

Psalms 82

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 82 - and as we make our way to the 82nd Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that - this is the 10th - of 11 consecutive songs - written by a seer named Asaph.

And as we take the time to study the lyrics found in this incredible Psalm...

...it won't take long before we find ourselves in the middle of an interpretive controversy...

...as we attempt to understand the point that Asaph was making.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 82nd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph writes...

Psa 82:1 A Psalm of Asaph.
God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.

Well - here we are - we've made it one verse into this incredible Psalm...

...and we already find ourselves facing an interpretive issue - as we attempt to make sense of this statement.

And just to be clear - the controversy is based on the question concerning what Asaph meant...

...when He informed us that God is standing in the congregation of the mighty...

...as He judges among the gods.

Let's consider how the scholars - who created the English Standard Version of the bible - rendered verse 1 - they put it like this...

Psa 82:1 God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

So - according to this translation - there's appears to be some sort of divine council in a heavenly courtroom.

And it's there where God is apparently engaging in some sort of meeting - with a group of gods.

And if this translation is correct - then we must ask - - was Asaph presenting a case for Polytheism?

Just to be clear - Polytheism - is the belief that there are many gods.

The word - POLY - comes from the Greek word for MANY...

...and the word - THEISM - comes from the Greek word THEOS - which means God.

And as we consider the way that Asaph referred to this congregation - or - divine council of gods...

...we should take a moment to ask - did Asaph believe in Polytheism?

With this question in mind - I should remind you about the first Psalm of Asaph - that we find in the Bible.

I'm referring to Psalm 50 - - and it's beginning in verse 1 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 50:1 The Mighty One, God the LORD,
Has spoken and called the earth
From the rising of the sun to its going down.

Here in the beginning of this Psalm - we find Asaph - singing the praises of the Lord.

And just to be clear - when Asaph referred to the Lord as the Mighty One - God the LORD...

...He was singing the praises of YAHWEH - Whom he called - El-Elohim.

El - which means - mighty one - has been used in reference to Jehovah God...

...as well as to mighty men - magistrates - angels - and demons.

The prolonged form of El - is the Hebrew word - Eloah - which is often translated - God.

And then there's the plural form of the word - Elohim - - which could be rendered - gods.

And at the same time - Elohim was also used of the plural majesties of the One true God.

Case in point - the very first use of the Hebrew word - Elohim - is found in Genesis chapter 1 - verse 1 - where Moses writes...

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Here in the first verse of the Bible - we find Moses - using the word - Elohim - in reference to our Creator God.

And in order to understand why this plural form of Eloah - was rendered into the singular noun - God...

...it's because - the following Hebrew verb translated - created - is singular...

...which helps us to see that - there was only One
Elohim - Who Created everything.

I like the way that the Lord put it - in Deuteronomy chapter 6 - it's verse 4
where He declared...

Deu 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

In order to better understand this statement - let's consider the
Hebrew terms - here's how it reads...

Deu 6:4 Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our Elohim is the only
Yahweh!

From this - we can see how the Hebrew word - Elohim -
was used in reference to the One and Only Yahweh.

At the same time - Elohim was also used in reference
to the false gods of the pagan nations.

For example - it's in Deuteronomy chapter 32 - beginning at verse 16 -
where we learn that the Children of Israel...

Deu 32:16 ...provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods;
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.

Deu 32:17 They sacrificed to demons, not to God,
To gods they did not know,
To new gods, new arrivals

That your fathers did not fear.

Deu 32:18 Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful,
And have forgotten the God who fathered you.

Here in these verses - we find Moses - describing the way that the
children of Israel forgot about the El Who Fathered them...

...as they presented their sacrifices to NEW ELOHIM - which
were nothing more than demons.

In this sense - the word - Elohim - was being used in
reference to the false gods of the pagan nations.

That being the case - we should take a moment to ask...

...do the Elohim of the pagan nations - actually exist?

With this question in mind - let's consider how the Lord addressed this question - in the book of Isaiah.

