

PSALM 81

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 81

To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A [Psalm] of Asaph

Of “gittith”, (see Gill on “^{<3981>}Psalm 8:1”). The Targum renders it,

“upon the harp which came from Gath;”

and so Jarchi says it was a musical instrument that came from Gath. The Septuagint, and the versions which follow that, render it, “for the winepresses”. This psalm, according to Kimchi, is said concerning the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt; and was composed in order to be sung at their new moons and solemn feasts, which were typical of Gospel things in Gospel times; (see ^{<5026>}Colossians 2:16,17) and so the Syriac version,

“a psalm of Asaph, when David by him prepared himself for the solemnities.”

Ver. 1. *Sing aloud unto God our strength*, etc.] The strength of Israel, who, by strength of hand, and a mighty arm, brought Israel out of Egypt, protected and upheld them in the wilderness, and brought them to, and settled and established them in the land of Canaan; and who is the strength of every true Israelite, from whom they have both their natural and spiritual strength; so that they can exercise grace, perform duty, bear afflictions, withstand temptations, fight with and conquer enemies, and hold on and out unto the end; and therefore have reason to sing the praises of God with great fervour, zeal, and affection:

make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob; or Israel, being the God that had made a covenant with them, had chosen them for his peculiar people, and had redeemed them out of the house of bondage, and bestowed peculiar favours upon them; and therefore were under obligation to show forth his praise vocally and audibly, and with strong expressions of joy; and the spiritual Israel of God much more so, who have an interest in the

covenant of grace, and share in electing, redeeming, and calling grace, by all which he appears to be their God and Father, in a special sense.

Ver. 2. *Take a psalm*, etc.] Or “lift one up”^{f1169}; hold up the book, and read and sing it; or rather, lift up the voice in singing a psalm:

and bring hither the timbrel; or “give one”^{f1170}, put the hand to one:

the pleasant harp with the psaltery; make use of all these musical instruments in singing, and so make an agreeable melody: these were used in the times of the Old Testament, and were typical of the spiritual joy and melody in the heart, expressed by vocal singing, under the New Testament; (see ^{<1170>}Revelation 5:8 14:2,3 15:2).

Ver. 3. *Blow up the trumpet in the new moon*, etc.] Either in every new moon, or first day of the month, which was religiously observed by the Jews, (^{<1171>}2 Kings 4:23) or rather the new moon, or first day of the seventh month, the month Tisri, which day was a memorial of blowing of trumpets, (^{<1172>}Leviticus 23:34), and so the Targum,

“blow the trumpet in the month of Tisri,”

when their new year began, and was typical of the year of the redeemed of the Lord, of the acceptable year of our God, of the famous new year, the Gospel dispensation, when old things passed away, and all things became new. The Jews say this blowing of trumpets was in commemoration of Isaac’s deliverance, a ram being sacrificed for him, and therefore they sounded with trumpets made of rams’ horns; or in remembrance of the trumpet blown at the giving of the law; though it rather was an emblem of the Gospel, and the ministry of it, by which sinners are aroused, awakened and quickened, and souls are charmed and allured, and filled with spiritual joy and gladness:

in the time appointed; so Aben Ezra, Jarchi, and Kimchi, interpret the word of a set fixed time; (see ^{<1173>}Proverbs 7:20), the word^{f1171} used has the signification of covering; and the former of these understand it of the time just before the change of the moon, when it is covered, which falls in with the former phrase; and so the Targum,

“in the moon that is covered;”

though the Latin interpreter renders it,

“in the month which is covered with the days of our solemnities,”

there being many festivals in the month of Tisri; the blowing of trumpets on the first day of it, the atonement on the tenth, and the feast of tabernacles on the fifteenth. But Deuteronomy Dieu has made it appear, from the use of the word in the Syriac language, that it should be rendered “in the full moon”, and so directs to the right understanding of the feast next mentioned;

on our solemn feast day, which must design a feast which was at the full of the moon; and so must be either the feast of the passover, which was on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan, and was a type of Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us, on which account we should keep the feast, (^{<0216>}Exodus 12:6 ^{<0607>}1 Corinthians 5:7,8), or else the feast of tabernacles, which was on the fifteenth of the month Tisri, kept in commemoration of the Israelites dwelling in booths, (^{<0234>}Leviticus 23:34,42,43) and which is called the feast, and the solemn feast, emphatically; (see ^{<1082>}1 Kings 8:2 ^{<0810>}Hosea 12:9), and was typical of the state of God’s people in this world, who dwell in the earthly houses of their tabernacles, and have no continuing city; and of the churches of Christ, which are the tabernacles in which God and his people dwell, and will abide in this form but for a time, and are moveable; and also of Christ’s tabernacling in human nature, (^{<0014>}John 1:14 ^{<0882>}Hebrews 8:2 9:11).

