

## **Psalms: Book Three (Part Three)**

**God Is Judge**

**Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 08-Aug-15; Sermon #1280**

It has been tough being a Christian in America over the past several months, especially. But the pressure has been building for many years and maybe we could even say it has been building for decades. The big blow lately, of course, has been the Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage. But that in itself is a contradiction in terms, that is, same-sex "marriage." Traditionally, and that means biblically, because the tradition derives from Judeo-Christian teaching, but marriage itself (the word), has been defined as the union of a man and a woman. That is how the Bible defines it.

Matrimony, if we go look at that word, and I did, I looked in *Miriam Webster's Dictionary*, is defined simply as the same thing as marriage, "the union of a man and a woman." Man and man or woman and woman does not fit that biblical definition. That is just the long and the short of it really. What they have ruled for is something other than marriage. And of course, God would call it an abomination.

Of course, this ruling and the definitions they impose upon the rest of us undermines Christian teaching. When asked about marriage and divorce, Jesus refers the Pharisees back to God's original teaching about men and women and marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. First, in Genesis 1, that He made man—mankind, humanity—male and female. And then in chapter 2, He says right there at the end, "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall be one flesh." So both these principles, one out of Genesis 1, one out of Genesis 2, include the reality of both sexes, both genders. Male and female in the one place, man and wife in the other.

Also, both principles allude to God creating two genders to complement each other. Because immediately after He says that He made man male and female, He said, "Be fruitful and multiply," which is the big 700 pound gorilla in the room here because man and man cannot multiply, woman and woman cannot multiply. It takes one of each; both genders, both sexes are

required. And it is interesting that that be fruitful and multiply is His first command to mankind. Right after He makes them, that is what He says. And so it is very clear that the producing of offspring is a major part of marriage, of a man and a woman being joined as one flesh.

Now, I want to call it *the* original major blow. It is not really the original, but it is back there a few decades ago. But in modern times, that blow was the Supreme Court's Roe v Wade decision in 1973, which of course legalized abortion across the nation. And every year since then, more than a million unborn children have been murdered in the name of sexual freedom. I saw an Internet counter last night on how many legal abortions have been done since 1973 and it was over 58.1 million.

And now we have Planned Parenthood caught by a hidden camera selling aborted baby parts for research, which is just sickening. What is especially sickening is their callous disregard for these babies and what they do with them and the things that they have planned for them.

Of course, the Bible gives no sanction to this decision by the Supreme Court to abort children. Actually, it is just the opposite. One of the Big Ten the sixth commandment, says "You shall do no murder," directly deals with the taking of a life. I also mentioned that God commands us to be fruitful. He does not want us to be taking life. He wants us to be multiplying life. Jesus says in John 10 that one of the main things that He came for is to give us life so that we could have it more abundantly. He is all about life and having abundant life.

Psalms 127 tells us that the Lord builds the house and that children are a heritage of the Lord. The fruit of the womb is His reward. David writes in Psalm 139 that God formed his inward parts in secret in his mother's womb and that already, while God was forming those inward parts, his days, meaning David's days, were already fashioned for him before he was even born. God recognized his life before birth and He had already planned out what David would do, in general, not specifically. We do not know quite how specifically it was, but He had a good idea how he was going to use that little baby when he was born. And as he grew up and as he became a man and a king and a father and so on, God already knew. And so He was planning to use that life that was already in process of being formed. And of

course, that plan for that life goes all the way out into the Kingdom of God, not just his physical life.

So we would say more scientifically that life begins at conception with the union of the egg and the sperm. Already that life is there.

Now other things, such as the spectacular and public hypocrisy of certain people known to be Christians to society, and even Christian ministers, there is been a lot of those that have taken drastic falls. There was one here right in Fort Mill about 30 years ago (I do not know if it is quite that long ago), but Jim and Tammy Faye Baker and their PTL Club and all the things that they did to bilk senior citizens out of a lot of money. Just a real Christian thing to do, was it not? There is that, and Jimmy Swaggart and some of the silly, stupid things that Pat Robertson has said and such, that has made people think that Christians are stumbling bumpkins.

More than that, maybe, though is the general laxity of mainline Christian churches and denominations. They have just gone hook, line, and sinker for all the new liberalism, the progressivism that has come down the line and all these things have just weakened Christianity in the culture.