And so - hold your place - here in the book of Psalms - and let's turn in our Bibles - to Isaiah chapter 44.

And as we make our way to the 44th chapter of Isaiah - I should take a moment to point out that...

...it is possible that Yahweh created lesser Elohim - Who sit with Him in a divine council...

...sort of like the Pantheon of Greek gods - - who were led by the greatest of them...

...better known as Zeus - the king of Olympus.

With this in mind - let's consider Yahweh's perspective - found here in Isaiah chapter 44 - look with me there at verse 6 - where we read...

Isa 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,

And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

'I am the First and I am the Last;

Besides Me there is no God. (Elohim)

Isa 44:7 And who can proclaim as I do?

Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me,

Since I appointed the ancient people.

And the things that are coming and shall come,

Let them show these to them.

Isa 44:8 Do not fear, nor be afraid;

Have I not told you from that time, and declared it?

You are My witnesses.

Is there a God besides Me?

Indeed there is no other Rock;
I know not one.' ”

Now - remember - Yahweh is the omniscient One - Who knows all things.

And it's here in these verses where He assures us that - He doesn't know of One Eloah - - besides Him.

To the contrary - He assures us that - Besides Him there is no Elohim.

And what this means is that - He's never heard of a divine council of Elohim.

With this as our focus - let's make our way back to the 82nd Psalm - - so that we can try to make sense of Asaph's song.

Look with me again - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 82:1 God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.

Now - as we take another look at this verse - I should remind you that...

...the Hebrew word - Elohim - was not only used in reference to God - as well as to false gods...

...but - the same word was also used - in reference to earthly magistrates - like judges - or rulers.

It's for this reason that the scholars who created the NASB 95 - rendered verse 1 in this way...

Psa 82:1 God takes His stand in His own congregation;
He judges in the midst of the rulers.

Here in this highly literal - word-for-word translation - which is considered by many to be a gold-standard Translation...

...we find the scholars - rendering the word - Elohim - into our English word - rulers.

And in order to understand why - we must consider the context.

With this as our focus - let's spend some time to take in more of the context of passage.

Look with me again - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 82:1 God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.
Psa 82:2 How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked? Selah

Here in the second verse of this Psalm - we find Asaph - describing the the Elohim that he mentioned in verse 1...

...as judges - who were failing to judge with righteous judgment.

Instead - they were judging unjustly - as they showed partiality to those who were wicked.

In other words - they were judges - who were perverting justice - by taking bribes.

Now - it might interest you to know that - the word - judge - found there in verse 2...

...was translated from the same Hebrew word that Moses used in Deuteronomy 16 - where he referred to human judges.

It's beginning at verse 18 - where Moses declared...

Deu 16:18 "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment.

Deu 16:19 “You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

Deu 16:20 “You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

So - according to Moses - it was the human judges - who were called to judge the people with just judgment.

And there were human judges - who were expected to refrain from showing partiality to the wicked.

That being the case - it seems to me that - Asaph was referring to the human judges...

...who were failing to judge - with righteous judgment.

We should also consider the second part of his complaint - which is found here in the 82nd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there in verse 3 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 82:3 Defend the poor and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.

Psa 82:4 Deliver the poor and needy;
Free them from the hand of the wicked.

Psa 82:5 They do not know, nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - reminding the Elohim about their righteous responsibilities...

...which included the defense of the poor and fatherless...

...as well as the deliverance of those who were unjustly afflicted and in need of help...

...so that they might be set free from the hand of the wicked.

Now - there are some Christians who are completely convinced - that...

...the Elohim who were failing to Defend the poor and fatherless - and who were failing to Deliver the poor and needy...

...were actually lesser gods - who were appointed to rule over the nations of men.

Here's how Dr. Michael Heiser explained it - in his book - the Unseen Realm - and I quote...

“Yahweh's portion would be Israel. He cast off the other nations and assigned them to lesser gods. Those gods become divine rivals, not servants, of Yahweh. Their rule is corrupt (Psa 82).”

Now - I'll be the first to confess that - Dr. Heiser is an incredible Hebrew scholar...

