

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 strengthen 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Psalm 12:5*

In Lesson 4, we explored the idea that God is our shelter, refuge, tower, and strength. These metaphors signify the Bible truth that God stands at the side of His faithful children, providing protection and care. This week, we will study a similar trope: that of our God, as a Mighty Warrior, fighting for His children. We also shall consider this idea within the context of social oppression, which was all too common in biblical times as it is, unfortunately, in our own. The theme of social oppression, a primary topic in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, is echoed throughout the Psalms. While the abuse of people by their political leaders causes us distress, we are not without recourse to hope; surely, the Lord is the defense of the humble.

Part II: Commentary

Social Oppression

Mosaic law commands God's people to take special care of three groups of people: "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (*Deut. 10:18, Deut. 14:29; Deut. 16:11, 14; Deut. 24:17–20; Deut. 26:12, 13; Deut. 27:19*). Usually, these people didn't have a source of stable income; many times they often didn't own land that could be worked or tilled to sustain their families. Ideally, these fringe citizens and immigrants sought to find places where they could hire out their services or, at the very least, be permitted to gather the leftover fruits and sheaves behind the harvesters (*see Ruth 2:6–8*). Such persons didn't have familial protection. Given their vulnerability, we can see how the abuse of widows, orphans, and strangers was considered one of the worst sins in society during Old Testament times. The prophets regularly admonished the people to provide for this under-privileged class (*Isa. 1:17, 23; Jer. 7:6; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10*).

For this reason, the psalmist depicts the Lord as "a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows" (*Ps. 68:5, NKJV*). This is the Psalter's promise: "The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down" (*Ps. 146:9, NKJV; compare with Ps. 10:14*). Our God is the God of the oppressed and the outcast.

Today, some places have social programs to help the fatherless and widows. Such programs provide opportunities to help the poor and needy

move forward. Some governments also provide much-needed financial assistance. But there are always more people in need, even within the church, than the system can support. Nowadays, other forms of abuse and oppression, such as bullying and torture, are prevalent besides poverty. We, as Christians, should identify the victims of such oppression and injustice and aid them. We must commit ourselves faithfully to finding ways to provide for their needs.

Immigration is another challenging issue in many countries around the world. Immigration has been an issue since the first days of human history. People have always looked for better places to live and thrive. We are the hands of God—He asks us to support and give succor to the lost, the straying, the stranger, and the outcast in our society. We should invite the members of this group to fix their eyes on the One who is the Defender of the fatherless and immigrants.

God, the Divine Warrior

There is a powerful metaphor about God in the Old Testament and, to a lesser degree, in the New, which is not too popular among Christians nowadays: God as a warrior. Such an idea may be too harsh or militaristic to a culture that prefers the expressions of God's love, mercy, inclusion, and peace.

The "LORD of hosts" (*Josh. 5:14, 1 Sam 1:11, 1 Sam. 4:4, 1 Sam. 17:45, 2 Sam. 7:26, Jer. 10:16, Jer. 31:35, Jer. 32:18, Amos 5:16, etc.*) is a common representation of God's character. It depicts the Creator as a general of the heavenly armies. He is involved in conflict against evil powers. But the Word of God also describes Him as a warrior. "The LORD is a warrior" (*Exod. 15:3, NIV; He is a "man of war," NKJV*); "The LORD marches out like a warrior" (*Isa. 42:13, ISV*).

The psalmist invokes this metaphor in Psalm 18:3–19. He claims to be delivered (*Ps. 18:3*) from a "strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me" (*Ps. 18:17, NKJV*). YHWH is described as a warrior, fighting for His servant, and as a Champion who, astride His warhorse, wields His weapons against the oppressors of His people. Read carefully verses 7–15. There are four scenarios, as follows:

Psalm 18:6–8: The Divine Warrior is in His castle (His temple); He is stirred to righteous anger on behalf of His servant after hearing his prayer. The Divine Warrior reacts with fury in His servant's defense (*Ps. 18:8*).

Psalm 18:9–12: The description of the Divine Warrior, who rides down in a magnificent display of power, is impressive. This imagery creates confidence in the heart of the Warrior's servant. Assuredly, our God is no weakling.

Psalm 18:13–15: In these verses, we read about an assault mounted by a Man of war, along with His fearsome munitions: hailstones, fire, arrows, and lightning. This figure of the Man of war, with His meteorological arsenal, connotes a powerful Soldier who, angered by injustice and

oppression, fights valiantly and righteously for His loyal servant.

Psalm 18:16–19: Here we read about the servant’s deliverance; the Warrior rescues, emancipates, and sustains him. “He also brought me out into a broad place” (*Ps. 18:19, NKJV*).