But I mentioned the two Supreme Court cases specifically, on purpose, because both of them, both the 1973 ruling on abortion and the 2015 ruling on same-sex marriage, were clear violations of an impartial reading of the Constitution. And it was not even anywhere in the ballpark in terms of original intent; that the Constitution was written for a specific purpose, and those men who wrote it, using the principles that they had learned in their own lives and their own upbringings, had not considered abortion or same-sex marriage as part of those fundamental rights of Americans.

It is just very clear if you look at it as objectively as you can, that in both cases the justices of the Supreme Court had to distort the meaning of the Constitution and the amendments that they used. And they even had to invent constitutional authority out of whole cloth to come to the decisions that they made. What they found in the Constitution was not there. And I read last night as I was going through some of this, that even liberal legal minds like Alan Dershowitz (you would never consider him to be a conservative), says *Roe v Wade* is a mess legally. And he is kind of

surprised that it has not been challenged. But any kind of challenge has always been suppressed before it got back to the Supreme Court.

Anyway, in both cases, what it comes down to is that the Court pandered to a special interest group to push a liberalizing agenda. First, they pandered to the feminists and then they pandered to homosexuals. And over the years, we have found that both have distorted and undermined our society.

Now, it is bad enough in society when regular Joes flout God's laws, and we kind of expect that to an extent because they do not know, they have not been given God's Spirit. Human people sin. It is part of human nature. We understand that. But when the nation's judges pervert justice at a very high level, and in these cases it went all the way to the top, all the way to the Supreme Court in both cases—(and I should also mention it has been happening ever since in a lot of other cases, so it has been very consistent that these justices have perverted justice for a very long time)—it really shows the depths of iniquity in the nation that even the people who have been appointed to be arbiters and judges among us who are supposed to know the law, who are supposed to be paragons, if you will, of what is right and ethical, yet they blatantly ruin the nation with their decisions. And they do it for various reasons like filthy lucre, to push an agenda, or what have you. So they lie.

To me, the blatant corruption of the Supreme Court is one of the most significant indicators of the state of this nation's ethics and morality and it is not good.

If you will, please go to Micah the third chapter. We are going to read this whole chapter because it is directly involved in this particular subject. In the New King James it is titled "Wicked Rulers and Prophets." Micah is a Jew and he was sent by God to go up into enemy territory, Israel, and he was supposed to preach to the Israelites up there in the Northern Kingdom that they were on a collision course with God. They were making a date with destiny if they did not change their ways. And here in chapter 3, he specifically warns and castigates the rulers of the people. Now listen to his argument here.

**Micah 3:1-12** And I said: "Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? [This is the beginning here. We have to understand where he is starting. He says, you know better.] You who hate good and love evil; who strip the skin from My people, and the flesh from their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones, and chop them in pieces like meat for the pot, like flesh for the cauldron." [Wow, He goes right to it.]

Then they will cry to the Lord, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds. Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets [Now he switches over to the prophets, not the judges of the rulers.] who make My people stray, who chant peace while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths: "Therefore you shall have night without vision, and you shall have darkness without divination; the sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them. So the seer shall be ashamed, and the diviners abashed; indeed they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God."

But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity: Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord, and say, "Is not the Lord among us? no harm can come upon us." Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.

Pretty scary indictment and prophecy of these judges and rulers!

Micah prophesized within about the last decade before the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians and clearly the leadership of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, the

rulers of the house of Israel as he calls them here, they were among his chief targets. He devotes this whole chapter to them. They are religious leaders, they are priests, they are prophets, as well as their secular leaders, their princes, and their judges. They were all selling out their principles for money; and money could stand for, let us just call it, unrighteous mammon. Anything that would help them to get ahead. And who cared if the little people got hurt in the process? They were only in it for them. Sound familiar?

Now a major underlying and often front and center theme of Psalms, Book Three concerns judging. Several Book Three psalms deal directly with God as judge and His righteous judgment. But there are also places within the book where the focus switches to the poor and unrighteous judgment of rulers and judges and the common people, because they are not innocent either. They are making bad judgments as well.

But one of the things that comes out in Psalms, Book Three is what is said there in Micah 3:1. "Is it not for you to know justice?" It always comes back to the fact that these people are not sinning in ignorance. They are not making their unjust laws or their unjust rulings ignorant of God's law, of what God wants. They are doing it *deliberately*. They should know better. They have been taught, they have been given the words of God. They have the Bible very available to them.

