

I Will Arise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 18:3–18, Ps. 41:1–3, Deut. 15:7–11, Psalm 82, Ps. 96:6–10, Ps. 99:1–4, Rom. 8:34.*

Memory Text: “‘For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,’ says the LORD; ‘I will set him in the safety for which he yearns’ ” (*Psalm 12:5, NKJV*).

Our age is not the only age in which evil, injustice, and oppression rage. The psalmists lived in such a time, as well. And so, whatever else they are, the Psalms are also God's protests against the violence and oppression in the world, in our world, and that of the psalmists, as well.

Yes, the Lord is long-suffering and holds His wrath in His great forbearance, not wanting anyone to perish but to repent and change their ways (*2 Pet. 3:9–15*). And though God's proper time for His intervention does not always coincide with human expectations, the day of God's judgment is coming (*Ps. 96:13, Ps. 98:9*). We just need to trust in Him, and in His promises, until that day comes.

Only the Creator, whose throne is founded on righteousness and justice (*Ps. 89:14, Ps. 97:2*), can provide, with His sovereign judgment, stability and prosperity to the world. The twofold aspect of divine judgment includes deliverance of the oppressed and destruction of the wicked (*Ps. 7:6–17*).

This is what we have been promised, and this is what will, indeed, one day come—but in God's time, not ours, a point that the psalmist emphasizes.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 10.

The Majestic Warrior

Read Psalm 18:3–18; Psalm 76:3–9, 12; and Psalm 144:5–7. How is the Lord portrayed in these texts? What do these images convey about God’s readiness to deliver His people?

These hymns praise the Lord for His awesome power over the evil forces that threaten His people. They portray God in His majesty as Warrior and Judge. The image of God as Warrior is frequent in the Psalms and highlights the severity and urgency of God’s response to His people’s cries and suffering.

“The LORD thundered from heaven, / And the Most High uttered His voice, / Hailstones and coals of fire. / He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, / Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. / Then the channels of the sea were seen, / The foundations of the world were uncovered / At Your rebuke, O LORD, / At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils” (*Ps. 18:13–15, NKJV*).

The sheer determination and magnitude of God’s action should dispense any doubt about God’s great care and compassion for the sufferers or about His ability to defeat evil. We just need to wait for Him to do it.

In the end, even when God’s people, such as David, were involved in war, deliverance did not come from human means. In his many battles against the enemies of God’s people, King David praised God as the only One who achieved all the victories. It would have been easy for David to take credit for what happened, for his many successes and triumphs, but that was not his frame of mind. He knew where the Source of his power came from.

Although David states that the Lord trains his hands for war (*Ps. 18:34*), nowhere in the Psalms does he rely on his battle skills. Instead, the Lord fights for David and delivers him (*Ps. 18:47, 48*).

In the Psalms, King David, who was known as a successful warrior, assumes his role as a skilled musician and praises the Lord as the only Deliverer and Sustainer of His people (*Ps. 144:10–15*). Praise and prayer to the Lord are David’s sources of strength, which are more powerful than any weapon of war. God alone is to be trusted and worshiped.

Whatever gifts and skills and success you have had in life, why must you always remember the Source of them all? What danger do you face if you forget that Source?

Justice for the Oppressed

Read Psalm 9:18, Psalm 12:5, Psalm 40:17, Psalm 113:7, Psalm 146:6–10, and Psalm 41:1–3. What is the message here to us, even today?

God exhibits special care and concern for justice regarding the various vulnerable groups of people, including the poor, needy, oppressed, fatherless, widows, widowers, and strangers. The Psalms, like the Law and the prophets, are clear on that point (*Exod. 22:21–27, Isa. 3:13–15*).

Many psalms use the expression “poor and needy” and avoid representing the oppressed in exclusively national and religious terms. This is done in order to highlight God’s universal care for all humanity.

The expression “poor and needy” is not limited to material poverty but also signifies vulnerability and helplessness. The expression appeals to God’s compassion, and it conveys the idea that the sufferer is alone and has no other help but God. The depiction “poor and needy” also pertains to one’s sincerity, truthfulness, and love for God in confessing one’s total dependence on God and renouncing any trace of self-reliance and self-assertion.

Meanwhile, caring for the deprived (*Ps. 41:1–3*) demonstrates the people’s faithfulness to God. Evil done against the vulnerable were particularly heinous sins in biblical culture (*Deut. 15:7–11*). The Psalms inspire faithful people to raise their voices against every oppression.

The Psalms also underline the futility of grounding one’s confidence on perishable human means as the ultimate source of wisdom and security. God’s people must resist the temptation to put ultimate faith for salvation in human leaders and institutions, especially when they differ from God’s ways.

