

**SBC – Sept. 21, 2025**  
**Psalm 81:1-16 (NKJV)**  
**“A Call to Worshipful Obedience”**

**Psalm 81 (NKJV)**  
**To the Chief Musician. On An Instrument of Gath. A Psalm of Asaph.**

“To the Chief Musician” indicates this was intended to be used in the worship life of God’s people. Instruction is given on the type of musical instrument to be used – “An instrument of Gath”. And the Psalm is accredited to Asaph.

Asaph was appointed by David as one of the chief musicians in the Temple, and had a long career, still serving under Solomon after the time of David. The Psalms of Asaph, Psalms 50 and 73–83 tend to be communal laments and prophetic. However, it would appear that either Asaph’s descendant in his name or someone carrying on his work used his name for some of what appear to be later Psalms written after his time (cf. Psa. 79).

The occasion here is one of the feasts of Israel and most likely the combination of feasts related to the 7<sup>th</sup> month as there were three festivals in that time frame. But the emphasis would seem to be on the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43; Deut. 16:13-15).

This Psalm is a call to Israel to worship God because of Who He is, what He has done, and what He desires to do for them. He is a God who desires to bless His people if only they will be obedient. Obedience and blessing go together.

**Slide # 1**

**Psalm 81**

***“A Call to Worshipful Obedience”***

vv. 1-5 A Call to Joyful Worship  
vv. 6-16 A Call to Worshipful Obedience

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

**2 Raise a song and strike the timbrel, The pleasant harp with the lute.**

This is a call to joyful worship – a celebration of Who God is to Jacob – that is to Israel.

He is said to be the source of Israel's strength (cf. 22:19; 28:7-8; 46:1; 59:9, 17; 118:14). He is behind all the feats of Israel. He had brought them to where they were, and He is to be joyfully worshiped for it.

Singing and worship go together. Singing with vibrancy is an expression of heartfelt worship. Note the emphasis on "Sing aloud" and "Make a joyful shout".

### **3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.**

The "trumpet" is literally the shofar (Heb), which was a ram's horn (cf. Ex. 19:13), which signaled the start of certain feast days or the marking of special times or events (cf. Num. 10:10; 28:11-15; Lev. 23:34).

#### **Slide # 2**

##### **Numbers 10:10 (NKJV)**

**10** Also 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."

The blowing of the trumpets was in effect a call to worship with the purpose of remembering what God has done for them.

Note the "New Moon" and the "full moon". This probably indicates that this Psalm fits the occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> month on the Jewish calendar called Tishri, which generally corresponds to our September/October time frame.

The Feast of Trumpets was on the first day of the seventh month – the time of the New Moon (Lev. 23:23-25), and the Feast of Tabernacles began on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month when the moon was full (Lev. 23:33-36). This month began with the blowing of trumpets, culminating in the Feast of Tabernacles in the middle of the month, which was a celebration of God's care in the wilderness and the promise of coming Kingdom Blessing.

### **4 For this is a statute [decree] for Israel, A law of the God of Jacob.**

God had ordained this festival period and incorporated it into the law. At the end of the calendar year for Israel, God wanted this to be a time of reflective worship that celebrates all He has done for them.

**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.**

Sort of like communion to us (which is a memorial – that which we do in remembrance), so also these feasts were designed by God to be an ongoing testimony to Him and what He has done for His people.

And God put these feasts in place when He brought His people out of Egypt. In that context, they were in a place of foreign speakers, speaking a language they did not understand.

The Egyptian language was not understood by the Israelites without an interpreter, as seen in Genesis 42:23. This is confirmed by Psalm 114:1.

### **Slide # 3**

**Psalm 114:1 (NKJV)**

**1 When Israel went out of Egypt, The house of Jacob from a people of strange language,**

It was in this context that God moved on behalf of His people, Israel.

