

Psalms: The Songs of the People of God
Psalm 81: A Call to Sincere Praise and True Devotion
Sunday, July 7, 2019

Introduction

Most of us are familiar with what Jesus calls the first and great commandment: We are called to love God fully and completely (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:28-30). But we are also all very aware of how hard it can be to remain faithful. Thankfully God, in His wisdom, has planned for us to come together each week so we can be reminded of who He is and what He has done and praise Him together.

Throughout the Scriptures we see different times that God appointed for His people to come together. One such time for the nation of Israel was the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). It was an annual feast when the people would praise God and remember His faithfulness and care for them during their time in the wilderness.

Psalm 81 was written with the Feast of Tabernacles in mind. It begins with a call to worship, a call for the people to gather and praise God. But what becomes clear as the psalm continues is that God is not pleased with many of the people. Many had forgotten His faithfulness and disobeyed His commands. The majority of the psalm is a call for the people to remember their God and to repent of their unfaithfulness.

A Call to Worship (81:1-5a)

- The psalm begins with a summons for the people to come to Feast of Tabernacles and to join in remembering and praising God. It's possible that this portion of the psalm may have been read or sung at the start of the annual feast.
- **The Heart of Worship (vv. 1-2)** – One thing that is emphasized throughout the psalms is that our love and gratitude for God and His salvation should be reflected in our praise. The psalmists often call for singing and shouting and even raised hands and dancing.
- **The Recipient of Worship (vv. 1)** – The psalmist makes it clear who is to be praised as he highlights God's strength and His faithfulness to His people (the God of Jacob).
- **The Duty of Worship (vv. 3-5a)** – Verses 3-5 reveal the setting of the psalm. The references to the moon and the sounding of trumpets connects this psalm to the Feast of Tabernacles. These verses are also reminders that God ordains and commands particular times and places for worship (in addition to daily and more spontaneous worship).

- **Matthew Henry** – *No time is amiss for praising God . . . But some are times appointed, not for God to meet us (for He is always ready) but for us to meet one another that we may join together in praising God.*

A Call to Remember (81:5b-10)

In vs. 5b the psalmist indicates a transition in the psalm and a change of voice. The rest of the psalm is a direct message from God for His people.

- **Remember My Deliverance (vv. 6-7)** – In verse 6 and 7 God reminds His people of all that He did in delivering them from Egypt and caring for them in the wilderness (Exodus 1:11; 2:23-25; 3:7-8). This is a good reminder to us of the importance of remembering our salvation and all the ways that God has been faithful to us (1 Corinthians 10:11).
- **Remember My Law (vv. 8-10)** – Here we see a transition as God begins to admonish His people. It is clear that they have begun to forsake His Law. In verses 8-10 He calls on them to remember and obey. He also adds that those who follow faithfully will be fully content and satisfied in Him (vs. 10b).

A Call to Repent (81:11-16)

- **The Rebellion of the People and God's Discipline (vv. 11-12)** – In verses 11-12 the primary reason for this oracle becomes clear: God's people had been unfaithful and He had enacted discipline (gave them over). This is a reminder of our own propensity to wander as well as a reminder of God's commitment to discipline those He loves in order to encourage repentance.
- **Application:** As we consider the setting of this psalm we are reminded of the temptation to insincere worship. Here the people have gathered for this feast of praise and remembrance, but it's also made clear that many of them had hearts that were far from God.
- **God's Desire to Forgive (vv. 13-16)** – As the psalm comes to an end the love of God for His people and His desire to show mercy are on full display. God desires for His people to repent and to return to Him. He is ready to deal with their enemies (vv. 14-15) and satisfy their souls (vs. 16).

Conclusion: On the whole the Psalm serves as a reminder of our own sinfulness and God's faithfulness. We should long to offer acceptable praise. This begins with our repenting of our sins and taking to time to remember God's salvation and all that He has commanded.