

Psalms 81

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 81 - and as we make our way to the 81st Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that - this is the 9th - of 11 consecutive songs - written by a seer named Asaph.

And as we make our way through this incredible Psalm...

..we'll soon see that Asaph wrote this song as a call to praise...

...by encouraging the people to observe a solemn feast which Had been ordered by the Lord.

Now - just to be clear - the Lord ordered the Children of Israel to observe seven annual feasts...

...including four spring feasts - beginning with Passover - the feast of Unleavened Bread - the feast of First Fruits and Pentecost.

Then there were three fall feasts - including the feast of Trumpets - the Day of Atonement - and finally - the feast of Tabernacles.

It's also interesting to note that three of these feasts were also known as pilgrimage festivals...

...including Passover - Pentecost - and the feast of Tabernacles.

Every Israelite who was able - was expected to celebrate these three great feasts in Jerusalem.

With all of this in mind - it's here in the 81st Psalm - where we find Asaph - encouraging the Children of Israel...

...to gather in Jerusalem - for the solemn feast day - so that they could corporately proclaim the praises of the Lord.

And while some scholars believe that Asaph was referring to the feast of Passover...

...the lyrical content of this song leads me to believe that Asaph was referring to the feast of Tabernacles.

I like the way that Dr. Thomas L. Constable explained it in his commentary of this Psalm - here's how he put it...

This psalm is a joyful celebration of God's deliverance of His people. The Israelites probably sang it at the Feast of Tabernacles, since it is a review of God's faithfulness and focuses especially on the wilderness wanderings. The Feast of Tabernacles reminded the Israelites of this period in their history.

Just to be clear the Feast of Tabernacles was a festival that memorialized the way that God provided shelter for the Israelites...

...as they wandered in the wilderness - during their exodus from Egypt.

Then - after arriving in the land of promise - the children of Israel were called to commemorate those days...

...by dwelling in sukkots - or shelters - as they sang the praises of the One Who brought them out of Egypt.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 81st Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph writes...

Psa 81:1 To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of Asaph.

Sing aloud to God our strength;

Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

Psa 81:2 Raise a song and strike the timbrel,

The pleasant harp with the lute.

Psa 81:3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon,
At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.
Psa 81:4 For this is a statute for Israel,
A law of the God of Jacob.

Here in the beginning of this Psalm - we find Asaph - encouraging the Chief Musician of Israel...

...to use an an instrument of Gath - for the musical background of these lyrics.

Seeing how this is the second of three references to this musical instrument - we really don't know much about it.

Some scholars believe that this was a stringed instrument created by the Philistines from the city of Gath.

Well - regardless of what sort of instrument Asaph requested for this specific song...

...we should take some time to focus on the instructions that he presented - here in this Psalm

Look with me again there at verse 1 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 81:1 Sing aloud to God our strength;
Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

Here in the first verse of this Psalm - we find Asaph - encouraging the children of Israel...

...to sing the praises of the God Who strengthened them - to accomplish His will.

Just to be clear - Asaph instructed them to joyfully proclaim the praises...

...of the God Who blessed the faith of Jacob - by establishing them in the land of promise.

And as we continue to make our way through this Psalm...

...we'll soon see why Asaph felt the need to direct them in this way.

Before I get too far ahead of myself - let's consider the instructions that Asaph presented - beginning there at verse 2 - where he declared...

Psa 81:2 Raise a song and strike the timbrel,
The pleasant harp with the lute.

Psa 81:3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon,
At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

Psa 81:4 For this is a statute for Israel,
A law of the God of Jacob.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - encouraging the children of Israel to blow the trumpets at the time of the New Moon...

...according to the command found in Numbers 10 - it's verse 10 - where the Lord declared...

Num 10:10 "...in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God."

At the time of the New Moon - which was the beginning of the month...

...the children of Israel we're supposed to blow trumpets over their offerings and sacrifices...

...in order to memorialize everything the God of Jacob has done for them.

Not only that - but - it's there in the middle of verse 3 - where Asaph also encouraged them to blow the trumpet...

Psa 81:3b ...At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

Now - I should point out that - ancient Israel followed a lunar calendar.

That being the case - the new moon always took place at the beginning of the month...

...while the full moon would happen in the middle of the month.

I should also point out that - Passover - and the feast of Tabernacles both begin in the middle of the month - when the moon is full.

