

Day 354 - WEDNESDAY: January 31st

Psalms 80, 81 & 82

Psalms 80:1-19 NKJV

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies." a Testimony of Asaph. A Psalm. Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength, And come and save us! Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved! O LORD God of hosts, How long will You be angry Against the prayer of Your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears, And given them tears to drink in great measure. You have made us a strife to our neighbors, And our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved! You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River. Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it. Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, And the branch that You made strong for Yourself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

Psalms 81:1-16 NKJV

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. Raise a song and strike the timbrel, The pleasant harp with the lute. Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, At the full moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, A law of the God of Jacob. 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. "I removed his shoulder from the burden; His hands were freed from the baskets. 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 "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god. I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. "But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels. "Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, And turn My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him, But their fate would endure forever. He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."

Psalms 82:1-8 NKJV

A Psalm of Asaph. God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked? Selah Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked. They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable. I said, "You are gods,

And all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, And fall like one of the princes." Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations.

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 80:

The UCG reading program states: "Where the superscription of Psalm 80 has "Set to 'The Lilies' [Hebrew *Shoshannim*]. A Testimony [*Eduth*] of Asaph," this could be rendered "Set to 'The Lilies of Testimony.' Of Asaph." The NIV has "The Lilies of the Covenant." Compare the superscription of Psalm 60, which has, "Set to 'Lily of the Testimony'" (*Shushan Eduth*). As in other cases throughout the Psalter, the first part of the superscription of each of these psalms may be a postscript of the preceding psalm.

As in the previous psalm (79), the nation is in distress—plundered by enemies (compare Psalm 80:12-13). And as before, it may be that Asaph was prophesying of national invasion beyond his lifetime—perhaps even of the end time still to come. Yet, just as Psalm 79 ends with reliance on God as the Shepherd of His people (see verse 13), so Psalm 80 opens with an appeal to the Shepherd of Israel who leads Joseph (the leading birthright people and therefore representative of the nation as a whole) like a flock (verse 1; compare Psalm 23; John 10).

God, who dwells between the cherubim—as represented on the earthly copy of God's throne, the mercy seat atop the Ark of the Covenant (see Exodus 25:17-22)—is asked to "shine forth" (Psalm 80:1), showing His glory through His intervening power (verse 2). Note the beginning of verse 2: "Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh." The psalm is here essentially

pleading, "March against the [enemy] nations as you marched in the midst of your army from Sinai into the promised land (in that march the ark of the covenant advanced in front of the troops of these three tribes; see Numbers 10:21-24...)" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 80:2).

The central theme of the psalm is clear from the repeated refrain asking, "Restore us..." (verses 3, 7, 19), with building intensity in calling on God: "...O God" (verse 3), "...O God of hosts" (verse 7) and "...O Lord God of hosts" (verse 19). The rest of the repeated refrain, "Cause Your face to shine [i.e., smile favorably on us], and we shall be saved" (same verses), is essentially drawn from the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." We have previously noted the use of this language in other psalms as well (see Psalm 4:6; Psalm 44:3; Psalm 67:1; Psalm 119:135). Here in Psalm 80 the people had been experiencing the opposite—the rebuke of God's countenance (His angry expression) causing them to perish (Psalm 80:16).

"How long," Asaph asks (as is common in laments), will God be angry and refuse to answer His people's prayers? (verse 4; compare Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 79:5). In the desert wilderness, God, as His people's caring Shepherd, fed them with manna and gave them water to drink from the rock. But now, figuratively, He has given His people their tearful misery to eat and drink (80:5). They have become a source of contention and mockery to neighboring countries (verse 6)—rather than the blessing and positive example they were intended to be. So again the plea of restoration is raised (verse 7).

In verses 8-16 Asaph likens Israel to a vine and vineyard, imagery found in other passages (see Isaiah 5:1-7; Isaiah 27:2-6; Jeremiah 2:21; Jeremiah 12:10; Ezekiel 15:1-8; Ezekiel 17:6-8; Ezekiel 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1; Hosea 14:7). God bringing the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land is pictured as transplanting the vine (Psalm 80:8). His driving out of the nations before them (same verse) is compared to a caring vinedresser clearing the ground for the vine (verse 9; compare Isaiah 5:2). The vine filled the land (Psalm 80:9), growing to immense stature so that hills and tall trees, symbolic of other national powers (compare Ezekiel 17), were overshadowed as the vine grew (Psalm 80:10). It spread from the Sea (the Mediterranean) to the River (the Euphrates) (verse 11), representing Israel's dominion reaching this extent, as it did during the reigns of David and Solomon.

