

Psalm 81

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 05 March 2017 21:00

This short Psalm is very clearly blaming God's people for their own demise! The same message needs to be heeded today by Christians who arrogantly and vainly call to Him for help, yet openly despise His word, disobeying Him even as they speak in prayer! (Do not be deceived – these are not openly wicked, but the majority of churchgoers, who think their Sunday attendance and their unbiblical weekday prayer meetings somehow 'qualify' them for favours from God!).

Read this Psalm and learn, for the message is so obviously stated: if we do not obey the Lord and live holy lives, we suffer the consequences. It really is that simple. Here we are given a basic fact... if we obey, then our prayers will be answered when we need deliverance from our enemies and big problems. The end of our woes will be swift if we obey. But, when we disobey or live away from God, He will be slow to answer. Can we at last learn why our nation is being crushed by those who hate God and His demands? And why individual Christians suffer under enemies?

Verse 1

1.

(To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of Asaph.) Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

Here is another psalm written by Asaph. Though the meaning of *gittith* ('wine press') is unsure, and was used in three separate psalms, it is likely it refers to a musical instrument. This is implied by use of the word "upon". The song was to be sung for the Feast of Booths. Unlike the previous Psalm, there does not appear to be a particular pressing problem on Israel apart from disobedience; Asaph is praising God and affirming the demands He has laid upon the nation; hence a call to sing loudly and to be joyful. As in certain other psalms, Asaph speaks words direct from the Lord, showing that he has received them from God. In the psalm we see Asaph alternating his own words with those of God (not an unusual way of writing).

Verses 2-4

1.

Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.

Psalm 81

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2.

Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.

3.

For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.

“Take a psalm” or ‘Lift up a song’. Add the timbrel (tambourine) to the gittith; the sweet sounds of the harp/lyre, with the music of the psaltery (ancient form of guitar/lute). In this is the basic music set-up for the Temple production of this psalm. Include a strong blast on the trumpet (even today, this *showfar* is still blown in Israel: it is made from a ram’s horn).

The psalm and its music were to be played and sung at the time of the new moon, regarded as the first day of the Hebrew month. It was a “solemn feast day” involving sacrifices, and was instituted as a law of God since the time of Jacob; a decree to be obeyed. (Though not for believers in Christ).

How many holy laws do modern Christians disobey willingly? But, they are more than happy to pretend to be Jews by resorting to feast days of Judaism! They even use Jewish words as greetings (though they do not understand what they really mean), because it is fashionable and ‘twee’. Judaism is dead and gone, though practised.

Verses 5-7

1.

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.

2.

I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.

Psalm 81

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3.

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.

The feast day the psalm is dedicated to was “ordained in Joseph” by God, as a standing testimony to His own greatness in taking the Hebrews out of bondage. The word for this means it was appointed, so was not optional (*choq* and *suwm*, as if to emphasise its importance). The “language” that was “understood not” was NOT a charismatic-invented ‘angelic language’. It was a straightforward *saphah*, or speech. Other meanings (but not in this text) include those normally used to describe the tongue, or a foreign language, e.g. ‘lip’, ‘bank’, ‘brim’, ‘language’, ‘shore’, etc. It just means that the language heard was foreign, so not understood.

Verse 6 then gives the direct words of God – He removed the slaves from their work burdens; the Hebrews called out in desperation to the God they had mainly forgotten, and He graciously took heed and delivered them. He did so knowing that in a very short time they would rebel and build a pagan calf! And they built it even as Moses was in the “secret place of thunder” on the sacred mountain! This describes the state of Christians today!

The Hebrews were sorely tried and tested “at the waters of Meribah”. There are two places this could refer to but I suggest the text speaks of the Rephidim fountain where the malcontented Hebrews spoke out against God. (The place was named the “desert of Sin” *because* of their sin). The people were tested and failed, yet God saved them...

selah

– this can either be a shout of exaltation (“so be it”), or it is a musical direction to pause the singing and music at that point.

Christians can be tested in the extreme, but their salvation from what ails them depends on how they respond to God. We can wail in abject misery and blame God, or we can respond with praise and thank God for the trial... because God only tries those He sees as fit to receive it. Thus, a trial is an honour from God.

Verses 8-12

Psalm 81

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1.

Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;

2.

There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.

3.

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

4.

But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.

5.

So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

God again speaks in this verse – Hear Almighty God and He will testify to them, showing He is with them. He will do this and rectify their misery if only they obey and praise Him. Part of His promise is bound up in a strict decree not to worship pagan gods... as I keep saying, all God's promises (except for salvation from sin) are conditional! Following or worshipping a false god negates God's help totally. Obvious examples today are Arminianism, Mormon, JWism, Catholicism, etc.

It was God Who freed the Hebrews from Egypt, so sing His praises and He will fill them with the sounds fit for the King of kings. He would also fill their bellies with food. Yet, as ungrateful wretches, the Hebrews "would not hearken to (His) voice"! Just like so many Christians today, who then wonder why God allows them to suffer; they do not even consider that it is not just allowed, but sent as a penalty!

Psalm 81

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“Israel would none of me”! They spurned the God of their salvation, so God gave them whatever their corrupt hearts desired (a punishment and not a reward, something that stops their blessings occurring). They thus returned to their paganism and listened to their own sinful thoughts and commands. This describes our modern churches to the letter!

Verses 13-16

1.

Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

2.

I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

3.

The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.

4.

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

Here God declares His sadness that Israel should so abandon their God so soon after He had saved them from Egypt! How easily modern believers return to their own vomit after God gives them an advantage and a blessing! If they had not been so sinful and instead listened to God, He would have subdued their enemies sooner. God would have crushed them to dust. But, their intransigence pushed God away and so they continued to suffer. Do you continue to suffer from enemies or some other woe? Then look to yourself. Such suffering is not always our own fault, but it is wise to search our hearts, just in case.

Those who hated God should have submitted themselves to Him, but wisdom fails true haters of the Lord. We see it rife today as they believe they now own the world and can command it to forget God! While God's anger is perpetually against the wicked, Israel's benefits should have lasted throughout history. They would have been fed physically and spiritually... but their evils

Psalm 81

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drove God away, and so they did not get what God had in store for them.

Praise God always! Look to Him even if you cannot see Him. Wait for His answers and do not rely on your own strength. He is at your side at all times, even when you fear and think He has gone – you drive Him away by your own sins and refusal to obey! As I warn time and again, the worst possible situation is for God to withdraw from His people, because they will not obey. With some He will withdraw for all their earthly lives... do not let this be your lot. Obey and worship God, no matter what becomes of you.

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