And so - when Asaph directed the children of Israel to blow trumpets at the full moon - on the solemn feast day...

...he might've been referring to Passover - which coincides with the feast of unleavened Bread...

...or - he could've been referring to the feast of Tabernacles.

Either way - Asaph felt the need to remind them that the monthly New Moon feasts - and the annual Full Moon festivals...

...were based on a legal statute the God of Jacob gave to Israel.

If you want the full rundown on these feasts - you can study Leviticus chapter 23 for homework.

For now - let it suffice to say that the Lord required the children of Israel to observe these 7 feasts...

...and one reason why is due to the fact that - these feasts are shadows...

...that prophetically point to our Savior Jesus.

In order to make my case - let's consider the way that Jesus has already fulfilled the four spring feasts.

It was during His first advent - when Jesus fulfilled Passover - by offering Himself as our passover Lamb on the cross.

Jesus also fulfilled the feast of unleavened bread - by offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice - free from the leaven of sin.

Jesus fulfilled the feast of first fruits - as He became the first to rise up from the grave.

And then He fulfilled Pentecost - by sending the Holy Spirit of God - to empower the church.

In light of these things - we can rejoice in knowing that the Lord Jesus...

...has already fulfilled the Prophetic purpose of the Spring Feasts.

At the same time - we should also expect that He will fulfill the prophetic purpose of the fall feasts - - at the time of His second advent.

This will beginning with the first fall festival - known as the feast of trumpets.

And just to be clear - many - like myself - believe that this feast corresponds with the rapture of the church.

This is followed by the 10 days of awe - that gives way to the day of atonement...

...which corresponds with the the Second Coming of Christ Jesus.

Finally - the feast of tabernacles - which commemorates the days during the Exodus - when the people of God wandered in the wilderness....

...also points to the Millennial Kingdom of Christ - when the Lord will establish His Tabernacle in Jerusalem.

And in light of these things - we can see why the Lord commanded the children of Israel...

...to keep these feasts throughout their generations...

...so that they might grasp the prophetic plan - which will be accomplished by the Messiah.

With all of this in mind - let's consider how Asaph reminded the children of Israel - about the way in which the Lord used the full moon feasts - as a testimony.

With this as our focus - let's pick up our study of the 81st Psalm - beginning there at verse 5 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 81:5 This He established in Joseph as a testimony,
When He went throughout the land of Egypt,
Where I heard a language I did not understand.

Psa 81:6 "I removed his shoulder from the burden;
His hands were freed from the baskets.

Psa 81:7 You called in trouble, and I delivered you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - reminding the children of Israel - about the way that the Lord established in Joseph as a testimony.

Now - remember - the Lord was the One Who raised up Jacob's son Joseph...

...to become the most powerful ruler in Egypt - just under the Pharaoh.

And in this way - the Lord saved the children of Israel - from the famine that was plaguing the land of promise.

But then - a Pharaoh arose who dealt treacherously with the children of Israel.

He oppressed their forefathers - and made them expose their babies in order to suppress their birth rates.

It's for this reason that the Lord answered their cries for help...

...by raising up Moses - to set them free from their captivity.

It's there in verse 7 - where Asaph reminded the children of Israel about the way that the Lord delivered them from Egypt.

And while it's true that He answered them in the secret place of thunder...

...He also tested them at the waters of Meribah - as they wandered in the wilderness.

And it's for this reason that I believe that Asaph was calling them to attend to the feast of Tabernacles...

...so that they might take the time to consider the way that the Lord tested their forefathers...

...at the waters of Meribah

Just to be clear - Asaph was referring to the days when they wandered in the wilderness - when there was no water.

It's in Exodus chapter 17 - beginning at verse 1 - where we read...

Exo 17:1 Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.

Exo 17:2 Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?"

Exo 17:3 And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Here in these verses - we learn about the days - when the children of Israel began to question the goodness of God...

...and the reason why was because - they were thirsty - - and they didn't see a viable source of water.

Rather than praying for the perfect provision of the Lord - Who - remember - just brought them out of Egypt...

...the people instead contended with the Lord - as they complained about the leadership of Moses.

In response - Moses cried out to the LORD in verse 4 - as he declared...

Exo 17:4 "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

Exo 17:5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go.

Exo 17:6 "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Exo 17:7 So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Now - the word - Massah - speaks of the testing that the Lord used to test the children of Israel.