**6 “I removed his shoulder from the burden; His hands were freed from the baskets.**

God freed His people, Israel, from their slavery in Egypt when they were required to shoulder the burden of harsh tasks and where their hands hauled bricks and clay (cf. Ex. 6:6). Again and again in the Bible God goes back to this special occasion of deliverance from Egypt to remind His people of what He has done for them.

**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**

God heard their groanings in Egypt and He answered.

### **Slide # 4**

**Exodus 2:23–24 (NKJV)**

**23** Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and

they cried out; and **their cry came up to God** because of the bondage.

**24** So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

The secret place of thunder is thought to refer to Mount Sinai where they experienced awesome thunderings and lightnings as they encountered the presence of God speaking to them.

### **Slide # 5**

#### **Exodus 19:16 (NKJV)**

**16** Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were **thunderings** and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp **trembled**.

#### **Exodus 20:18 (NKJV)**

**18** Now all the people witnessed the **thunderings**, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they **trembled** and stood afar off.

This is called by some “an education by encounter.” They certainly experienced the awesomeness of God.

### **Slide # 6**

#### **Exodus 20:19 (NKJV)**

**19** Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but **let not God speak with us, lest we die.**”

And then as God led them from there He tested (trained) them at the waters of Meribah as seen in Exodus 17:1-7. Recall on this occasion there was no water and the people began to complain and blame Moses terribly. At that time God instructed Moses to strike the rock with his rod and water came out.

### **Slide # 7**

#### **Exodus 17:7 (NKJV)**

**7** So he called the name of the place Massah [testing] and **Meribah** [strife], because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

The word “Meribah” means “strife” or “dispute” and marks a time when Israel tempted God – challenging the idea that He was among them and able to help them (cf. Num. 20:1-13; Ps. 95:8; 106:32). This is an example of God’s gracious faithfulness in spite of themselves. They were unfaithful – but God was faithful! This is the pattern!

The Feast of Tabernacles reminded Israel of God’s faithfulness in their wanderings in spite of themselves. Sometimes we need reminded of this!

“The story of Israel is only our own history in another shape. God has heard us, delivered us, liberated us, and too often our unbelief makes the wretched return of mistrust, murmuring, and rebellion.”

- **Charles Spurgeon**

## **8 “Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me!**

God here pleads with His people to now listen to Him. There is a double emphasis on “hearing” in this verse as well as in verse 11 and 13. To listen to God not only means to hear it but to hear with the resolve to do.

**I recall reading** about a man who trained hunting dogs. Whenever he had a dog that would respond immediately to his command, he would say, “That dog is all ear”. That is the idea here. God wants them to hear and obey!

Every 7 years at the Feast of Tabernacles the priests would read the book of Deuteronomy to the people (cf. Deut. 31:9-13). Perhaps this was the occasion. A great emphasis in Deuteronomy is on “hearing God” (cf. Deut. 4:1, 6, 10; 5:1; 6:3, 4; 9:1).

And here is what God wants them to hear:

## **9 There shall be no foreign god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god.**

This, in effect, is a reiteration of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments of the Law (cf. Ex. 20:1-3). Really, this was the WHOLE of what God wanted from His people. He wanted their full allegiance to Him as God. He wanted their worshipful allegiance to be directed to Him and Him alone! God tolerates no rivals. He alone must be God. This is a total LORDSHIP emphasis. He demands that His people recognize Him and Him alone as Lord-God.

Pretty simple! Not difficult to understand. He is warning them that the pathway to blessing lay in faithfulness to Him as the one true God.

Coming out of Egypt, the Jews were commanded not to worship any foreign god, and now, under the kings, the command is reiterated. There is total consistency here!

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.”

**-James Montgomery Boice**

What does God want from us? He want us to live out the truth of His Lordship! He wants us to recognize Him as our God in every facet of our lives. To put anything above the Lord in terms of affections, in terms of commitment, in terms of priority, is really a form of idolatry! God wants worshipful allegiance to where we give God is His due as our Lord.

And God now explains that this is only reasonable and sane.