...who used his theological expertise - to introduce - what I consider to be an overly complex interpretation of this text.

And while I agree with many things that he wrote in the Unseen Realm...

...I must disagree with this idea that Asaph was referring to lesser gods.

In order to explain why - I should point out that there is no Biblical basis for believing that...

...God commanded lesser gods - to Defend the poor and fatherless.

And as far as I know - there is no passage of scripture....

...where divine beings are directed to do justice to the afflicted and needy...

...by delivering the poor and needy - from the hand of the wicked.

No - instead - these are instructions that God gave to Moses - who then presented these commands to human judges.

For example - let's consider the instruction that the Lord gave to Moses - in Exodus chapter 22 - where he declared...

Exo 22:22 "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.

Exo 22:23 "If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry;

Exo 22:24 "and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

These instructions weren't given to divine beings - no - instead - they were given to Moses.

And then - Moses presented these law to the judges - who were called to judge the people with just judgment.

And in order to further make my case - you might like to know that...

...these judges were also called - Elohim.

Let's consider how Asaph explained it - here in the 82nd Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 6 - where he declared...

Psa 82:6 I said, "You are gods,
And all of you are children of the Most High.

Psa 82:7 But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes."

Psa 82:8 Arise, O God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

Here in the second half of this Psalm - we find Asaph - presenting the people with a juxtaposition...

...between the lofty position given to these rulers - - and the eventual outcome of their unfortunate failure.

And while it's true that the true and living God - called them Elohim...

...it's also true that their earthly exaltation - wouldn't save them from the destruction of death.

Now - before I get too far ahead of myself - let's take a moment to consider the proof - that these Earthly judges - were in fact called - Elohim.

It's in Exodus chapter 21 - where Moses writes...

Exo 21:2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.

Exo 21:3 "If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

Exo 21:4 "If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

Exo 21:5 "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'

Exo 21:6 "then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

Now - when Moses referred to the - judges - he was actually using the Hebrew word - Elohim.

And what this means is that - the judges of Israel were also called - Elohim.

We find the same use of the word - in the 22nd verse of the same chapter where Moses declared...

Exo 21:22 "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine."

According to Moses - the judges - or - the Elohim of Israel - were called to order a just judgment...

...in the case where a man causes a woman to miscarriage.

And this is yet another reason for why I am certain that Asaph was referring to human judges...

...and NOT to lesser gods - who were appointed to judge the nations.

In order to further make my case - we should take some time to consider the way that Christ Jesus applied the 82nd Psalm.

And with this as our focus - let's turn in our Bibles - to the gospel of John - - I'd like you to turn to John chapter 10.

And we make our way to the 10th chapter of John's gospel account...

...I wanna take a moment to present you with the Hermeneutical principle...

...which is better known as the principle of "New Testament priority."

Just to be clear - the principle of "New Testament priority" is an interpretive principle - which is based on the belief that...

...the best interpreter of the Old Testament - is the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the New Testament.

For example - the Messianic mysteries that we find in the Old Testament...

...are illuminated - and revealed by the light of the New Testament.

And the difficult passages that we find in the Old Testament...

...are expounded - expanded and explained in the New Testament.

With this in mind - let's consider how the Lord Jesus provides us with His perspective on the 82nd Psalm - here in John chapter 10.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 30 - where he declared...

Jhn 10:30 "I and My Father are one."

Jhn 10:31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

Jhn 10:32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"

Jhn 10:33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

Jhn 10:34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods' '?"

Jhn 10:35 "If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),

Jhn 10:36 "do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Jhn 10:37 "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

Jhn 10:38 "but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."

Here in these verses - we find a group of angry Jews - accusing Jesus of Blasphemy.

The reason why was due to the fact that - the Lord Jesus just assured them the He - and God the Father - were ONE.

In other words - the Lord Jesus was insisting that He One with YAHWEH - our Elohim - - the only YAWEH.

In light of His controversial claim - - the Jews declared: "You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

And in response to their accusation - the Lord Jesus assured them that...