And the word - Meribah - can also be rendered - strife" or "contention"...

...which reminds us of the way that the people were contentious over their perceived problems.

And it's for this reason that Paul encouraged every Christian to stop complaining...

...about the tests that God has allowed in our lives.

It's in Philippians chapter 2 - beginning at verse 14 - where he declared...

Phl 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

Phl 2:15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

Phl 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Christian - listen - before you complain about the leaders that the Lord has raised up...

...I encourage you to remember that - the Lord might be using that situation to test your faith.

And before you complain about the perceived lack of the thing that you enjoyed back in Egypt...

...I encourage you to remember that - there are times when the Lord uses scarcity - and poverty...

...to build the faith of those who will learn to turn every complaint - into a prayer.

Sadly - the Children of Israel were failing to shine as lights in the world.

Not only that - but - they were failing to hold fast the word of life.

And so - rather than gathering in Jerusalem - for the feast of tabernacles...

...the chosen people were spending their time on the high places...

...where they presented their sacrifices - on the altars of the false Canaanite gods.

And it's for this reason that the Lord rebuked them.

With this as our focus - let's consider how the Lord used Asaph the seer - to rebuke the nation of Israel.

Let's pick up our study of the 81st Psalm - beginning there at verse 8 - where the LORD declared...

Psa 81:8 "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!
O Israel, if you will listen to Me!

Psa 81:9 There shall be no foreign god among you;
Nor shall you worship any foreign god.

Psa 81:10 I am the LORD your God,
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Psa 81:11 "But My people would not heed My voice,
And Israel would have none of Me.

Psa 81:12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart,
To walk in their own counsels."

Here in these verses - we find the Lord - encouraging the Children of Israel to abstain from the worship of foreign god.

In this way - He took the time to remind them about the prohibition that He gave to their forefather...

...after He brought them out of the land of Egypt - and into the land of promise.

Let's consider how Moses explained it - in Deuteronomy chapter 6 - it's beginning at verse 10 - where he declared...

Deu 6:10 "So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build,

Deu 6:11 "houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—

Deu 6:12 “then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Deu 6:13 “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.

Deu 6:14 “You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you

Deu 6:15 “(for the LORD your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

Deu 6:16 “You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah.

Here in these verses - we find Moses - warning the children of Israel...

...about the temptation that they would eventually face - after settling into the land of promise.

You see - those who receive the abundant blessings of the Lord...

...will be tempted to start serving the false gods - who are nothing more than demons.

And that’s exactly what happened - there in the land of promise.

Let’s consider how the Psalmist put it - in the 106th Psalm - and so - hold your place here in Psalm 81...

...and let’s turn in our Bibles - to the 106th Psalm - where we find the Psalmist...

...describing the way that the children of Israel - sacrificed their children - to the false gods of Canaan.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 34 - where the Psalmist declared...

Psa 106:34 They did not destroy the peoples,

Concerning whom the LORD had commanded them,
Psa 106:35 But they mingled with the Gentiles
And learned their works;
Psa 106:36 They served their idols,
Which became a snare to them.
Psa 106:37 They even sacrificed their sons
And their daughters to demons,
Psa 106:38 And shed innocent blood,
The blood of their sons and daughters,
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;
And the land was polluted with blood.
Psa 106:39 Thus they were defiled by their own works,
And played the harlot by their own deeds.
Psa 106:40 Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against
His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance.

It was after they settled in the land of promise - when the children of Israel started to learn the ways of the Canaanites.

And it wasn't long before they started sacrificing their sons and their daughters to the demons....

...who were masquerading as the gods of Canaan.

And in this way - they were not only defiled by those demons...

...but - they also provoked the true and living God to jealousy.

Let's consider how Moses explained it - in Deuteronomy chapter 32 - it's verses 16 thru 18 - where he described the way that Israel...

Deu 32:16 ...provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods;
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.

Deu 32:17 They sacrificed to demons, not to God,
To gods they did not know, To new gods, new arrivals
That your fathers did not fear.

Deu 32:18 Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful,
And have forgotten the God who fathered you.

According to Moses - the foreign elohim are nothing more than demons - who masquerade as gods.

And as we consider the way that the Children of Israel started sacrificing their sons and daughters to demons...

...it's no wonder that He was provoked to anger - against His chosen people.

And it's for this reason that HE gave them over to their own stubborn heart...

...by allowing them to walk in their own counsels.

