
For the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. By Asaph.

PSALM 81: 1 Sing aloud to God, our strength! Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob!

An exhortation to the people to praise God for his benefits, Psa 81:1-7; and to attend to what he had prescribed, Psa 81:8-10; their disobedience lamented, Psa 81:11; the miseries brought on themselves by their transgressions, Psa 81:12-16.

The title is the same as to Psa 8:1-9 (note), which see. There are various opinions concerning the occasion and time of this Psalm: but it is pretty generally agreed that it was either written for or used at the celebration of the Feast of Trumpets, (see on Lev 23:24 (note)), which was held on the first day of the month Tisri, which was the beginning of the Jewish year; and on that day it is still used in the Jewish worship. According to Jewish tradition, credited by many learned Christians, the world was created in Tisri, which answers to our September. The Psalm may have been used in celebrating the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of Tisri, the Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth of the same month, the creation of the world, the Feasts of the New Moons, and the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt; to all which circumstances it appears to refer.

Verse 1

Sing aloud unto God our strength - There is much meaning here: as God is our strength, let that strength be devoted to his service; therefore, sing aloud! This is principally addressed to the priests and Levites.

PSALM 81: 2 Raise a song, and bring here the tambourine, the pleasant lyre with the harp.

Verse 2

Take a psalm - זמרה zimrah. I rather think that this was the name of a musical instrument.

Bring hither the timbrel - תוף toph; some kind of drum or tom tom.

The pleasant harp - כנור kinnor. Probably a sistrum, or something like it. A Stringed instrument.

With the psaltery - נבל nebel, the naba. The cithara, Septuagint.

PSALM 81: 3 Blow the trumpet at the New Moon, at the full moon, on our feast day.

Verse 3

Blow up the trumpet - שופר shophar, a species of horn. Certainly a wind instrument, as the two last were stringed instruments. Perhaps some chanted a psalm in recitativo, while all these instruments were used as accompaniments. In a representative system of religion, such as the Jewish, there must have been much outside work, all emblematical of better things: no proof that such things should be continued under the Gospel dispensation, where outsides have disappeared, shadows flown away,

and the substance alone is presented to the hearts of mankind. He must be ill off for proofs in favour of instrumental music in the Church of Christ, who has recourse to practices under the Jewish ritual.

The feast of the new moon was always proclaimed by sound of trumpet. Of the ceremonies on this occasion I have given a full account in my Discourse on the Eucharist. For want of astronomical knowledge, the poor Jews were put to sad shifts to know the real time of the new moon. They generally sent persons to the top of some hill or mountain about the time which, according to their supputations, the new moon should appear. The first who saw it was to give immediate notice to the Sanhedrin; they closely examined the reporter as to his credibility, and whether his information agreed with their calculations. If all was found satisfactory, the president proclaimed the new moon by shouting out **שִׁקְדֵשׁ** mikkodesh! "It is consecrated." This word was repeated twice aloud by the people; and was then proclaimed every where by blowing of horns, or what is called the sound of trumpets. Among the Hindoos some feasts are announced by the sound of the conch or sacred shell.

PSALM 81: 4 For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.

Verse 4

This was a statute for Israel - See the statute, Num 10:10 (note), and Lev 23:24 (note).

PSALM 81: 5 He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out over the land of Egypt, I heard a language that I didn't know.

Verse 5

I heard a language I understood not - This passage is difficult. Who heard? And what was heard? All the Versions, except the Chaldee, read the pronoun in the third person, instead of the first. "He heard a language that he understood not." And to the Versions Kennicott reforms the text, **שִׁפְתָּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע יְדַעָה** sephath lo yadah yisma; "a language which he did not understand he heard." But what was that language? Some say the Egyptian; others, who take Joseph to signify the children of Israel in general, say it was the declaration of God by Moses, that Jehovah was the true God, that he would deliver their shoulder from their burdens, and their hands from the pots - the moulds and furnaces in which they formed and baked their brick.

PSALM 81: 6 "I removed his shoulder from the burden. His hands were freed from the basket.

PSALM 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.

Verse 7

Thou calledst in trouble - They had cried by reason of their burdens, and the cruelty of their task-masters; and God heard that cry, and delivered them. See Exo 3:7, etc.

In the secret place of thunder - On Mount Sinai; where God was heard, but not seen. They heard a voice, but they saw no shape.

At the waters of Meribah - See this transaction, Exo 17:1 (note), etc.

PSALM 81: 8 "Hear, my people, and I will testify to you, Israel, if you would listen to me!"

Verse 8

Hear, O my people - These are nearly the same words with those spoken at the giving of the law, Exo 20:2.

PSALM 81: 9 There shall be no strange god in you, neither shall you worship any foreign god.

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

Verse 10

Open thy mouth wide - Let thy desires be ever so extensive, I will gratify them if thou wilt be faithful to me. Thou shalt lack no manner of thing that is good.

PSALM 81: 11 But my people didn't listen to my voice. Israel desired none of me.

Verse 11

Israel would none of me - לי לא אבה לו abah li, They willed me not, they would not have me for their God.

PSALM 81: 12 So I let them go after the stubbornness of their hearts, that they might walk in their own counsels.

Verse 12

Unto their own hearts' lust - To the obstinate wickedness of their heart.

In their own counsels - God withdrew his restraining grace, which they had abused; and then they fulfilled the inventions of their wicked hearts.

PSALM 81: 13 Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!

Verse 13

O that my people had hearkened unto me, - Israel had walked in my ways - Nothing can be more plaintive than the original; sense and sound are surprisingly united. I scruple not to say to him who understands the Hebrew, however learned, he has never found in any poet, Greek or Latin, a finer example of deep-seated grief, unable to express itself in appropriate words without frequent interruptions of sighs and sobs, terminated with a mournful cry. *ל (m#ym(אל ישראל בדרכי יהלכו* Lo ammi shomea li Yishrael bidrachi yehallechu! He who can give the proper guttural pronunciation to the letter *א* ain; and gives the *ו* vau, and the *י* yod, their full Asiatic sound, not pinching them to death by a compressed and worthless European enunciation; will at once be convinced of the propriety of this remark.

PSALM 81: 14 I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their adversaries.

Verse 14

I should soon have subdued - If God's promise appeared to fail in behalf of his people, it was because they rejected his counsel, and walked in their own. While they were faithful, they prospered; and not one jot or tittle of God's word failed to them.

PSALM 81: 15 The haters of the LORD would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever.

Verse 15

Their time should have endured for ever - That is, Their prosperity should have known no end.

PSALM 81: 16 But he would have also fed them with the finest of the wheat. I will satisfy you with honey out of the rock."

Verse 16

With the finest of the wheat - *מחלב חטה* mecheleb chittah; literally, with the fat of wheat, as in the margin.

Honey out of the rock - And he fed thaim of the grese of whete: And of the hony stane he thaim filled. Old Psalter. Thus paraphrased: "He fed thaim with the body of Criste and gastely understandyng; and of hony that ran of the stane, that is, of the wisdom that is swete to the hert." Several of the fathers understand this place of Christ.