Yet things have dramatically changed. God has broken down His vine's hedges—its protective fence (referring to His own divine protection)—and allowed others to plunder it (verse 12). The boar and wild beasts (unclean animals here representing foreign invaders) uproot and devour it. Because of God's anger it is burned with fire and cut down (verse 16). Compare God's later words, probably adapted from Psalm 80, in Isaiah 5:5: "And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down."

The psalm calls on God to look at the sorry state of the vine now and to "visit" it (Psalm 80:14)—to show it care and restore it as it was. There is a play on words in the last several verses here. The Hebrew word for vineyard in verse 15 "is used only here in the Bible; it literally means 'root-stock'" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on

verses 4-17). Then we see the word "branch" in the same verse—giving us the common pairing of *root and branch*. Yet the Hebrew word for branch here is *ben*, meaning "son"—the same word translated "son" in verse 17 in the expression "son of man." The nation of Israel was not just as a mere plant to God as a vinedresser but was God's own son (see Exodus 4:22)—intended to serve as His "right-hand man" (see Psalm 80:17), a model nation to properly represent Him to the world (as a vine bearing godly fruit). Yet the imagery here likely pointed to Israel's Davidic ruler as well, the particular "son of man" (meaning human being) who was to lead the nation in setting the proper example. Moreover, the words here no doubt look to the ultimate "Branch" who would come from the vine of Israel and the line of David—the Messiah. He too would be, in a unique way, God's own Son. Jesus would later tell His followers that He is the true vine, that God the Father is the vinedresser and that they, abiding in Him as the vine, are the branches (John 15:1-8). Jesus Himself was brought out of Egypt and replanted in the Promised Land, preaching throughout the breadth of the land. He suffered terribly for sin at the hands of enemies (not His own sin but that of others). He was brutalized and died. But He rose again—and through His death and resurrection all may be saved. Indeed, it is through this Son and His followers that the vine of Israel would be reconstituted in a spiritual sense and revived—so that it would never turn from God again (see Psalm 80:18). The physical Israelites will be restored to God's favor or grace through being grafted into spiritual Israel (compare Romans 11; Galatians 6:16). Thus, as the final refrain calls for again (Psalm 80:19), Israel will be restored, God will smile favorably on His people and they shall be saved." [END]

Psalm 81:

The UCG reading program states: "The middle of the superscription of Psalm 81, which may be part of a postscript to Psalm 80, contains the Hebrew phrase *al gittith*. We saw this earlier in the superscription of Psalm 8, and it reappears in Psalm 84. The NIV leaves it mostly untranslated as "According to *gittith*," whereas the New King James Version renders it as, "On an instrument of Gath." The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments, "The Hebrew word perhaps refers to either a winepress ('song of the winepress') or the Philistine city of Gath ('Gittite lyre or music'; see 2 Samuel 15:18)" (note on Psalm 8 title).

Asaph composed Psalm 81 as a festival song (verses 1-3)--albeit one in which national enemies remain a serious concern (see verses 14-15), as in other psalms of Asaph in Book III.

The people were to "sing aloud," to "make a joyful shout," to "raise a song," to "strike the timbrel," to play "the pleasant harp with the lute" (verses 1-2), to "blow the trumpet" (the *shofar* or ram's horn) because it was a statute and law of God to do so (verses 3-4)--revealed by God at the time of the Exodus (verse 5).

It is important to recognize the congregational nature of worship here. As commentator George Knight remarks on these verses: "You cannot hold a festival all by yourself. It is God's will, however, that we should hold festivals. These verbs *sing aloud*, *shout for joy* and so on are all expressed in the plural" (*Psalms*, comments on Psalm 81). The word for "statute" (verse 4) or "decree" (NIV) "refers in its original usage to something that is meant to be imperishable for it has been chiseled in stone. God then 'demands' our regular worship. In his wisdom he knows that it is our regular participation in congregational worship that keeps

us right with himself. Public worship is God's good idea, not ours" (same comments).