What did I say a couple of weeks ago? There are about three Bibles in every household in America. They should know—the people of Judah knew, the people of Israel knew, people of America know. It is not like God is doing anything in a corner. His Word is out there. They can have access to it. They can know. There are churches on every corner, it seems in some places. It is there if they would only listen.

And the background of the culture of our society is Christian, or at least the Christianity of this world. But at least the Christianity of this world bases what they preach on an interpretation of Scripture. At least the Scripture is there and the fundamental principles are there. Even if they get some—many—of the things wrong, it is still there. They still know the basic understanding of justice, of good and bad, of right and wrong. Even if it is

not perfect, they still know generally what is good, what is ethical, what is moral. Because God has made a witness, a very strong witness to this country, and they should know.

So this understanding here of "Is it not for you to know justice?" is, is it not your responsibility to know what true justice is and what good judgment is and what is right and what is wrong? And that is the indictment He makes of not just the judges, not just the rulers, but everybody in Israel—all the people. So God comes to a conclusion in many of these psalms—a right conclusion, He is the judge—that there must be punishment, that He must act. As we see in one of the psalms we get to today that He must stand, meaning get up and act.

We are going to focus on two shorter psalms of Book Three that deal with this theme of judgment and justice. And we will see what we already know. I am not going to tell you anything, really, that is going to be surprising about judgment and justice today. We already know that man's judgment and justice is perverse and God's judgment is righteous and His justice is well deserved. Meaning, those who bear the brunt of it, that when He acts, He acts in His wrath as payment for sin or as a penalty for sin, that He is very just in doing whatever He desires to do.

Just to bring us up quickly on the themes of Book Three. We have already gone over the themes in the first sermon. If you remember, it was about summer and ripening fruit, and also the sanctuary and nearness to God. Remember Asaph went to the sanctuary and that is where he figured out, "Hey, now I understand how things are going." Also, we talked in the last sermon about the grief and the mourning and the suffering that is due to sin and God's punishment for Judah's and Israel's failure to repent. Also we just touched on briefly that we need to praise God for His sovereign goodness, His blessings, and the sureness of His promises, not just the good ones, but the bad ones too, especially if we are on His side.

The sureness of the bad ones is comforting to us because we know, like Asaph came to understand, that the wicked are going to get their due and so that we can go forward then in faith. And of course, we love to be happy and praise God for all the good promises, you know, the eternal life, Kingdom of God, abundance of life, etc. that He is going to also give us.

But we have to understand that it is a good thing to praise Him, that He will do what He says He will do. And that is kind of, in a way, if you wanted to give one overall theme for Book Three, I think it would be "God means what He says and He does as He promises."

The two psalms I am going to do today are Psalm 75 and Psalm 82. We are going to do Psalm 75 first. What I will do is I will read Psalm 75 in full and then we will unpack it a little bit. And remember the theme we are looking at today is judgment and justice. So these are the ideas that we are going to be pulling out.

**Psalm 75:1-10** We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near. "When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly. The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah. I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn. Do not lift up your horn on high; do not speak with a stiff neck.'" For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.

But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down. But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted."

If you have a New King James and you see what they title this psalm, they say it is "Thanksgiving for God's Righteous Judgment" and that is okay, that is fine, because it starts out with thanksgiving. "We give thanks to you, O God." I can see where they got it, but it is not complete by any means. If they had just left it as "God's Righteous Judgment," that would have been great because that is really what it is all about, not just thanksgiving, but really it is talking a great deal about God's righteous judgment. It begins with thanksgiving, yes, but it is far more.



If you look at the way the New King James has paragraphed this psalm, you will see they have cut it into five sections. Now, this is one of the interpretations of how the psalm should be organized. I myself put it more or less into four sections, but the ones that they have got set out here by their paragraphing and, separating the verses here is pretty good. The only one that is maybe a problem is verses 9 and 10. You will see that the New King James has separated those two apart from one another. They could be combined and we will get into that.

Now, some commentators believe that these sections divide along the lines of who is speaking, that there is a different speaker for each paragraph. And there may be something to that. It gives an indication that this may have actually been a song that was sung at the Temple as a hymn and that it was what would you call an audience participation type of thing, unless it was the choir itself was the audience or the ones that sang for the assembly and they had various soloists do the others. But just kind of an interesting thing to think about is how it would have come across in the Temple situation.