Ver. 4. *For this was a statute for Israel*, etc.] It was not a piece of will worship, or device of the children of Israel, but was of divine institution; that the passover should be kept at the time it was; and that the trumpets should be blown on the new moon, or first of Tisri; and that the feast of tabernacles should be kept on the fifteenth of the same month:

and a law of the God of Jacob; and therefore to be observed by Jacob’s posterity: the law for the one is in (^{<0218>}Exodus 12:18,19) and for the other is in (^{<0234>}Leviticus 23:24,34) and so all the ordinances of Christ, and of the Gospel dispensation, are to be regarded on the same account, because they are the statutes and appointments of God; and the feast of tabernacles is particularly put for them all, (^{<0816>}Zechariah 14:16).

Ver. 5. *This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony*, etc.] That is, this law concerning the blowing of trumpets on the new moon, and the keeping the solemn feast at the full of the moon, was made to be observed by all Israel,

who are meant by Joseph, for a testimony of God's good will to them, and of their duty and obedience to him:

when he went out through the land of Egypt, or "over it"^{f1172}; which some understand of Joseph, who is said to go over all the land of Egypt, to gather in provision against the seven years of famine, (^{<0445>}Genesis 41:45,46) and Jarchi says that his deliverance from prison was at the beginning of the year, and was advanced in Pharaoh's court: and the meaning is, either "when he", the Lord, "went out against the land of Egypt", so Arama, in order to slay their firstborn; and when he passed over Israel, and saved them; marched through the land in his indignation, and went forth for the salvation of his people, (^{<0104>}Exodus 11:4 ^{<0302>}Habakkuk 3:12,13) then was the ordinance of the passover appointed: or when Israel went out of Egypt, designed by Joseph, some little time after, while in the wilderness, and dwelling in tents, the feast of tabernacles was instituted; but rather this shows that the feast of passover is before meant, which was instituted at the time of Israel's going out of Egypt, and was the solemn feast day ordained for a statute, law and testimony in Israel; and that the new moon, or month rather, on which the trumpet was to be blown, was the month Abib, the beginning of months, by an ordinance of God, (^{<0122>}Exodus 12:2 13:3,4)

where I heard a language that I understood not; here the prophet represents the people of Israel in Egypt; though the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, read,

he heard, and he understood not and the language is either the voice of God out of the fire, which before was never heard in this unusual manner, nor understood, (^{<0054>}Deuteronomy 5:24,26) or the speech of Moses, who had Aaron for his mouth and spokesman; or rather the Egyptian language, which was not understood by the Israelites without an interpreter, (^{<0423>}Genesis 42:23) which sense is confirmed by (^{<0301>}Psalms 114:1), and this is mentioned as an aggravation of their affliction in Egypt; (see ^{<0455>}Jeremiah 5:15).

Ver. 6. *I removed his shoulder from the burden*, etc.] These are the words of God, declaring how he had delivered the Israelites from the oppression and cruelty of the Egyptians; who made their lives bitter in hard bondage, and obliged them to carry heavy loads of bricks upon their shoulders:

his hands were delivered from the pots, or “baskets”^{f1173}; into which the bricks were put when made, and carried on their shoulders; or from making of pots, as Kimchi, who thinks the Israelites were employed in making pots of clay as well as bricks; (see ^{<19813>}Psalm 68:13), the Targum is,

“his hands withdrew themselves from casting clay into the pots:”

the whole is typical of the saints’ deliverance by Christ from the bondage of sin, Satan, and the law.

Ver. 7. *Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee*, etc.] That is, when Israel were in trouble in Egypt, as the Targum adds, and they cried unto the Lord in their distress, he heard them, and answered them, and sent them a deliverer, and brought them out of all their troubles, (^{<11817>}Exodus 3:7-10).