...His claim was not as blasphemous as they imagined.

He did this by quoting the 82nd Psalm - where Asaph reminded the Israelites about the days...

...when Yahweh referred to a group unjust judges - as Elohim.

Now - let's take a moment to consider the implications of this argument.

If the Elohim found in the 82nd Psalm were something other than human...

...then the point that the Lord Jesus was making would've been based on a categorical fallacy.

It seems clear to me that the point Jesus was making is this...

...IF God was willing to call a group of unjust judges ELOHIM...

...then - why were the Jews so offended - when He called Himself the Son of God?

At the same time - IF the Elohim mentioned in Psalm 82 - weren't HUMAN judges - THEN...

...why would Jesus use this passage as a defense against the religious rulers - who were accusing Him of blasphemy.

It seems to me that - if they all understood Psalm 82 - to be a passage about lesser gods - being called Elohim...

...that this argument would fail to convince the Jews -
that He wasn't guilty of Blasphemy.

To further make my case - let's take a closer look at the argument that
Jesus presented - as He appealed to the 82nd Psalm.

Look with me again - there at John chapter 10 - I wanna draw your
attention - beginning there at verse 34 - where Jesus asked...

Jhn 10:34 "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" '?"

Jhn 10:35 "If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came
(and the Scripture cannot be broken),

Jhn 10:36 "do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent
into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of
God'?"

Here in this verse - we find the Lord Jesus - clarifying the words of
Asaph...

...and He did this by informing us that Asaph was actually
quoting something - which was written in the law.

Just to be clear - Jesus was referring to the Mosaic law -
which is found in the first five books of the Old Testament

And that's exactly what we've discovered - here in
our study tonight.

Not only that - but it's there in verse 35 - where Jesus referred to
the Elohim - to whom the word of God came.

And then He added that - the Scripture cannot be broken.

Or in other words - the Jews - who were accusing Jesus
of blasphemy - - were failing to realize that...

...the Old Testament scriptures that referred to
human judges - as Elohim...

...couldn't be broken from the rest of the Bible.

And yet - they were acting as if those bible verses no longer existed.

To sum it up with simplicity - - if Yahweh - our Elohim - Who alone is Yahweh - decided to call unjust judged - Elohim...

...then - it wasn't blasphemous - for the Lord Jesus - to call Himself the Son of God.

And to the contrary - is was completely correct for Christ Jesus to assure His audience...

...that He is in fact - the One Who was sent - to accomplish the work of His Heavenly Father.

And listen - this not only includes the work of our Redemption - which Jesus accomplished on the cross...

...but - this also includes the work of restoration - which Jesus will accomplish at the time of His second coming...

...when He establishes a theocratic government - which will include righteous judges - who will help Him rule over the Earth.

And it's for this reason that Asaph concluded this Psalm - with a focus on the day of the Lord.

It's in the final verse of the 82nd Psalm - where Asaph declared....

Psa 82:8 Arise, O God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

Asaph was looking forward to the day - when the righteous judge of heaven and Earth will Arise...

...and establish true justice throughout the Earth.

And just like Asaph - we too should be praying for this day.

But until that day comes - it's important for us to remember that...

...the Lord is the One Who has established human government...

...so that His Elohim might judge the people with just judgment.

This was precisely the point that Paul was making in Romans chapter 13 it's beginning at verse 1 - where he declared...

Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Rom 13:2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Rom 13:4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Rom 13:5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

Much like Israel - the Lord is the One Who appoints authorities - to oversee human government - throughout the world.

And while this is not to suggest that the governing authorities are always inline with the perfect will of God...

...we can rejoice in knowing that - the Lord is the One Who raises up rulers....

...and He is also the One Who can bring them down.

With that being the case - we will all do well to become those believers who remember that...

...the Lord has a plan to use the Earthly Elohim - to punish evil doers.

And it's for this reason that Christians should strive to become the best citizens that we can be...

...as we set out to serve our Savior Jesus - - for the glory of Yahweh our Elohim - Who is the One and Only Yahweh.