

PSALM 81

God's Goodness and Israel's Waywardness.

INTRODUCTION.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (9-20-95).
- B. To the Chief Musician. On a Gittith. A Psalm of Asaph. "A Hymn and Homily at Harvest Time."
- C. Many scholars claim that this psalm is a composite of two psalms: 81:1-5 is supposed to be a hymn of praise and the last part a sermon. It is of general character and impossible to date, other than it seems to reflect the temple worship. Verse 3 mentions blowing the trumpet at the full moon on their solemn feast day, so it may have been written for a festival. It is logical to include instruction when celebrating a festival. Therefore, it is quite logical to think that it is a single psalm that begins with the setting of a festival and uses the occasion to instruct and warn.
- D. The psalm is naturally divided into the two parts:
 1. The Hymn or Song of Praise.
 2. The Homily or Sermon.

THE TEXT.

- 81:1** Sing for joy to God our strength;
Shout joyfully to the God of Jacob.
- 2** Raise a song, strike the timbrel,
The sweet sounding lyre with the harp.
- 3** Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
At the full moon, on our feast day.
- 4** For it is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5** He established it for a testimony in Joseph
When he went throughout the land of Egypt.
I heard a language that I did not know:
- 6** "I relieved his shoulder of the burden,
His hands were freed from the basket.
- 7** "You called in trouble and I rescued you;
I answered you in the hiding place of thunder;
I proved you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.
- 8** "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you;
O Israel, if you would listen to Me!
- 9** "Let there be no strange god among you;
Nor shall you worship any foreign god.
- 10** "I, the LORD, am your God,
Who brought you up from the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
- 11** "But My people did not listen to My voice,
And Israel did not obey Me.
- 12** "So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk in their own devices.
- 13** "Oh that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
- 14** "I would quickly subdue their enemies
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
- 15** "Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him,
And their time of *punishment* would be forever.
- 16** "But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

COMMENTS.

- A. The Hymn or Song of Praise.

[v1] “Sing aloud... make a joyful noise...” The Jewish festivals were usually characterized by eating, rejoicing and celebrating.

[v2] “Raise a song...timbrel...harp...lute.” Various musical instruments were used in the worship at the festivals, along with the animal sacrifices of gratitude and for the atonement of sins.

[v3] “Blow the trumpet at the new moon...” The Hebrew says “ram’s horn” and it was not a musical instrument, but used as a signal for important occasions. It could only produce the first two notes, and that not very well, but it was loud (*Nelson’s Bible Dictionary*).

[v5] “...Egypt, where I heard a language I did not understand.” Coffman says that this is the most difficult line in the entire psalm. There is considerable difference in opinions on what it means. Some suggest that God is the speaker, but it is difficult to accept that God does not understand a language, unless it is in the sense that it was foreign to His will. Coffman believes that the speaker is the psalmist and that the language not understood could be ungodly conduct. It is generally agreed that the sermon that follows does have God as the speaker, (81:10) and may be prompted by Israel’s present behavior which was like that in Egypt, perhaps by the Egyptians.

B. The Homily or Sermon.

The word “homily” means an “exhortation” or “admonition,” and is often translated as sermon.

[v6] “I removed his shoulder from the burden...” God delivered His people from the crushing burden of slavery in Egypt.

[v7] “...I tested you at the waters of Meribah.” “Meribah” means “contention” and there were two places where the people contended with Moses, and thus with God, for water. The first was “in Rephidim” at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and the second was in Kadesh, and called Meribath-Kadesh, when God told Moses to speak to the rock, but he struck it like God had told him the first time (*Nelson’s Bible Dictionary*).

[v8-10] “Hear O My people...Israel...” God calls the nation Israel in the psalm by reminding them of what he had done for the nation in the past.

“There shall be no foreign god in you...” He wanted to bless them, but idol worship would prevent Him.

“I am the Lord your God...” The ASV has “...Jehovah your God...”

“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” (“What if all of the raindrops were lemon drops and gum drops...I’d stand outside with my MOUTH OPEN WIDE...”)

[v11,12] “BUT My people would not heed My voice...SO I let them go...” This reminds us of Jesus’ laments over Capernaum and Jerusalem.

[v13-16] “Oh, that My people would listen to Me...” Then He lists some of the blessings that they could receive:

1. “I would soon subdue their enemies,” (81:14).
2. “and turn my hand against their adversaries.” (81:14).
3. “The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him...” (81:15).
4. “He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat...” (81:16).
5. “With honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.” (81:16).

How often do we cut ourselves off from God’s blessings and happiness because we will not DO what He says. We think we know best, but “The way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23).