Verse 3 causes some confusion as to the timing of this particular celebration and trumpet blowing. Some take it to mean every New Moon (new month), every full moon and every sacred festival day. However, there was no law or statute to blow the ram's horn or celebrate at all of these times. Indeed, in the law God gave through Moses the blast of the ram's horn was commanded for only one festival, the Feast of Trumpets (see Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1). This Holy Day actually falls on a New Moon--and is the only annual festival that does. Yet what of the mention of the full moon in Psalm 81:3? Some see other annual festivals indicated here. Passover and the First Day of Unleavened Bread come at the time of the full moon in the first month of the Hebrew sacred calendar. The beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles does as well--and many see verse 3 as indicating the entire fall festival period in the seventh month, from the Feast of Trumpets through Tabernacles. However, the word translated "full moon" can simply mean "full" or "fullness," and could here imply the completion of a month--thus the beginning of a new one. The Ferrar Fenton Translation makes no mention of the full moon--only the New Moon. So it may well be that the Feast of Trumpets is exclusively meant here, though the call to celebration and reflection on God's deliverance fits with all of God's festivals.

Note again the timing of God's revelation of the statute in verse 5: "This He established in Joseph [representative of all Israel] as a testimony, when He went throughout the land of Egypt." This translation would indicate the time that God sent the plagues against Egypt. However, nothing is recorded in Moses' writings about God revealing the command to blow the shofar at the Feast

of Trumpets until Israel was later gathered at Mount Sinai. It is possible that He gave Moses an earlier revelation while in Egypt. Yet it seems more likely that a very general time frame is meant--that is to say, God gave the Israelites this statute long ago around the time that He destroyed Egypt to free them. Alternatively, some versions translate verse 5 as saying that God established the statute when Joseph (i.e., Israel) went out of Egypt (compare Tanakh, New and Revised English Bible, New American Bible, Fenton).

The end of verse 5 says, "I heard a language [literally, lip] I did not understand." There is some dispute as to who is speaking here. In the remainder of the psalm, from verses 6-16, it is clearly God who is speaking, referring to Himself as "I." That would seem to argue for the "I" at the end of verse 5 also being God. Yet how could the omniscient God not understand the Egyptian language? For this reason, many take the "I" in verse 5 to refer to each Israelite singing the song--following the Jewish understanding that each and every Jew even today was personally and individually delivered from ancient Egyptian bondage.

Yet the word rendered "understand" in verse 5, *yada*, has the general meaning of "know." As Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary notes, this word can mean "acknowledge...regard, have respect [for]" (*Abingdon Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Strong's No. 3045). Indeed, just as God says He does not "know" those who do not obey Him, He could just as well say that He does not "know" (acknowledge or regard) the speech of those who defy Him. Consider that Egypt's language and speech was thoroughly polluted with idolatrous references. "As in [Psalm] 114:1, there is a disdain for the history, culture, and language of Egypt" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 3-5).

In Psalm 81:7, God answering in "the secret place of thunder" is evidently a reference to the giving of His law and covenant at Mount Sinai, when "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.... Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire... And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice" (Exodus 19:16-19; compare Exodus 20:18). Thus, it would seem that in the "memorial of blowing of trumpets" at the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24), the Israelites were to recall this earlier trumpet blast when God came down in power and glory, descending with thunder and fire, as a prelude to giving His law. Interestingly, the Feast of Trumpets primarily represents the time of Christ's return, when He will come in great power and glory, in a devouring fire, as a prelude to revealing His law anew to Israel and all nations. Moses gave the point: "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin" (Exodus 20:20)--as they had at Meribah, when they questioned whether God was among them after having experienced the Exodus (17:1-7; Psalm 81:7).

In verses 8-10, God reminds the people of what He told them at Sinai--and implicitly holds out His offer of covenant relationship anew. In verse 9, He reiterates the first of the Ten Commandments--that there be no foreign gods among His people (see Exodus 20:3). And in verse 10 of Psalm 81, He repeats the preamble to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (see Exodus 20:2). This great episode should have been enough to convince them to trust

and obey Him. God promised to be His people's provider (Psalm 81:10b).

Historically, Israel failed to listen (verse 11), so God allowed them to go their own way (verse 12)--although that's not what He wanted (verse 13). If His people would obey, He would subdue their enemies (verse 14). It seems likely that God inspired Asaph to write this psalm while Israel was experiencing problems from enemies--perhaps while David was still battling foreign nations. And the words would certainly take on greater urgency in later times of foreign oppression.