I answered thee in the secret place of thunder; by bringing the plague of thunder and lightnings upon the Egyptians, when the Israelites were hidden from them; a sense given by some, as Kimchi observes: or rather this was done when the Lord looked out of the pillar of cloud at the Red sea upon the Egyptian host, and troubled them; at which time the voice of his thunder was heard in heaven, (^{<19716>}Psalm 77:16-18). Some think this has reference to the thunder at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; but the sense before given is best:

I proved thee at the waters of Meribah; by withholding water from them to try them, and see whether they would behave patiently, and put their trust and confidence in the Lord, or not; (see ^{<12714>}Exodus 17:4-7).

Selah. (See Gill on “^{<10012>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 8. *Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee*, etc.] Of himself, his being, and perfections; what he was unto them, had done for them, and would do for them, as in the following verses: or “testify in thee”^{f1174}, bear witness to their spirits, that they were his people, and he was their God; this is a witness which the people of God have in themselves; it is the inward testimony of the Spirit; besides which, there is the outward testimony of the word, and which also may be here meant; for it may be rendered,

I will give a testimony to thee: the law is a testimony of the will of God to his people, what he would have done, or not done; and the Gospel is a

testimony of his grace, and the whole word testifies of Christ, his person, offices, obedience, sufferings, and death: some render it, “testify against thee”^{f1175}, for their murmurings, rebellion, and idolatry, as in (~~1807~~ Psalm 50:7) and they are called upon to hear the voice of God in his word, and in his providences, being his people; and as such he addresses them, which bespeaks interest in them, affection to them, and an acknowledgment of them, and carries in it a reason why they should hear him:

O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; this explains who are meant by the Lord’s people, Israel, the posterity of Jacob, a chosen and special people, who are exhorted not only to hear, but to hearken and to obey; suggesting, it would be well with them, if they did as in (~~1813~~ Psalm 81:13,14), and some^{f1176} take these words to be a wish, as there; “Israel, O that thou wouldest hearken unto me”: (see ~~2388~~ Isaiah 48:18).

Ver. 9. *There shall no strange god be in thee*, etc.] Or in the midst of thee, owned and worshipped as God; or in thine heart, for whatever engrosses the affection, or a man puts his trust and confidence in, that he makes his god, and is a strange one: thus, if any friend or relation, father or mother, wife or children, are loved more than God, they are set up as such in his place; thus the epicure, that seeks the gratification of his carnal lusts, makes his belly his god; and the covetous man his money, in which he trusts, and therefore is called an idolater; and the self-righteous man his righteousness, on which he depends for salvation: hence we read of idols set up in the heart, from which they are disengaged in conversion, and kept from, (~~2647~~ Ezekiel 14:7 36:25 ~~2848~~ Hosea 14:8 ~~6171~~ 1 John 5:21)

neither shall thou worship any strange god; only the Lord God is to be worshipped, (~~4189~~ Matthew 28:19 ~~4734~~ 2 Corinthians 13:14 ~~6104~~ Revelation 1:4,5) and there is but one God; though this is to be understood not to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit, who are with the Father the one God, and to be worshipped equally with him, and are; (see ~~4189~~ Matthew 28:19 ~~4734~~ 2 Corinthians 13:14 ~~6104~~ Revelation 1:4,5).

Ver. 10. *I am the Lord thy God*, etc.] The true Jehovah, the Being of beings, in whom all live and move and have their beings, the covenant God of his people; and is a reason why they should hear him, and worship him, and no other:

which brought thee out of the land of Egypt; this, with what goes before, is the preface to the ten commands, the first and principal of which is urged in

the preceding verse; and this is another reason why the Lord God should be had and worshipped, and not a strange god; and redemption from worse than Egyptian bondage, from the bondage of sin, Satan, and the law, and a deliverance from worse than Egyptian darkness, and from a state of wickedness and impiety, should lay under greater obligations still to serve the Lord, and worship him only; who adds, as a further reason for it,