At the same time - the Lord also spoke through Asaph the seer - so that they might repent of their wicked ways.

With this as our focus - let's consider the way that the Lord pleaded with His chosen people - it's beginning there at verse 13 - where the Lord declared...

Psa 81:13 "Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!

Psa 81:14 I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries."

Here in these verses - we find the Lord - pleading with the Children of Israel...

...so that they might receive His counsel - repent of their idolatries - and return to the narrow path of the Lord.

And it's there in verse 14 - where the Lord reminded them about the benefits...

...bestowed upon the believers who were walking according to His will.

This was based on the promise that the Lord presented in Exodus chapter 23 - it's beginning at verse 20 - where He declared...

Exo 23:20 "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

Exo 23:21 "Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him.

Exo 23:22 "But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

Exo 23:23 "For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.

Exo 23:24 "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.

Exo 23:25 "So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you.

Exo 23:26 "No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

Exo 23:27 "I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

Exo 23:28 "And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you.

Here in these verses - we find the Lord - promising to drive out the inhabitants of the land - before the Israelites.

And while this was a promise that the angel of the Lord was ready to fulfill...

...it's also true that the Lord also promised to punish His people...

...if they started worshiping the false god of the pagan nations.

It's in Judges 3 - where we learn that the Lord used the Philistines, the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites to test the faith of His people.

Here's how Samuel put it - beginning at verse 4 - where we learn that those nations were left in the land...

Jdg 3:4 ...that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Jdg 3:5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Jdg 3:6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

Jdg 3:7 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.

Jdg 3:8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.

Here in these verses - we learn about the way that the People of God failed to follow His word...

...and as a result - they failed to follow His path of perfection.

It's for this reason that He allowed the pagan nations to conquer the children of Israel.

And in this way - the Lord would expose the Israelites...

...who had no desire - to submit to His almighty Authority.

With this as our focus - let's consider the final stanza of this song.

Look with me again - there at the 81st psalm - it's beginning there at verse 15 - where Asaph wrapped up this Psalm - by declaring...

Psa 81:15 The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever.

Psa 81:16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.”

Here in the final verses of this Psalm - we find Asaph - helping his audience to understand that...

...those who were pretending to love the Lord - would soon be exposed.

And those who were faking their faith - would suffer a fate that would endure forever.

With this in mind - I have no doubt that there were Israelites - who were showing up to temple service on Saturday...

...after serving the demons of the pagan nations - on Friday night.

And they were showing up to the new moon festivals - and the full moon feasts....

...after sacrificing their sons and daughters - in the fires of Moloch.

And it's for this reason that Asaph assured them that the Lord was well aware of their hypocrisy.

Not only that - but - He also informed them that the Lord was the One - Who could bless them - with the abundant life.

Notice again - there in verse 16 - where we learn that the Lord...

Psa 81:16 ...would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.”

According to Asaph - the Lord would've blessed them with an abundance of wheat.

And not only that - but - He would've provided them with honey from the Rock.

Now - remember - the Rock that produced the water in the desert - was actually a preincarnate manifestation of our Messiah - Jesus.

And I have no doubt that this Rock that would produce honey - was also an allusion to our Savior.

That being the case - I can't help but to wonder is Asaph was prophetically pointing to the day...

...when the promised Messiah would tabernacle with us?

I like the way that the apostle John put it - in John chapter 1 - it's verse 14 where he tells us that...

Jhn 1:14 ...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word - Who was with God - and Who was God - came and dwelt among us.

I like the way that Robert Young put it - in his Literal Translation of the Bible - here's how we rendered the Greek...

Jhn 1:14 ...the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth.

The Lord Jesus tabernacled with the Children of Israel - during the days of His first advent.

And it was at that point in time - when the Rock of Salvation produced the sweet honey of redemption...

...for those who will simply repent - and trust in Him.

Not only that - but - the Lord will tabernacle with us once again...

...when the feast of tabernacles is finally fulfilled - during the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

It's at that point in time with the milk and honey will flow with abundance...

...for those who have placed their faith - in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

But until that day comes - I encourage every Christian - to follow the advice of Asaph.

Let's become those believers - who Sing aloud to God our strength;

Let's make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

Let's raise a song and strike the timbrel - the pleasant harp with the lute...

...and let's proclaim the praises - of the One Who fulfills all the feasts...

...according to the prophetic will of God.