In verse 15, the Israelites' enemies are referred to as *God's* enemies--"the haters of the Lord" (compare 83:1-4). The NKJV says that when God subdues them, they "would pretend submission to Him" (81:15). The NIV alternatively says they "would cringe before him." Then note the latter phrase in verse 15: "But their fate would endure forever." The Hebrew word translated "fate" here actually means "time." Most see this as meaning judgment on the enemies. But "their" might refer back to the Israelites, just as "them" in the next verse does--in which case the verse would mean that obedient Israelites would endure for all time.

God's desire is to give His people the very best of everything (verse 16)--and He eventually will if they will only heed Him and walk in His ways. The Feast of Trumpets and the other fall festivals picture the ushering in of a time when Israel will repent and all God's promises will come to fruition. Even other nations will be grafted into Israel to learn God's way and share in the promises as well. This is certainly a wonderful reason to joyfully celebrate." [END]

Psalm 82

The UCG reading program states: "In Psalm 82, Asaph delivers from God "a word of judgment on unjust rulers and judges.... [He shows] God presiding over his heavenly court [verse 1].... As the Great King (see...Psalm 47) and the Judge of all the earth (see Psalm 94:2; Genesis 18:25; 1 Samuel 2:10) who 'loves justice' (Psalm 99:4) and judges the nations in righteousness (see Psalm 9:8; Psalm 96:13; Psalm 98:9), he is seen calling to account those responsible for defending the weak and oppressed on earth" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on Psalm 82).

Observe in verses 1 and 6 the term "gods" (Hebrew elohim). This plural word can refer to a plurality of gods (usually false gods) or in a singular sense to the one God (or God family) comprising more than one Being--God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. To learn more about this terminology and the nature of God, see our free booklet "[Who Is God](#)".

Here the term "gods" refers to human beings--"children of the Most High" (verse 6). Consider that when God created the plants and animals of the earth in Genesis 1, He made them to reproduce each "according to its kind." But in the same context, God said of humanity, "Let Us [the Father and the preincarnate Christ] make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (verse 26)--language denoting producing a child in one's image (compare Psalm 5:3). So man was made according to the God-kind. Yet this initially is in an incomplete sense of resembling God in appearance on a physical level and having an intelligent and creative mind (though still unimaginably inferior to God's). God ultimately intends for man to be a spiritual creation completely in His likeness.

Jesus would later use Psalm 82:6 to confound the Jewish religious authorities who were upset because He declared Himself

the Son of God. Reminding them that their own law (Scripture) referred to human beings as "gods," he asked them why they were so upset at Him for merely saying He was the Son of God (John 10:31-37).

One godlike characteristic human beings were given at man's initial creation was that of having dominion over the earth--representing Him as ruler over creation (Genesis 1:26-28). For many, this dominion would extend over other human beings. Yet for the most part, people have not taken after God's nature in the way they have fulfilled this responsibility. Rather, they have taken advantage of and abused each other. Psalm 82 addresses this failing. It is in fact a message for everyone--but applies all the more to those who are in positions of power, who have the capacity to help others in the ways called for in verses 2-4.

Verse 5 speaks of the colossal failure of human misrule.

Commenting on this verse, the Zondervan NIV Study Bible notes: "They ought to have shared in the wisdom of God (see 1 Kings 3:9; Proverbs 8:14-16; Isaiah 11:12), but they are utterly devoid of true understanding of moral issues or of the moral order that God's rule sustains (see Isaiah 44:18; Jeremiah 3:15; Jeremiah 9:24).... When such people are the wardens of justice, the whole world order crumbles (see Psalm 11:3; Psalm 75:3...)."

Clearly the human beings addressed in Psalm 82 as gods are not truly gods in an ultimate sense--as God says they will die as mere mortal men, falling "like every other ruler" (verse 7, NIV). Yet for those who submit to God's ways, other passages show that men can receive eternal life and divine glory as spirit-born members of the God family.

Thankfully, while the current societal order will fall to pieces, the ultimate world order God has ordained will stand (Psalm 75:3;

Psalm 93:1). As the concluding verse of Psalm 82 calls for, He will intervene and set all things right in all nations. For all nations will at last be His, not just as His property but as His true children in His likeness-not only of form, but of character.” [END]