But verse 1 is like a chorus that all of the congregation would sing. "We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks! For your wondrous works declare that Your name is near." So everybody would sing that, it would be a big chorus. Verses 2 through 5, right after this, is supposed to be the voice of God. This is God talking to the congregation in response to their giving thanks. And then verses 6 through 8, you might say, is the words of a priest who is trying to not only take what God says, but give it an exhortative, instructive twist or whatever. It is a preacher taking what God has said and adding his thoughts to what God has said.

And then verses 9 and 10, 9 especially, 10 is the one that people wonder about. But 9 is the response of the individual person—not the whole congregation, but an individual, a single Israelite—this is supposed to be his typical response to God and to the instruction that he has been given. And then verse 10, some say that this is the individual again speaking, repeating God's words and making them his own. Or it is God having the final say on the psalm and giving the lesson of the psalm.

So that is kind of how this all unpacks in terms of being part of the liturgy. And it helps us then understand it a little better.

Remember the law of first mentions? When something is said first that it is important and it tends to cast a hue on the rest of its usages? Well, there is also a kind of a principle in terms of the Psalms, many of the Psalms, not all of them, but I have mentioned it in terms of Psalm 73 and also Psalm 74. But again, here in Psalm 75 the first verse is *very* important. It is key, it sets the stage for the rest of it. It is not just there for window dressing, it is not just there as an introduction or to get us started. It is there setting the tone.

Now we could, if we were just reading this, go blithely over this and miss the vital details because we would think, oh, it is just thanksgiving, they are praising God. But it is very interesting when we see the words that are used here. And both of the key terms are in the second phrase or the second clause of the verse: "For your wondrous works declare that Your name is near." That is the important bit.

The first one that we need to key in on here is "Your wondrous works." What is being referred to here is God's acts in both the past and in the present. What they are saying here is that God's acts in both the present and in the past, what we can see of what God has done, prove His involvement in our lives. Let me read that with that understanding then: "Your wondrous works *prove* that Your name is near. What You have done, what we have seen, what has been recorded, what others have told us about what You have done in the past;" and also the healings and the interventions and such that we talk about among each other happening in the present, prove that God is working with His people, that He is among them.

And these things, if we are open to God's works, if we have taken the encouragement to see God, to seek God, to look for Him in our lives, to look for how He is working with us and others, then these things are obvious to us. We can pick them out. We can say, "Yeah, God was behind that. God made sure the timing was right on that. God made sure that the emphasis was on this, that He made us look at these particular things, that He focused our

attention here, that He directed us to do this instead of that." We can see that God is working things in our lives and working with us to bring us to a certain end, a certain conclusion, a certain completeness, if you will.

So these things are not just the "wondrous works." It makes you think about miracles, you know, a man born blind now can see and Jairus' daughter is now alive again. We think of those kind of miraculous, wonderful works. But it does not have to be just those things that make you go, Wow! Even though these other things that I am going to mention in a minute should make you go, Wow!

Think about this among God's wondrous works. Let us start with your calling. There are over 7 billion people on this earth and He has called *you*. Who are you? What have you got that these other 7 billion people do not have? Why did God choose you? Does He just have a big lottery ball up there and He just kind of reaches in and picks number 6,750,000 or whatever and say, "Okay, I want that one." I do not think it is chance. He has a plan, He sees something and that is a wondrous work that He called you.

What about the fact, and this goes with the calling, that you understand what He is trying to do, what He is headed toward; some of the things in Scripture that other people do not understand, that they fumbled about for 2,000 years. Things that you look at it and say Jesus said this and that is exactly what He meant. But you have commentators and priests and theologians and whatnot, and they are all arguing about what He meant, and to you it is clear as day what He meant. There is no question you have understanding and knowledge that other people do not have. And of course, the wisdom, then, comes in that comes in applying that.

What about the wondrous work of God's providence to you every day: your life, your food, your water, your house, your car, your clothes, your children, you name it. By the way, kids, that was not an order of importance. But just think of all of the things that you have that come from God. You get a new job, that probably was not your doing. God probably had a hand in that. You missed that accident in the intersection. If you had been left to yourself, you would have probably been in it. So that just adds to the providence. His

keeping you safe, keeping you well, whatever, each of these things are wondrous works that we do not think about a lot, but they declare that He is near.

