

**Psalms 81:0 ¶ To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of Asaph.**

This is a psalm of Asaph directed to the music director at the temple with instruction to play it on a harp (from Hebrew for “Gittith”).

New Bible Commentary: “The mid-month feast to which this psalm refers could be either Passover or Tabernacles both of which were essentially exodus-remembrances. It is more likely Tabernacles because of the references to the Law and listening to the Lord and to harvest abundance.”

**Psalms 81:1 ¶ Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.**

**Psalms 81:2 Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.**

**Psalms 81:3 Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.**

The psalmist begins by calling for the people to sing and make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Jacob fathered the twelve men from whom descended the twelve tribes of Israel and is a reference to the whole nation. He calls for the musicians to choose a psalm and use their instruments to provide music as they celebrate the appointed feast day and make the required sacrifices (from the Hebrew for “feast”).

The Jews used a lunar calendar, and the beginning of the month was announced by trumpet when the new moon was sighted.

God initially appointed seven feast days that the people were to observe, but the three main feast days were Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Tabernacles).

*Exodus 23:14–16 “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread [Pesach]: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:.) And the feast of harvest [Shavuot], the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering [Sukkot], which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.”*

**Psalms 81:4 For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.**

**Psalms 81:5 This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.**

As noted in the verses above, the people of Israel were commanded by God to observe these feasts after He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. I think the psalmist refers to the nation as Joseph (as in the previous psalm) in verse 5 since it was through Joseph that the nation was originally preserved in Egypt through the years of famine.

It’s significant to note that God desires that we worship Him in obedience, according to His will as revealed in His word. Even those religions that claim to be Christian are false that establish rules and works that are not according to God’s word.

The last part of verse 5 is difficult, and I think Spurgeon gave the best explanation: "But how can it be imagined that the Lord should speak of a language which he understood not, seeing he knows all things, and no form of speech is incomprehensible to him? The reply is, that the Lord here speaks as the God of Israel identifying himself with his own chosen nation and calling that an unknown tongue to himself which was unknown to them. He had never been adored by psalm or prayer in the tongue of Egypt; the Hebrew was the speech known in his sacred house, and the Egyptian was outlandish and foreign there. In strictest truth, and not merely in figure, might the Lord thus speak, since the wicked customs and idolatrous rites of Egypt were disapproved of by him, and in that sense were unknown. Of the wicked, Jesus shall say, 'I never knew you;' and probably in the same sense this expression should be understood, for it may be correctly rendered, 'a speech I knew not I am hearing.'"

**Psalms 81:6 I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.**

**Psalms 81:7 Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.**

Asaph speaks for God in recounting how He freed His people from the burdens associated with slavery. The LORD recalls how He answered their prayers for deliverance and spoke to them through the thunder; He reminds them how He tested them at the waters of Meribah.

*Exodus 20:18–19 "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die."*

*Exodus 17:5–7 "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?"*

New Bible Commentary: "But Exodus 17:2 says they tested the Lord! Life's adversities are divine testings; but if we come to them doubting his love, care and power to save, we 'test' him by suggesting that he must prove himself before we will trust him."

Selah – a pause, an opportunity for reflection and meditation

**Psalms 81:8 ¶ Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;**

**Psalms 81:9 There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.**

**Psalms 81:10 I *am* the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.**

The LORD goes on to promise the people that if they will listen to Him and obey Him and not worship any false gods, He would fill their mouths (bless them abundantly). They should have no doubt that He could and would after the many miracles He demonstrated in delivering them from Egypt and its “gods” (and many others).

I liked this application from Boice as quoted by Guzik: “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. Instead of worshipping the Lord and him only, Christians seem to be worshipping the gods of the secular culture – gods of wealth, pleasure, fame, status, and self-absorption.”

**Psalms 81:11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.**

**Psalms 81:12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: *and* they walked in their own counsels.**

I can almost hear the grief in God’s voice as He recalls how His people refused to obey Him and rejected Him. Because of that rejection, God gave them over to their sins and their own purposes (from Hebrew for “counsels”) and the subsequent consequences.

Morgan as quoted by Guzik: “It reveals a constant method of God with His disloyal and disobedient children. When they will not go His way, He lets them go their way....He permits them to learn by the bitter results of their own folly what He would have had them know by communion with Himself.”

**Psalms 81:13 Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, *and* Israel had walked in my ways!**

**Psalms 81:14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.**

**Psalms 81:15 The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.**

**Psalms 81:16 He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.**

The psalmist closes by giving voice to God’s grief and disappointment that His people had chosen to reject Him. If only they had obeyed Him, He would have subdued and overthrown their enemies.

“should have submitted themselves unto Him” – The Hebrew reveals only the word for submitted. I am thinking it should have read “would have submitted unto them.”

Israel would have remained a growing, prosperous nation, and God would have given them the best this earth has to offer. To be satisfied is to have plenty and to enjoy to the fullest.

I liked Spurgeon’s application: “Sin strips a man of his armour, and leaves him naked to his enemies. Our doubts and fears would long ago have been slain if we had been more

faithful to our God. Ten thousand evils which afflict us now would have been driven far from us if we had been more jealous of holiness in our walk and conversation.”