

PSALM 81



GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

A Call to Worship & Commitment

December 5, 2021 AM

I. GENRE: Prophetic Summons to Festival Worship & Obedience

- A.** The psalm opens like a hymn of **praise** (1-5), calling the Israelites to joyfully worship their redeeming God.
- The opening lines describe all sorts of musical expressions (1-2).
 - The particular days of worship were in the month of the high holy days and Tabernacles (3).
- B.** The majority of the psalm sounds like a prophetic **oracle**, a message from God Himself to the people assembling for worship (5c-16).
- Most of vv. 5-16 are in the first person “I” as God describes what He’s done for Israel and what He expects of them.
 - Because the voice is God’s own, this is more than a sermon by the worship leader but a word from God Himself.

II. SETTING & USAGE

A. AUTHOR: An Asaphite

- Pss 73-83 (as well as Ps 50) are all ascribed to “Asaph,” the chief musician of the sanctuary appointed by David. Asaph’s descendants were active when worship was restored in 536 BC. Ezra 3:10.
- It is unclear whether the author of Ps 81 was Asaph himself or one of his descendants by whom many of the Asaphite pss are written.

B. BACKGROUND: The **Fall** Festivals of Israel.

- There are no identifiable historical events specified to date the psalm, but there are references to some of the nation’s annual fall festivals (3).

PSALM 81 <small>© M. Scott Bashlow 2021</small>				
HEADINGS Authorized to the Sanctuary Choir Director Musical Note On the <i>Gittith</i> (perhaps a Gittite instrument or a musical style) Song Type A Song for Instruments Authorship An Asaphite	THE PSALMIST’S SUMMONS TO OBSERVE FESTIVAL: AN INVITATION TO WORSHIP IN THE HIGH HOLY DAYS vv. 1-5b	GOD’S SUMMONS TO HEED THE COVENANT: A PROPHETIC ORACLE ON OBEDIENCE & TRUST vv. 5c-16	PURPOSE: The Psalmist calls Israel to joyfully worship their ancient Redeemer during the high holy days & beyond. A divine oracle reveals that such worship includes not only a joyful expression but also heartfelt trust & obedience to their covenant God who is their deliverer & provider. Type: Prophetic Summons to Festival Worship & Obedience Author: An Asaphite Date: Unknown. Before the fall of Israel (722 BC) Note: Used during the 7 th month, Tishri (v. 3, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement & the Feast of Tabernacles)	
	An Invitation to Joyful Worship vv. 1-3 Calls to Sing & Shout to the God, Their Strength v. 1 Calls to Orchestrate Songs with Instruments v. 2 Calls to Observe the High Holy Days & Tabernacles v. 3	The Obligation of Festival Worship vv. 4-5b Based upon God’s Covenantal Law v. 4-5a Based upon God’s Redemption of the Nation from Egypt v. 5b	God’s Gracious Response to His Unresponsive People vv. 5c-10 God’s Response to Israel’s Call for Help v. 5c-7 <i>God’s Heed to Israel’s Call</i> v. 5c <i>God’s Freeing Them from Egyptian Slavery</i> v. 6-7a <i>God’s Forming Them in the Wilderness</i> v. 7bc (selah) Israel’s Obligation to Respond to God vv. 8-10 <i>The Need to Listen</i> v. 8 <i>The Call to Undivided Loyalty</i> v. 9 <i>The Need to Remember God’s Redemption</i> v. 10ab <i>A Call to Trust God’s Faithful Provision</i> v. 10c	God’s Promising Invitation to His Unresponsive People vv. 11-16 Indictment of Israel’s Unresponsiveness vv. 11-12 <i>Israel’s Lack of Listening</i> v. 11 <i>God’s Partial Abandonment of Israel</i> v. 12 Invitation for Israel to Respond vv. 13-16 <i>God’s Desire for Israel’s Responsiveness</i> v. 13 <i>God’s Promise of Victory over the Nation’s Enemies</i> vv. 14-15 <i>God’s Promise to Enrich Israel with the Best of the Land</i> v. 16

2. Since there is no mention of the tribes going into captivity (12), it is probable it was written at least before the Fall of Israel in 722 BC.
3. Verse 3 mentions special **moon** related festivals.
 - a. Every new moon (the **first** day of a month) was a special Sabbath. The 7th month also had a full moon holiday on the 15th and the holiest of Israel's feasts in between.
 - b. The 7th month, **Tishri**, falls in our September/October.
 - c. Psalm 81 might have originally been used to summon the people for the high holy days and Tabernacles. In later Judaism, Ps 81 was scheduled to be read on the 5th day of Tishri.

ISRAEL'S AUTUMN FESTIVALS THE HIGH HOLY DAYS & TABERNACLES		
DAY	FESTIVAL	NOTES
1 st day (new moon)	Feast of Trumpets	Later called Rosh Hashana, the start of the civil year
10 th day	Day of Atonement	Hebrew name: Yom Kippur
15 th day (full moon) - 23 rd day	Feast of Tabernacles	Aka: Feast of Booths Hebrew name: Sukkoth

C. PLACEMENT

1. Psalm 81 is part of the 3rd book of the Pss (73-89), most of which are written by psalmists other than David.
2. "**Joseph**" is mentioned in Pss 77:15; 78:67; 80:1; 81:5.
3. Pss 80 & 81 both refer to Israel coming out of Egypt (80:8, 81:5).
4. Pss 79 & 80 are painful laments about the falls of Jerusalem (79) and Ephraim (80). Ps 81 is situated to provide a sense of God's response.
 - a. This doesn't mean Ps 81 is written in response to those pss.
 - b. But it's placement after them provides some theological relief to the **reader** who has been caught up in the laments.

III. NOTES:

- A. **Divine Speech.** Ps 81 is one of several pss where God speaks directly to the worshippers. This speech is most like those in Pss 50 and 95.
 - B. **Pronoun Switching:** One challenge in reading Ps 81 is the frequent pronoun shifts. In at least one spot, it's not clear at first who is speaking.
 1. Vv 1-3, the psalmist commands Israel (2nd person)
 2. Vv. 4-5, the psalmist speaks about God (3rd person)
 3. Vv. 5c-14, 16a, God speaks (1st person) to Israel
 - (a) The **speaker** in v. 5c is debated.
 - (1) Is it the psalmist talking about hearing God's voice?
 - (2) Is it Israel saying it was now hearing God's voice?
 - (3) Is it about Joseph hearing the language of Egypt?
 - (4) Is it God hearing the cries of **Israel**?
 - (b) The least jarring option is (4), God hearing Israel's cries. **Ex 2:23.**
- C. **Joseph.** Joseph (5) is mentioned in this psalm (5) to represent the whole nation, not just some of the northern tribes which he begat. Amongst the Egyptians, the Israelites were better known as Joseph's people.
- D. **God's Remembrance:** While Ps 78 models how Israelites are supposed to remember their history, Ps 81 shows that God remembers, too. Here God recounts His delivering them from Egypt & thru the wilderness.
- E. **Covenant Reminder.** Verses 9-10 paraphrase the beginning of the 10 commandments, the heart of God's covenant made at Sinai. Ex. 20:2-3. God promises both covenant blessings (10b, 14, 16) & curses (12, 15).
 - a. V. 15 could be rendered as **prayers**: "May those who hate the LORD cower in fear; may their time *of punishment* be forever."
 - b. The blessings of v. 16 describe both cultivated resources (abundant wheat) and raw natural resources (honey in the cliffs).