Of course, there are big ones like the fact that Jesus Christ paid for your sins and now you have forgiveness and you have salvation and eternal life and a place in God's Kingdom. You will be glorified. You have the promise of a spirit body and of eternal relationship with God and all that that entails. I mean, that is a wondrous work and it has already begun.

This is another big theme in this book. And as a matter of fact, I have taken a few more minutes on it than I wanted to. But actually my next sermon is going to be on this theme pretty much the whole time because I am going to go through Psalm 78 and that is all about the wondrous works that God did on Israel's behalf and they forgot them or discounted them. So Israel failed to acknowledge His wondrous works. They failed to see God in their lives. They failed to live in faith. They failed to repent. Well, let us just leave it at. They failed, they failed in everything. That is why they are lost to these people in the world. We have an idea where they are but God was so disgusted at them and their failure that He made them disappear, even to themselves, so that their relationship with God, their former holiness to Him, their being set apart as a nation, has been forgotten by just about everyone.

The second part that we need to key in on here in verse 1 is the two words: Your name, "For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near." As we know, names identify. They define, they differentiate, they provide information. We know that Jim and Bill are two separate people. We know Jim is a lawyer. We know Bill is a banker. You know, Jim drives a Chevy, Bill drives an Acura. You see the difference. We know these things. When we say the word Jim or Bill, or whoever it is that we are talking about, immediately we are flooded with information.

We do not actually even have to call it up. Mahatma Gandhi. What do you think of? It identifies a certain person, certain activity, certain things that happened in history. You name it, you name anyone that would be generally known by people. Bill Clinton. What was the first word that came into your mind? Crook, liar, adulterer. Cigar smoker. You could name 1,000 things probably, if we sat down and started thinking about the identity of this

person, the description of the person, the information that would flood into your mind just by knowing the name of a thing, of a person.

So we are beginning to get an indication here of what is actually being spoken about in verse 1. You know, God covers this principle in the third commandment in terms of Himself. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." That commandment regulates our use and our disposition toward His name, which identifies, defines, and encompasses all of our knowledge about Him. And that commandment goes on to say He "will not hold him guiltless who bears His name in vain." And so we have to understand that the name of God is more than just the identity of God, but it means a lot more. When it comes down to it, His name means everything He is.

It is a very, very broad concept. It does not mean just His holiness. It does not mean just His righteousness. It does not mean just His love. It means *all* of what we think of when we hear the name God or Jesus Christ or the Lord or even like the Hebrew words Yahweh or El, Elohim. All of those are names of His, titles of His, let us say, but they function as names and those names tell us a great deal of information about Him: His personality, His character, what He does, what He says. It goes on and on, everything that we can pack into the association with that particular name.

So His name means what He is. It essentially means God Himself and everything that that name means.

Now, the most significant fact of all of that I have just said is that His name, put in God Himself, the person, the personality, is near. That is what is important; that this God is not far off. He is not unknown, but He, the whole of what He is and what He has revealed to us, is right here! He is near. He is not some theistic God who made things, wound it up, set it spinning off into the cosmos and then went and played golf on Riga, you know, whatever. He is not that kind of God. He did not go away when He revealed Himself to us. He stayed, He is with us. He is near, and for us as true Christians, it is even closer. It is not just, well, He is in that temple down the street. For us, it is He is inside, He is in us. God sent another comforter who is always with us.

The Spirit of God is in us. We do not have to go far. We do not have to go *anywhere* because He is not only near, He is here, in our hearts and in our minds. So He is aware, whatever kind of stuff is going on around us, whatever our conditions, whatever the situation, whatever the trial and test and tribulation, He knows about it. He is here, He is seeing it. He is not some long way off where we have to say, "God, are you there?" Busy signal. "No? Okay, get here as soon as You can. I've got a problem." No, He knows it already. He is aware of it. He knows a lot more about it than we do because He is God and most of the time, He has probably set it up for us so that we would go through it and learn and grow.

So He is not a God that is far away. He is present in everything that we do.

