the dark; and from erroneous decisions, from such ignorance, arose confusion, tumult, sedition and rebellion, on the part of the people; as is signified in the next sentence, "all the foundations of the earth shall be moved;" that means, the whole world will be confused, and knocked about. When the whole kingdom of Israel revolted from David, no other reason could be assigned for such revolt but Absalom's having persuaded the people that David took no trouble in hearing their complaints, and doing them justice, 2 Kings 13. The holy Scripture assigns bribery as the cause of so much corruption among judges. Thus, Isaiah 1, "they all love bribes they run after rewards; they judge not for the fatherless, and the widows cause, cometh not in to them;" and in Exodus 23, "neither shalt thou take bribes, which blind the wise;" and in Deuteronomy 16, "thou shalt not accept gifts: for gifts

blind the eyes of the wise, and changed the words of the just;” and finally, Eccles. 20, “presents and gifts blind the eyes of judges, and make them dumb in the mouth, so that they cannot correct.”

6 “I have said: you are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High.” Having hitherto censured those judges for the respect of persons, their injustice, and their ignorance, he now shows how derogatory such vices are to the high position in which God had placed them. “I have said;” I have asserted, that you judges and princes “are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High.” He calls them the sons of the Most High; either, because they were nearly equal to the angels who, in Job, all called “sons of God;” or to show that these judges are not gods, strictly speaking, as is the true supreme God, who had neither beginning nor end; but that they may be called gods, it as much as they are sons of God, of the one true God; and made, to a certain extent, gods by him when he gave them a share in his authority, and power of sitting in judgment. In the Gospel of St. John, our Lord, in quoting this passage, says, that they are called gods, because “the word of God was spoken to them.” Then said he, “if he called them gods, to whom the word of God was spoken; do you say of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world: thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” The meaning of the expression, “to whom the word of God was spoken,” is the being appointed to, or entrusted with, some particular duty by God. Thus, “the word of God came to the prophets whom he sent to preach;” and in Luke 3, “the word of the Lord came to John.” Hence, we see the force of Christ’s argument. If those whom God entrusted with any particular duty or mission were called gods, how much a better title thereto have I not, who am the Son of God, sent with all power into the world by my heavenly Father? We are not, however, to infer from this passage that all princes and judges have their power immediately to God. Some have, such as Moses and the Old, and Peter in the New Testament. Others have it through the consent of the people, who give up the power of the natural law conferred on them, which power had its origin in God, “for there is no power but from God,” Romans 13.

7. “But you like men shall die; and shall fall like one of the princes.” I have told you what you were through God’s mercy. I will now tell you what you are through your own perversity. Through God’s mercy you were gods, and like angels; but, from the sin you inherit from your first family, “like men you shall die;” and, from your own wickedness in abusing the power committed to you, “you shall fall” from the highest pinnacle of glory to the lowest pit of hell, “like one of the princes,” the fallen angels.

8. “Arise, O God, judge thou the earth: for thou shall inherit among all the nations.” The Prophet concludes by asking God’s assistance against the injustice of the princes and judges of this world, and prays that he who is the real master and owner of this world may correct the judgment of man, may punish unjust judges, and relieve the oppressed poor according to his own power and wisdom; the prayer being a prophetic one, in which he predicts, the Messiah, who, as he will come in for the inheritance of the world, will also see that justice be fairly administered therein, through his princes and judges, and afterwards by himself on the day of judgment. “Arise, O God, judge the earth;” since the judges so abused their authority, you, that are the supreme Judge, arise and “judge the earth,” including the judges themselves, and deliver the suffering poor from their unjust oppressors; “for thou shalt inherit among all the nations;” because all nations, as they ever did, so they ever will belong to you; because you never placed anyone in power here below without reserving the supreme authority to yourself above.