

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
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Psalm 81 — Celebrate the Feast Day!

1.0 Introducing Psalm 81

- In the early 1960's excavators uncovered a manuscript including Psalms 81–85 at Masada, the Jewish fortress on the west side of the Dead Sea that was destroyed around A.D. 73.
- Psalms 50, 81, and 95 are the three festival psalms in the Psalter.
- Most commentators identify the Feast of Tabernacles with the festival celebration in Psalm 81 (Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43; Deuteronomy 16:13-15).
- According to the rabbis, the following psalms were sung in the daily services of the Temple:
 - ✓ 1st day (Sunday): Psalm 24
 - ✓ 2nd day (Monday): Psalm 48
 - ✓ 3rd day (Tuesday): Psalm 82
 - ✓ 4th day (Wednesday): Psalm 94
 - ✓ 5th day (Thursday): Psalm 81
 - ✓ 6th day (Friday): Psalm 93
 - ✓ 7th day (Saturday): Psalm 92
- Within the collection of Asaph psalms (Psalms 79–83), Psalm 81 presents God's response to the laments of Psalms 79 and 80.

2.0 Reading Psalm 81 (NAU)

81:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

Sing for joy to God our strength;
Shout joyfully to the God of Jacob.

81:2 Raise a song, strike the timbrel,
The sweet sounding lyre with the harp.

81:3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon,

At the full moon, on our feast day.

- 81:4** For it is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 81:5** 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:
- 81:6** “I relieved his shoulder of the burden,
His hands were freed from the basket.
- 81:7** “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.
- 81:8** “**Hear, O My people**, and I will admonish you;
O Israel, if you would listen to Me!
- 81:9** “Let there be no strange god among you;
Nor shall you worship any foreign god.
- 81:10** “I, the LORD, am your God,
Who brought you up from the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
- 81:11** “But **My people did not listen** to My voice,
And Israel did not obey Me.
- 81:12** “So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk in their own devices.
- 81:13** “**Oh that My people would listen** to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
- 81:14** “I would quickly subdue their enemies
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
- 81:15** “Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him,
And their time of *punishment* would be forever.
- 81:16** “But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

Selah.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 81

3.1 Outline

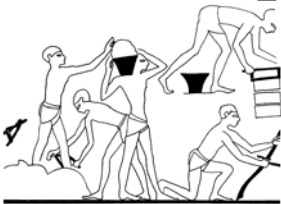
- I. A Summons to Obedient Rejoicing (vv. 1-5)
- II. A Summons to Honest Remembrance (vv. 6-12)
- III. A Summons to Genuine Repentance (vv. 13-16)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “God our strength”
 - See Exodus 15:2 = Isaiah 12:2 = Psalm 118:14.
 - Compare Psalms 46:1; 59:17; and Habakkuk 3:19.

- v. 2 “timbrel ... lyre ... harp”
 - See notes on Psalm 33:2 regarding musical instruments.
- v. 3 “the new moon”
 - New moons at the start of the months for the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles were considered very holy.
 - The *shophar* (ram’s horn) signals the commencement of the seventh month (Numbers 29:1).
- v. 3 “At the full moon, on our feast day.”
 - According to Leviticus 23:34, the Feast of Tabernacles began on the full moon (15th day of the 7th month, September-October).
 - The Feast of Tabernacles (or, Feast of Booths, *Sukkoth*)
 - ✓ was associated with the grape harvest as the last of the three great harvest festivals,
 - ✓ involved giving thanks to God for delivering Israel from Egypt,
 - ✓ reminded Israel of how they lived in the wilderness, and
 - ✓ marked the end of summer and the beginning of the rains.
- v. 5 “Egypt”
 - On the basis of this verse, some commentators associate Psalm 81 with the Feast of Passover, commemorating the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12:1-51; Leviticus 23:5).
- v. 5 “I heard a language that I did not know”
 - Potential interpretations:
 - ✓ Joseph (= Israel) heard the Egyptian language (Calvin, VanGemeren, Lawson).
 - ✓ Israel began to hear God speaking to them (Delitzsch, Perowne).
 - ✓ The psalmist received divine revelation (Tate).
 - ✓ God heard Israel calling to Him in Egypt (Spurgeon, Boice, Barrick).
- v. 6 “His hands were freed from the basket.”
 - Delitzsch claims that this is a reference to the deliverance that is commemorated by the Passover, “the Old Testament Christmas.”— Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols., trans. by Francis Bolton, Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch (reprint; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 2:394.
 - In Egypt the Israelites were slaves carrying baskets of clay, sand, and bricks.
- v. 7 “in the place of thunder”
 - See Exodus 20:18-19—the reference is probably to the theophany (appearance of God) on Mt. Sinai when the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to Moses.