You might just want to jot down Hebrews 13:5. This is a well known scripture. He Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Which we know in the Greek is a series of five negatives. Basically, I will never, never, never, never, never leave you. And if God can use that many negatives in a row to impress upon us that He means what He says, that He is not going to go away and leave us in the lurch and we can trust Him. Right?

I do want to go to Haggai 2 because in this case, the people of Judah coming back, building the Temple, were in a state and Zerubbabel and Joshua were probably on their knees day and night trying to get God to hear them, and He sends a word of encouragement to them. And this is the point that He makes to them.

**Haggai 2:4-5** "Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel," says the Lord, "and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong all you people of the land," says the Lord, "and work [do what you need to do, build that Temple, get it done]; for I am with you," says the Lord of hosts. "According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt [He goes all the way back to the original covenant. He says, basically, I have been with you all this time.], so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!"

That is the encouragement we are starting off Psalm 75 with. His wondrous works prove, they declare that God Himself is here with us now. He has never gone away. He is always involved in our lives. He is always guiding us by the hand. Remember that image in one of the earlier sermons? He has got our right hand and He is guiding us through life. That is how close He is. And so we do not need to fear and that is how we have to understand this psalm.

We do not have to coax Him to draw near to us. We do not have to shout. We do not have to burn sacrifices. We do not have to give gifts. We do not have to give big offerings. We do not have to dance. We do not have to speak in tongues. We do not have to cut ourselves or handle snakes. Whatever it is, that is not going to get God's attention. Why? Because we have already got His attention because He is here! He is near, He is watching, He is present with us, and His constant care and intervention scream out to us that that is so—if we only keep our eyes open to it. And it should give us faith. We should be able to say, "Yeah, God is with me in this. God is helping me through this, so I do not need to fear. I can walk forward in faith."

Let us go on. These are the words of God in 2 through 5.

**Psalm 75:2-5** "When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly. The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah. I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn. Do not lift up your horn on high; do not speak with a stiff neck.'"

God's response here is an indication in the psalm that they are going through a situation of some distress, that they are in need of God. They are calling on God and they are saying in faith that they know He is near. But He responds and He says, "When I choose, when I figure out or when I know that the time is right, I'll act," which is His way of responding to the peoples' cry out for help. He explains here in His words, that boastful, wicked men are arrogantly using their power against God's people and they are even being arrogant

against God Himself. And God acknowledges in His response here that He is near. He knows what is going on and He is going to act against these arrogant people, whoever they happen to be.

Now, the background of the psalm is probably the Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. Remember, they came up to the walls of Jerusalem and God sent the plague and 185,000 people died right there at the walls of Jerusalem. Well, it did not go so well for Israel. They succumbed to God's punishment through the Assyrians that Micah prophesized about, which we read a little bit earlier. They were devastated and the ones that were left were sent back to Assyria. Actually, the land of the Medes, sent way far away into captivity.

I do want to go to Isaiah 10 just to get an idea of what was going on here. Isaiah 10 is the chapter in Isaiah that deals with Assyria. But I want to start in verse 1 because I want you to see why God brought the Assyrians in the first place.

**Isaiah 10:1-7** "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners, and they shall fall among the slain." For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. [then he goes on to the rod of His anger] "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets. Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations.

Let us drop down to verse 11.



**Isaiah 10:11-15** "As I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?" Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem [Notice that it was *His* work. He sent the Assyrians and it was His work that the Assyrians did.], that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks." For he says, "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries; so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. My hand has found like a nest, the riches of the people, I have gathered all the earth. . . . [He says] Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw magnify himself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!"

This is what is happening in the background of the psalm. Assyria is coming and people want God to act. But He says, "In the appointed time, I will act." But He has work to do and the work was to go all the way up to Mount Zion, right to the gates of Jerusalem. And then He said He would punish the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria. Notice, though, the point here is that He will choose the proper time. Now this is the word *moed*. Any of you who know the calendar know this word very well. It is what in other places is translated as "the appointed time." It is the word that is used for seasons. He appoints the seasons. It is also the word that is used of the holy days. The holy days are appointed times. One is very interesting in Daniel 12, verse 7. And I want you to see this because it shows it goes farther than just a calendar thing.

**Daniel 12:7** Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a [*moed*, *moeds*, and a half a *moed*].

That is the word that is in there. That what He is talking about is that time that He has set for the prophecy to unravel, for the fulfillment to come about, is an appointed time. So it not only has to do with their calendar and moons and all these other things, and the seasons that are going about, it also has to do with His Plan. He has timed everything out to a "T."