In His grace, our Lord identified Himself with the poor by becoming poor Himself that through His poverty many might become rich (*2 Cor. 8:9*). Christ’s riches include deliverance from every oppression brought by sin, and He promises us eternal life in God’s kingdom (*Rev. 21:4*). Jesus Christ fulfills the Psalms’ promises as the divine Judge, who will judge every mistreatment of the deprived, as well as neglect of duty toward them (*Matt. 25:31–46*).

How much do we think of the “poor and needy” among us, and how much do we do for them?

How Long Will You Judge Unjustly?

The Lord has endowed Israel's leaders with authority to maintain justice in Israel (*Ps. 72:1–7, 12–14*). Israel's kings were to exercise their authority in accordance with God's will. The leaders' central concern should be ensuring peace and justice in the land and caring for the socially disadvantaged. Only then shall the land and the entire people prosper. The king's throne is strengthened by faithfulness to God, not by human power.

Read Psalm 82. What happens when the leaders pervert justice and oppress the people they are tasked to protect?

In Psalm 82, God declares His judgments upon Israel's corrupt judges. The "gods" (*Ps. 82:1, 6*) are clearly neither pagan gods nor angels because they were never tasked with delivering justice to God's people and so could not be judged for not fulfilling it. The charges listed in Psalm 82:2–4 echo the laws of the Torah, identifying the "gods" as Israel's leaders (*Deut. 1:16–18, Deut. 16:18–20, John 10:33–35*). God questions the "sons of men" whether they judge justly, and their punishment is announced because they have been found unrighteous. The leaders totter in darkness without knowledge (*Ps. 82:5*) because they have abandoned God's law, the light (*Ps. 119:105*).

The Scripture unswervingly upholds the view that the Lord is the only God. God shares His governance of the world with appointed human leaders as His representatives (*Rom. 13:1*). How often, however, have these human representatives, both in history and even now, perverted the responsibility that they have been given?

Psalm 82 mockingly exposes the apostasy of some leaders who believed themselves to be "gods" above other people. Although God gave the authority and the privilege to the Israelite leaders to be called the "children of the Most High" and to represent Him, God renounces the wicked leaders. God reminds them that they are mortal and subject to the same moral laws as all people. No one is above God's law (*Ps. 82:6–8*).

God will judge the entire world; God's people, too, shall give an account to God. Both the leaders and the people should emulate the example of the divine Judge and place their ultimate hope in Him.

What kind of authority do you hold over others? How justly and fairly are you exercising that authority? Take heed.

Pour Out Your Indignation

Read Psalm 58:6–8; Psalm 69:22–28; Psalm 83:9–17; Psalm 94:1, 2; and Psalm 137:7–9. What sentiments do these psalms convey? Who is the agent of judgment in these psalms?

Some psalms beseech God to take vengeance on individuals and nations who intend to harm, or who have already harmed, the psalmists or their people. These psalms can sound perplexing because of their harsh language and apparent discord with the biblical principle of love for enemies (*Matt. 5:44*).

Yet, the psalmist's indignation in the face of oppression is a good one. It means that the psalmists took right and wrong more seriously than did many people. He cares, even greatly, about the evil that is done in the world, not just to himself but to others, as well.

However, nowhere does the psalmist suggest himself to be the agent of vengeance. Instead, he leaves retribution solely in God's hands. The Psalms evoke the divine covenant curses (*Deut. 27:9–16*) and implore God to act as He has promised.

The Psalms are prophetic proclamations about God's impending judgment; they are not solely the psalmist's prayers. Psalm 137 reflects the announcements of divine judgment on Babylon, as seen in the prophets. The devastation that the Babylonians brought to other nations would turn back on them. The Psalms convey divine warnings that evil will not go unpunished forever.

God's retribution is measured with justice and grace. God's children are called to pray for those who mistreat them and even to hope for their conversion (*Ps. 83:18, Jer. 29:7*).

However, while seeking to fit these psalms with the biblical norms of love for enemies, we must be careful not to minimize the agonizing experience expressed in them. God acknowledges the suffering of His children and reassures them that "precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (*Ps. 116:15, NKJV*). Divine judgment obliges God's people to raise their voices against all evil and seek the coming of God's kingdom in its fullness. The Psalms also give voice to those who suffer, letting them know that God is aware of their suffering and that one day justice will come.

Who doesn't, at times, have thoughts or fantasies about vengeance on those who have done them or their loved ones terrible wrong? How might these psalms help you put such feelings in proper perspective?

The Lord's Judgment and the Sanctuary

Read Psalm 96:6–10; Psalm 99:1–4; and Psalm 132:7–9, 13–18. Where does God's judgment take place, and what are the implications of the answer for us? How does the sanctuary help us understand how God will deal with evil?

The Lord's judgment is closely related to the sanctuary. The sanctuary was the environment where the psalmist's understanding of the problem of evil was transformed (*Ps. 73:17–20*). The sanctuary was designated as the place of divine judgment as indicated by the judgment of Urim (*Num. 27:21*) and by the breastplate of judgment of the high priest (*Exod. 28:15, 28–30*). Accordingly, many psalms depict God on His throne in the sanctuary ready to judge the world for its sin and evil.