What an amazing and detailed description of the Lord’s work for His children under the most trying circumstances. This understanding of God’s character will transform the world and our church. The oppressed and persecuted must rest in the assurance that God is fighting for them.

Rebuke to the Leaders

Psalm 82 constitutes a strong reprimand to leaders, who have—but fail to exercise—the influence and power to change the situation of the “poor and fatherless; . . . the afflicted and needy” (*Ps. 82:3, NKJV*).

The Psalms describe a meeting in which leaders are scolded for their negligence and indifference toward the oppressed. They “judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked” (*Ps. 82:2, NKJV*). Are some leaders any less guilty of these crimes today? Is not the suffering of the poor and the needy the result of corruption? Also, does not our own selfishness and greed cause us to focus on ourselves and our families and forget those around us who need our support? Charity should start at home, within our own families and lives. We should teach our children always to be kind and generous to those who are in need.

The psalmist reminds us that we are “gods” and “children of the Most High” (*Ps. 82:6, NKJV*). God created humans in His image and likeness (*Gen. 1:26*), which means we are intelligent beings with a moral conscience. Therefore, we should support the afflicted, the stranger, and the needy. Whatever our sphere—whether the neighborhood or the workplace—we should strive to be a source of help to those in need.

God’s Judgment

Thursday’s study invites us to consider the plight of the oppressed within the context of the final judgment in the heavenly sanctuary (*Ps. 96:6–10; Ps. 99:1–4; and Ps. 132:7–9, 13–18*) and the great controversy between God and Satan, as depicted in the books of Daniel and Revelation especially.

Daniel 7 reveals two intentions of the pre-Advent judgment in heaven: to punish the oppressor (*Dan. 7:26*) and to vindicate the oppressed (*Dan. 7:22*). The judgment confirms that God’s actions are in favor of those who are righteous.

In the book of Revelation, the judgment transpires in the sanctuary. In Revelation 6, we learn that “the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God” are “under the altar” (*Rev. 6:9, NKJV*). They receive white

robes while they wait for the final action of the Lord to redeem them from death.

Revelation 8 starts with the vision of the seven trumpets (*Rev. 8:2*), which are given to the seven angels who stand near the golden altar “before the throne” of God (*Rev. 8:3*). The trumpets are a symbol of the judgment of the Creator against those powers who have persecuted God’s people throughout the long centuries of human history (see the seven seals of Revelation 6 and 7). The sanctuary is the place where the Lord acts on behalf of His people to save and protect them from their oppressors. So, it’s no coincidence that the seven last plagues given to the seven angels are delivered from the temple, the seat of God’s judgment (*Rev. 15:5, 6*).

Thus, when the book of Psalms expresses the certainty that believers can pray to Heaven for deliverance, this statement is a serious indictment against the oppressors of God’s people and a source of faith for the oppressed. “Let us go into His tabernacle; let us worship at His footstool. Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength” (*Ps. 132:7, 8, NKJV*).

The Bible truth in this verse reveals a fact we would do well to meditate upon as faithful believers. Yes, we should do all in our power to help and support the needy, the widows, the orphans. But we must bear in mind that the final and complete solution to all oppression and suffering will come from heaven. We must not be deceived by the idea that the church can achieve social justice on earth, or that the main goal of the church is to fight political battles in an attempt to solve all the injustice in the world. That kind of complicated issue can be totally solved only by the Lord of hosts. Our faith should be focused on the promise of divine action on our behalf and not on the illusory strength of human power, which is a mirage at best.

Part III: Life Application

God is the shelter and refuge of those who are in trouble, but He also is the divine Warrior who fights for the oppressed. Furthermore, He is a proactive leader. Thus, we should be proactive in confronting the social problems that face us today in the world. For sure, we cannot solve all of these problems, but we can strive to have a positive impact on our community and on the lives of the vulnerable and oppressed around us: the poor, the outcast, and the persecuted. We can do meaningful and life-changing work for those minorities who have been marginalized by society, just as Jesus did on behalf of the tax collectors, the sinners (*Matt. 9:10*), the prostitutes (*Luke 7:37–39*), and the outcasts (*Matt. 15:21–28*) in His time.

The psalmist’s rebuke for community and political leaders (*Psalms 82*) also includes us if we are indifferent to the suffering or injustices of society and fail to address or alleviate them. Finally, we must remember that the final

solution for the evils of our unjust world will come from the heavenly sanctuary. Let's do our part, trusting in the Divine Warrior for the final outcome of justice.

Notes