So what we are seeing here is that He is in control of all the time: time of the seasons, time of the holy days, times on a calendar. He is also in control of the times of fulfillment of prophecy, the timing of the parts of His Plan coming off, as we find in Ecclesiastes 3:11, that God makes everything beautiful in its time. If you want to kind of have a different translation is that God times everything beautifully. It all comes off right at the proper time. He never does anything too soon, never does anything too late. It always happens on time, God's time.

And so when He tells the people here, when I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly, this is basically, "Don't worry, I've got it all under control. Not only will I judge this situation equitably and everything will happen; people will get the due that's coming to them, people will get the reward that's coming to them depending on how they have been. If they've been good, they will get good things. If they do bad, they will get bad things. And not only that, it will come exactly when it's needed—right at the proper appointed time." So there is no need to worry. God is in control. He is going to judge matters with equity. Why should we fear?

Verse 3 back here in Psalm 75 should not read quite the way it is translated because I think it makes things a little bit unclear. It says here in the New King James, "The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly." A little bit easier way to understand it is, "When the earth and all its inhabitants sway, I Myself steady its pillars."

He is saying, when you see things going all wacky in the world, do not worry because He is there to steady things, to make sure the pillars stay upright because we are "dissolved." That is the traditional way to understand this Hebrew word. But as they are getting more understanding of Hebrew and Aramaic and some of these other cognate languages, they believe the word actually means "sway" or "bent." So it comes out a little bit better because it

is encouragement. He has just encouraged us by saying, "Hey, I'm going to judge this situation equitably and I'm going to do it at the right time," He says, "but when you see things going on, don't worry because I'm going to step in with My own hands and fix the problem." So He is being very encouraging to the people here.

As we go on to verses 4 and 5, we do not need to really touch on these. He says that He will take care of the boastful and the wicked. "Don't worry, they have been arrogant against Me. I'll slap them down when they need it in the right time."

Verses 6 through 8 is the priests or the preachers expounding comments on what God has just said. What he basically says is if we are looking for help, if we are looking for deliverance from anywhere else, if we are looking for some sort of solution that does not include God, then we are in for a very sore time. We are going to be disappointed. God is the only one who equitably decides the fates of men, who is right and who is wrong.

And then verse 7 is a reminder that God is the Judge and that is what we need to understand, that no one else has any right to judge these situations and that He *will* judge. He is not going to shirk His duty as Judge. That is what He does.

Verse 8, then, tells us that God has a cup that He makes everyone and every nation drink. Now, this cup is a very common biblical symbol, and it can be a cup of blessing or it can be a cup of wrath. In Psalm 23 David's cup ran over; in Psalm 116:13 the psalmist says that he is going to take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. That is a good cup. But most often we see that the cup is a cup of judgment to wrath because of sin. And in this case, that is how it is brought out to us—that this cup is fully mixed, it says, meaning that there are lots of bitter spices in it and that He is going to make all the people who have sinned drink it down, all the way down to the dregs. People are not going to get away with their oppression and their sinfulness.

If you want to (I think it is probably a good idea), read Jeremiah 25:15-29. This is where God commanded Jeremiah to take the cup around to all the nations and make them drink. And this goes very much with what is going

on in this psalm here. Also, you might want to read Revelation 17 and 18 where Babylon, mystery Babylon, the great harlot, has a golden cup and her abominations are in it, and God makes her drink it.

Verses 9 and 10 may be the most controversial part of the psalm but that is only because nobody is sure who is speaking. But verse 9 mostly seems like the individual's response to the knowledge that has just been laid on him about God. God is the Judge. God judges everything on time. He judges everything equitably. Everything is going to be okay because God is there. Remember that was the original idea: that God is with us, God is near, He knows what is going on. And so the individual, the individual Israelite, let us say, says, "I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob." That may be kind of a clunky way to translate that. I would say it is much easier to understand as, "But as for me, I will declare for God," meaning I will say that I am on God's side, I will declare for God and praise Him forever.

So what He is saying is, "I'm all in, I'm going to be on God's side. God is the great judge. He's going to win. I want to be on the winning side. I want to do what is right. I want to please God. And so I will declare for God and I'll praise Him forever."