**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.**

What an invitation! God desires to bless His people. He does not want to withhold from them, but to bless them with overabundance – if only they will obey and recognize that He alone is God in all their ways.

How reasonable is this: He alone was the God who brought them out of Egypt – no foreign god. And He now desires to do so much more them if they would only LISTEN!

“No other god had done anything for the Jews, and therefore they had no reason for paying homage to any other. To us the same argument will apply. We owe all to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: the world, the flesh, the devil, none of these have been of any service to us; they are aliens, foreigners, enemies, and it is not for us to bow down before them.” - **Charles Spurgeon**

**Slide # 8**

**Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)**

**18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD,**  
 “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow;  
 Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

What God is asking is only reasonable!

God invites them to open their mouth wide and He will fill it. God is able to do great things for His people – if only they will LISTEN.

### **Slide # 9**

**Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)**

**33** But **seek first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness, **and** all these things shall be added to you.

**Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV)**

**20** Now **to Him who is able** to do **exceedingly abundantly above** all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

Who is able to grasp the full meaning of the sentence! He is the omnipotent Lord; there is nothing too hard for the Lord. Open your mouth, He says, as wide as you can, and I will fill it. Ask anything in My Name, He says in the New Testament, and I will do it. All He asks is obedience to Him, the yielding of the heart and will.

**- A.C. Gaebelien**

**11 “But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me.**

What is this called? Insanity – spiritual insanity! After all God had done for them. After the long history of God proving Himself to be God to them, they still would not listen, and they wanted nothing to do with God. That is spiritual suicide, and there is no excuse for it.

**12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels.**

This is the consequence of sinful rebellion. At some point God just lets people go in their own rebellious ways.

I often would like to say to people: “How is that working for you?”

These people are miserable. Their relationships are a mess. They themselves are a mess. Their whole life is a mess! Sometimes people say, “I just can’t understand how people without the Lord cope with life.” Well, look around: How are they doing? The world is a mess and they can’t seem to figure out why! I know why – God gives people over to their own devices and it ain’t pretty! This is the stuff of Romans 1 (cf. 1:24,26,28).

### **Slide # 10**

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.”

— C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

One of the greatest judgments God can bring is to simply leave us alone to our own stubbornness and foolishness. – **David Guzik**

### **13 “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!**

We see here the heart of God! He is still pleading and desiring that His people would listen to Him. He intensely desires for them to walk in His ways. The idea that God just sovereignly forces His will on people is seriously challenged by verses like this.

Yes God is sovereign, but people are responsible for their own choices! The desire of God is clear!

“The affectionate tone of these verses is also worth noting in the context of judgment: it is something of an Old Testament counterpart to the lament for Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37).” - **Derek Kidner**

### **Slide # 11**

**Matthew 23:37 (NKJV)**



**37** “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! **How often I wanted** to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing!**

And then here again is the voice of reason...

**14 I would soon subdue their enemies, And turn My hand against their adversaries.**

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

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

God wanted to bless and satisfy His people with great blessings, with victory and prosperity, but because of their stubborn rebellion and refusing to listen, they missed out on the blessings that God desired for them.

This psalm ends on a sad note, filled with the tragedy of missed opportunity and unfulfilled potential. God would have richly provided for them and **satisfied them** – *if* His people would have only listened and obeyed. – **David Guzik**

Some the saddest words are “***if only***”. God is a very reasonable God, in fact very merciful and patient. But He does demand that He be recognized as God and that He alone be recognized as God. Is that asking to much? Of course not! That is only reasonable!

And for those who will thus recognize Him He fills us with blessings more than we can contain and the best is yet to be!

God’s way is the best way- and in fact it is the only blessed way! Why would we choose any other way!

Hear the Word of the Lord...

**Psalms 81:8 (NKJV)**

**8** “**Hear**, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will **listen** to Me!

**Psalms 81:13 (NKJV)**

**13** “Oh, that My people would **listen** to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!

As Jesus often said, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Mk. 4:23).