- **v. 7** “the waters of Meribah”
 - Meribah (meaning “strife”) was the location where the Israelites complained about not having water (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13). God provided water by means of a miracle on both occasions.
- **v. 8** “Hear, O My people”
 - Compare Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3.
 - Other references in this psalm to Deuteronomy:
 - ✓ “I will admonish you” (v. 8)—Deuteronomy 31:19, 26, 28
 - ✓ “if you would” (v. 8)—Deuteronomy 5:29; 32:29
 - ✓ “Let there be no / Nor shall you worship” (v. 9)—Deuteronomy 5:7
 - ✓ “foreign god” (v. 9)—Deuteronomy 32:12, 16
 - ✓ “I, the LORD, am your God” (v. 10)—Deuteronomy 5:6
- **vv. 9-10** “Let there be no strange god among you . . . I, the LORD, am your God”
 - Verses 9-10 echo the commencement of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-5; cf. 34:14).
- **v. 10** “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”
 - God gives revelation to His prophet (Charnock, Tate).
 - God fills the mouth with praise (Wilcock).
 - God provides abundant gifts like the wheat and honey in verse 16 (Spurgeon, Delitzsch, Davidson, VanGemeren, Lawson, Barrick).
- **v. 11** “But My people did not listen to My voice”
 - “The problem is not that the world does not know God. How can we expect it to? The problem is that the people of God do not know God, or at least they do not act like they do. . . .
“ . . . Christianity has become a form of Sunday entertainment, a political pressure group, or a twelve-step recovery process, rather than a community of those who know and are learning to obey God.”—
James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 2:671.
- **v. 12** “the stubbornness of their heart”
 - Compare Deuteronomy 29:14-21 (esp. v. 19).
 - Read Romans 2:1-11 (esp. v. 5).
 - Jeremiah uses this phraseology more frequently than in any other book of the Bible (3:17; 5:23; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).
- **v. 16** “I would feed you”
 - This verse is a free rendering of Deuteronomy 32:13-14.
 - In verses 6 and 11-15, the psalmist uses the third person (“they,” “their,” “them”), but in verses 7-10 and 16, he switches to the second person (“you,” “your”).



- “The abrupt change in verse 16 introduces the blessings that come to God’s people who obey Him (v. 13).”—Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1:854.

4.0 Singing Psalm 81

Now to God, Our Strength and Savior

Tune: “Jesus Calls Us,” “God, Renew Us by Your Spirit!,” or “In the Cross of Christ I Glory”

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| <p>1 Now to God, our Strength and Savior,
Render praise and loudly sing.
In our fathers’ God rejoicing,
All your noblest music bring.</p> <p>3 I, Thy God, removed thy burdens,
When thou calledst, set thee free,
Proved thee in the thirsty desert,
In the thunder answered thee.</p> <p>5 I am God the Lord Who saved thee,
And from cruel bondage freed;
Open wide thy mouth of longing;
I will satisfy thy need.</p> <p>7 If My people would obey Me,
Gladly walking in My ways,
Soon would I, their foes subduing,
Fill their lips with songs of praise.</p> <p>9 Yea, with wheat the very finest
I their hunger will supply,
Bid the very rocks yield honey
That shall fully satisfy.</p> | <p>2 Let the trumpet, far resounding,
This our festal day proclaim,
By our fathers’ God appointed,
When from bondage Israel came.</p> <p>4 O My people, hear My pleadings;
O that thou wouldst hearken now;
No strange worship shalt thou offer,
Nor to idols shalt thou bow.</p> <p>6 But My people would not hearken,
Yea, they would not yield to Me;
So I left them in their blindness,
Their own counselors to be.</p> <p>8 All the haters of Jehovah
Shall His clemency implore,
And the days of those that love Him
Shall endure forevermore.</p> |
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- Author unknown

5.0 Praying Psalm 81

- Lord, thank you for being my strength. [v. 1]
- How I praise You for freeing me from my slavery to sin. [v. 6]
- God, help me listen to You and Your Word. [v. 8]
- Thank You for providing me with an abundance of food. [v. 16]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 81

- Biblical celebration focuses on the recitation of God’s mighty deeds.
- God can never abandon His people completely—regardless of their sin.
- God’s people must commit themselves to His revelation in order to experience His abundant blessings.