Then we come to verse 10, which is the one that nobody is exactly sure who says it. But let us just assume that the individual is still speaking, and what it would be then is that he is repeating the words of God here, "All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous will be exalted." He is saying, "Yes, I agree with that and I will participate in it. I will do the work of God. I will accompany Him in His work. I will do what He wants me to do." But if God says it Himself it is saying basically this is the lesson you need to learn from this psalm. That God is the one who judges those who are wicked and He raises up those who are good.

So, a very interesting psalm, one that I enjoyed very much studying.

I do want to read Psalm 82. There is quite a bit here I guess I could go into, but I just want to read it because it makes a good follow-up to Psalm 75, I

think. Psalm 82. (And it is very interesting. My dad's commentary ended with "you are gods" and I was going to go into that, but maybe I will let him do it. But it is here in verse 6.)

**Psalm 82:1-5** God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Selah [think about that; consider this; why are you continuing to do wrong things, to make bad judgments, to undermine the people?] Defend the poor [He says] and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked. [This is what you *should* be doing. This is what I instructed you to do in My law. This is how judges under God are supposed to judge. But He says] They do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are unstable.

This is what they have done. He says, they do not know. Notice there is knowledge here, they are willfully ignorant. They do not understand because they do not have the knowledge that they should have or that they have pushed to one side, rejected, and therefore they walk about in darkness. They are stumbling like blind men. They cannot do what is right. And because they are stumbling around and crashing into things, the foundations—their underpinnings, the underpinnings of society—are wobbly and about ready to crash down. He is saying you are the reason for this happening. You see the culture going all wobbly? It is because of you judges in making your bad decisions, because you rejected His knowledge, you rejected His understanding, and you rejected His guidance.

**Psalm 82:6** 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."

Without getting into any specifics on this, what I want to say here is that Jesus basically said that those that He called gods are those to whom the Word of God had come. And who did the word of God come to? Well, it came to the Israelites. He gave them His Word on Mount Sinai. They had His Word for all those hundreds of years. They should have known. Also, the Ten Commandments that He gave there on Mount Sinai. In Hebrew they

are called "the ten words." So He had given them His words and they had rejected them, the basis for all law. And this is why they were in this state.

Also the fact that when God brought Israel out of Egypt, He made them His sons and daughters, His children. He said, "You are My son." That is in Exodus 4:22-23. He tells Pharaoh to let My son go out of Egypt. He is my firstborn.

So what it is talking about is that when God made the covenant with the Israelites, He made them His Family. And so they took on the surname, if you will, of Elohim. So He could very easily, without any problem, call them gods because they were part of God's Family. And He said, "You should have known this. By covenant I made you holy. By covenant I separated you out and made you a distinct people on this earth because I loved you," He says in Deuteronomy 7. And so He did all these things and exalted them above the peoples of the earth. He says, because you have done this poor job of judging My people (verse 7), you shall die like men. He says, because what you have done by doing all this poor judgment, by ignoring His law, you have basically repudiated the covenant. And in doing so, you are no longer in that exalted position. So you are going to die just like regular men.

You could even say that this is kind of a different way of illustrating that God *gave them up to* laws that were not good. He *gave them up to* a reprobate mind. He *gave them up to* the gods of the surrounding territory. He just let them go. And so that is what He is saying here. Because you have done this, I am letting you go. You are no longer going to be have the status of gods. You are going to die like men because that is the judgment that you deserve. And so we have verse 8,

**Psalm 82:8** Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations.

The final verse here beseeches God to judge the earth. He is the one that can judge with equity. This is very analogous, if you will, to Revelation 22:20 where John writes at the very end of his book there, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Saying this, Asaph here asked God to come, to stand. Remember that? He stands in the congregation of the righteous there in verse 1. He is saying, "God, you've stood, now come. Act; judge the earth, please."

Then he gives a very interesting statement, "For You shall inherit all nations," which many think is a Messianic prophecy, if you will, because who is going to inherit all nations but Jesus Christ. And so this is looking forward that the real judgment is not the judgment that occurred for Judah when Assyria and Babylonia came. That is not the judgment that he was really thinking about or God was really thinking about. He inspired the psalmist to think about the judgment at the end when Christ Himself would arise and come and judge the world, He would remove and punish all the unjust judges of humanity and establish justice and equity in His Kingdom.