At the sanctuary, the plan of salvation was revealed. In paganism, sin was understood primarily as a physical stain to be eliminated by magic rites. In contrast, the Bible presents sin as a violation of God's moral law. God's holiness means that He loves justice and righteousness. Likewise, God's people should pursue justice and righteousness and should worship God in His holiness. To do that, they must keep God's law, which is an expression of His holiness.

Thus, the sanctuary is the place of forgiveness of sin and restoration of righteousness as indicated by the mercy seat of God's throne and the "sacrifices of righteousness" (*Deut. 33:19, Ps. 4:5*).

Yet, the "God-Who-Forgives" takes vengeance upon the wicked deeds of unrepentant people (*Ps. 99:8, NKJV*). The practical implications of the sanctuary being the place of divine judgment are seen in the constant awareness of God's holiness and demands for righteous living according to God's covenantal requirements.

The Lord's judgment from Zion results in the well-being of the righteous and the defeat of the wicked (*Ps. 132:13–18*). The sanctuary fostered the jubilant expectations of the Lord's coming as the Judge, especially during the Day of Atonement. Likewise, the Psalms strengthens the certainty of the impending arrival of the divine Judge (*Ps. 96:13, Ps. 98:9*), namely, Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (*Rev. 11:15–19*).

Read Romans 8:34. How does this verse show us that what Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary is good news for His people?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Beatitudes,” pp. 6–13, 29–35, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

The Psalms are protests against human indifference to injustice; they are a refusal to accept evil. They are motivated not by a desire for revenge but by a zeal to glorify God’s name. Hence, it is fitting for the righteous to rejoice when they shall see God’s vengeance on evil because in this way God’s name and His justice are restored in the world (*Ps. 58:10, 11*). The Psalms oblige people to raise their voices against evil and to seek the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness. In the Psalms, we are given assurance of divine comfort and deliverance. The Lord will arise!

“‘When men shall revile you, and persecute you,’ said Jesus, ‘rejoice, and be exceeding glad.’ And He pointed His hearers to the prophets who had spoken in the name of the Lord, as ‘an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.’ James 5:10. Abel, the very first Christian of Adam’s children, died a martyr. Enoch walked with God, and the world knew him not. Noah was mocked as a fanatic and an alarmist. ‘Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment.’ ‘Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.’ Hebrews 11:36, 35.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 33.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Because the painful realization of the evil in the world can cause one to wonder whether the Lord actually reigns, how can we grow an unshakable faith that will stand strong even under temptation? That is, what must we focus on in order to maintain our faith in God’s love and goodness and power? What should the Cross say to us about God and His character?
- 2 Why is it important not to rely on human means (leaders, institutions, and social movements) as the ultimate wisdom and solution for justice in the world but rely solely on God’s Word and judgment?
- 3 What are the practical implications of the truth that the sanctuary is the place of divine judgment?
- 4 How can we understand the harsh language of some psalms? How does that language help us relate to the humanity of those who wrote them?

Invited to Church: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Seventeen-year-old Sekule wanted to know truth as a high school student in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, so, he started to visit various houses of worship. But he didn't find satisfactory answers to his questions about why a God of love would burn someone in hell for eternity. So, Sekule resolved to find the truth on his own by reading the New Testament.

When he returned to his home village in Montenegro that summer, he read one Bible book a day. On the first day, he read the 28 chapters of Matthew. The next day, he read Mark. Then he read Luke, John, Acts, and Romans. He read only one book a day, even when he came to such smaller epistles as Titus and Philemon.

Some answers to his questions about God emerged in his reading of the New Testament. But he longed for more information. He visited several more houses of worship. But he didn't visit a Seventh-day Adventist church. He had heard that Adventists celebrated "Sweet Sabbaths" every week, a time when they engaged in sexual relations with each other. He thought, *They're crazy. They cannot have the truth.*

Failing to find answers in the many houses of worship that he visited, he decided that God probably did not exist. He stopped reading the Bible.

Then a high school teacher saw Sekule's Bible. She was an Adventist, and she saw the Bible as faculty members conducted random searches of dormitory rooms to see whether boys were hiding alcohol or drugs.

"You have a Bible!" she said.

"Yes," Sekule said.

"What have you learned?"

"Many things."

She quizzed him about Daniel, and Sekule, who had a good memory, provided clear answers.

"You actually understand!" she exclaimed. "You're the first person whom I've met who understands. You must come to the Seventh-day Adventist church."

Sekule didn't dare refuse. She was his teacher. He feared that she would lower his grade if he didn't go.

"OK, I'll go," he said.

But he lied. He had no plans to go to church.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus' soon coming in Montenegro and around the world.