open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it; which may be understood of opening the mouth either in prayer or in praise: to open the mouth wide in prayer is to pray with great freedom, to pour out the soul to God, lay open its whole case, and tell him all his mind and wants; to pray with great boldness, and with much importunity and fervency, and in full assurance of faith, pleading with great strength the promises of God, and asking in faith for much, according to them; and God may be said to fill this wide mouth of faith in prayer, when he grants the desires of the heart, gives his people what they will, even very largely and abundantly, yea, more than they can ask or think: to open the mouth wide in praise is to be abundantly thankful for mercies received; and when persons are so, the Lord fills them with more abundant matter for praise and thanksgiving; (see ^{<B7K8>}Psalm 71:8), or this may be interpreted of opening the mouth wide in expressions of desire after spiritual food, hungering and thirsting after spiritual things, when the Lord fills or satisfies the mouths of his people with good things, (^{<B3B5>}Psalm 103:5 ^{<B1B5>}Matthew 5:6), with the sincere milk of the word which they desire, and with the ordinances, the breasts of consolation they long for, and so satisfies them with the goodness and fatness of his house, (^{<B6D4>}Psalm 64:4), the metaphor seems to be taken from the young of birds, which open their mouths, and are filled by the old ones: the Targum is,

“open thy mouth to the words of the law, and I will fill it with every good thing.”

Ver. 11. *But my people would not hearken to my voice*, etc.] Neither as exhorting them to the above duties, nor as promising the above favours; would neither hearken to the voice of the law, nor to the voice of the Gospel; but were like the deaf adder, which stops its ear to the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely:

and Israel would none of me; would not attend to his word, acquiesce in his will, nor delight themselves in him, and in his worship and service; would have none of his salutary doctrines, or wholesome reproofs, nor of his laws and government; would not have him to reign over them, nor to be

their Saviour, though the only one, and there is none beside him; though the chiefest good, and from whom all good things come, and is the portion and exceeding great reward of his people: (see ^{<1025>}Proverbs 1:25,30).

Ver. 12. *So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust*, etc.] Sometimes God gave them up, when they sinned, into the hands of the Moabites, or Ammonites, or Philistines, or other neighbouring nations, for their chastisement; but to be delivered up unto their own hearts' lust is worse than that; nay, than to be delivered to Satan: salvation may be the consequence of that, but damnation of this; and yet it is a righteous judgment; for as men like not to retain God in their knowledge, it is but just with him to give them up to vile affections, to a reprobate mind, to do things not convenient, (^{<1024>}Romans 1:24,26,28) there is nothing men are more desirous of than to have their hearts' lusts; and there is no greater judgment can befall them than to be left to the power of them, which must unavoidably issue in their ruin here and hereafter: and they walked in their own counsels; which were bad; after the imagination of their own evil hearts, and not after the counsels and directions of God in his word, and by his servants.

Ver. 13. *O that my people had hearkened unto me*, etc.] This might have been expected from them, as they were his professing people; and it would have been to their advantage if they had hearkened to him, as well as it would have been well pleasing to him; for that is what is designed by this wish, which does not express the purposing will of God; for who hath resisted that? if he had so willed, he could have given them ears to hear; but his commanding will, and what is his approving one: to hearken to him is not only to hearken to what he commands, but to what he approves of; it is the good and acceptable will of God that men should hearken to the declarations of his will in the law, and to the declarations of his grace in the Gospel; and indeed it is the voice of Christ, the Angel of God's presence, who went before the children of Israel in the wilderness, which they were to hearken to and obey, that is here meant; (see ^{<1023>}Exodus 23:20-22), and (^{<1026>}Hebrews 3:6-8),

and Israel had walked in my ways; which he marked out and directed them unto, meaning his ordinances and commandments; which to walk in, as it denotes progress and continuance, and supposes and requires life and strength, so it is both pleasant and profitable.

Ver. 14. *I should soon have subdued their enemies*, etc.] The Canaanites, and others: this he would have done in a very little time, or at once, and that easily, and without any trouble; he would quickly have humbled them, and brought them on their knees, as the word ^{f1177} signifies, to terms of peace; for when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes his enemies to be at peace with him, (²⁰⁶⁷Proverbs 16:7) so those that hearken to the voice of Christ, and walk in his ways, he subdues their iniquities, and will bruise Satan under their feet shortly, and make them more than conquerors: through himself, over the world; the men and things of it he has overcome:

and turned my hand against their adversaries; that troubled, distressed, and oppressed them; and it is a righteous thing with God to render tribulation to them that trouble his people; he turns his chastising hand off of them, which sometimes is heavy upon them, and presses them sore, and turns it in a way of wrath and vindictive justice against their adversaries; and so the Targum,

“and turned the stroke of my power against their adversaries;”

this is the lighting down of his arm with the indignation of his anger, which is intolerable, (²³¹⁰Isaiah 30:30).

Ver. 15. *The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him*, etc.] Or, “lied unto him” ^{f1178}; feignedly submitted to him, flattered him, pretended friendship to him, and entered into a league with him; either Israel, mentioned (¹⁸¹³Psalm 81:13), our God, whom and whose worship and people they hated; as every natural man is an hater of God, and all that is good, and enmity itself unto him; but these shall all submit to Christ, sooner or later, in one way or another, and acknowledge him Lord, and that he is superior to them, and themselves not a match for him; as Julian the emperor when wounded, said, Thou hast overcome me, O Galilean:

but their time should have endured for ever; which Jarchi and Aben Ezra interpret of the calamities and vengeance that should come upon the haters of God, who will be punished with everlasting destruction; their worm will never die, nor their fire be quenched; it is everlasting, and the smoke of their torment will ascend for ever and ever; in which sense the word is used, (²³²²Isaiah 13:22) or rather this is to be understood of the time, or happy state and condition, of the Israelites, which would have been of long continuance, had they hearkened to the Lord, and walked in his ways; particularly, they would have long enjoyed the land of Canaan, which was

given to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession, and which they held by the tenure of their obedience, (^{<0178>}Genesis 17:8 ^{<2019>}Isaiah 1:19), and so all truly gracious souls, that hearken to the voice of Christ, and walk in his ways, are in a happy state, which will endure for ever; they are blessed with all spiritual blessings, and those are for ever; the heavenly land of Canaan they shall dwell in for ever; their mansions or habitations in Christ's Father's house are everlasting; their house, not made with hands, is eternal in the heavens; their estate, possession, and inheritance is an eternal one; it is incorruptible, and fades not away; their being with Christ is for ever; and their happiness is often expressed by eternal life and eternal glory.

Ver. 16. *He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat,* etc.] Or the "fat of the wheat"^{f1179}"; (see ^{<0324>}Deuteronomy 32:14), with the finest flour of it: the Targum is, "with the best bread of wheat;"

with the best of wheat, and the best bread that can be made of it: Aben Ezra interprets it of the manna, which was better than the fat, or finest, of the wheat, being the corn of heaven, and angels' food, (^{<0784>}Psalms 78:24,25), but it rather respects what the Israelites would have been continued to be fed with in the land of Canaan, which was a land of wheat, (^{<0888>}Deuteronomy 8:8), and such who hearken to the Lord, and walk in his ways, are fed by him with the Gospel, which is comparable to wheat, and the finest of it, for its choiceness and excellency, for its solidity and substantiality, for its purity and cleanness, and for its being of a nourishing and strengthening nature, (see ^{<0888>}Jeremiah 38:28), and especially Christ, the sum and substance of the Gospel, may be figuratively meant, with whom the saints are fed, and who is compared to a corn of wheat, (^{<0124>}John 12:24) for his preciousness and excellency, for his purity and fruitfulness, and for being the food of his people, the bread of life, for which he was prepared by his sufferings and death; which may be fitly expressed by the threshing, winnowing, and grinding of wheat, and then of kneading the flour, and baking the bread:

and with honey out of the rock would I have satisfied thee; the land of Canaan abounded with hills and rocks, in which bees had their hives, and from whence honey dropped to lower places; and hence the land is said to flow with milk and honey, (^{<0188>}Exodus 3:8 ^{<0523>}Deuteronomy 32:13 ^{<0125>}1 Samuel 14:25,26), nor is it unusual in other places to find honey in rocks; at Guadaloupe, in the West Indies, we are told^{f1180}, honey was found in

trees and caves of rocks. Aben Ezra interprets this of the water which flowed out of the rock at Horeb, which was sweeter than honey; but the former sense is best: the rock spiritually and mystically designs Christ, the Rock of salvation, (~~1~~1 Corinthians 10:4), the honey out of the rock, the fulness of grace in him, and the blessings of it, the sure mercies of David, and the precious promises of the everlasting covenant; and the Gospel, which is sweeter than the honey or the honeycomb; and with these such are filled and satisfied, who hearken to Christ, and walk in his ways; for, as the whole of what is here said shows what Israel lost by disobedience, it clearly suggests what such enjoy who hear and obey.