

Psalm 81 • God admonishes Israel

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Psalm 81. Psalm 81 is directed, you'll notice, to the chief musician. It speaks of recalling the feasts of Israel, and it's interesting because it almost sounds like a Psalm of praise at the beginning. But as we get further into it, we realize that all of this talk about the feast and stuff is really connected to the last two Psalms concerning a time when Israel has been destroyed, decimated by their enemies, but due to their own sin and rebellion against God. The references made in the beginning of the Psalm to the feasts of Israel are made more as a remembrance of better times.

But then we're going to find, toward the end of the Psalm, it ends on a rather sad note, speaking of missed opportunities. And that's the sorrow that goes along with sin, isn't it? That's what the psalmist is talking about here: the sorrow that goes along with sin and the missed opportunities. He says in verse 1,

“Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob! ² Raise a song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp. ³ Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. (Speaking of the feast of trumpets.) ⁴ For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob. ⁵ He made it a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a language I had not known.” (ESV)

And here's where the Lord begins to speak in verse 6 and following. You'll notice that this is God now talking through the psalmist, speaking to Israel. And look at what He says here:

“I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket. ⁷ In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.”

The waters of Meribah were along the way in the wilderness when Israel was set free from their bondage in Egypt, and they were on their way to the Promised Land.

What's being said here? God is reminding them that when they were in Egypt and under bondage in slavery, He said, I relieved you from that burden. In other words, I brought you out from that slavery. I freed you from the basket. And that speaks of the work that they were doing there. He says, you were in

distress. You called out to Me, and I answered. And then I tested you in the waters of Meribah. And then He goes on to say in verse 8,

“Hear, O my people, while I admonish you! (God has a word for Israel.) O Israel, if you would but listen to me! ⁹ There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god. 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.”

In these verses, God is reminding His people that He had commanded them to worship Him and worship Him alone. He also promised them great blessings along with that commandment. He said that if you would but open your mouth wide, I would fill it accordingly, and so forth, which speaks metaphorically of just how I will pour out My blessings to you, had you done this well, did they? No. Look at verse 11:

“But my people did not listen to my voice; (He says,) Israel would not submit to me. ¹² So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.”

This is one of the most challenging and sobering sorts of statements throughout Scripture, where the Bible talks about God giving people over to a particular pattern of behavior, or attitude, or thought process.

Paul uses the same language in the book of Romans, chapter 1, when he talks about how the wrath of God is being poured out upon the rebellion of mankind for hiding the very presence of God, for denying His existence, even though, he goes on to say, it's been made plain to them in all of creation. God made it plain that He exists. He did it through creation.

In fact, Paul says that God's divine being, His attributes, are clearly seen by what has been made, which is really kind of an interesting statement. (Romans 1:18-20)

And you read passages like that and think, wow, so creation actually speaks to us? Yeah. Elsewhere in the Psalms, we read, *“The heavens declare the glory of God...”* right? The skies, the heavens proclaim, and they speak constantly about who He is, that He is God. (Psalms 19:1)

And you think, well, how exactly does He do that? Well, there's something that God has placed inside every human being, and that is the ability to understand and recognize design when we see it.

When we look at things, we know what's been designed and what hasn't been designed. We know chaos and disorder when we see it, and we know order and design when we see it. We recognize it right away. We know it right away. Nobody has to tell us. Nobody has to tell us. It's just, it's there. It's there because God gave it to us. And so we look at creation, and we see this incredible design in all of creation, this order, this amazing order.

We can set our clocks by the sunrise and the sunset. We know when the sun is going to set 15 years from now on a particular day of the week, a particular day of the month. We know exactly when that's going to happen. Why? Because there's order in the universe. And that order shows forth design. We look at our bodies—the more we're doing, the more scientific information comes out about our bodies, the more we realize how amazing we are.

I mean, the Bible said it all along, *"...I'm fearfully and wonderfully made..."* (Psalm 139:14) but we're learning just exactly how wonderful that creation is in our physical bodies. We're learning that even a single cell contains information.

We've unlocked DNA now, and it's amazing! But what is DNA? It's information that's locked on the inside of a cell, and it just blows people away, and you're going, where'd that come from? There's this design that we see, and the more we look into it, the more we see design.

Well, here's the deal. God created in you and me the ability to recognize design when we see it. And the fact remains that where there is design, there must be a designer.

You know what? Even secular atheist scientists will tell you that there appears to be design in the universe. They'll admit it. And they've actually gone on record as saying things like, well, you have to understand that when you look at things, it's going to look like it's designed, but we know it's not.

It's exactly what Paul is saying: they're denying the reality. They're literally suppressing the truth, which is that there's a designer behind it all, and that sort of thing. It's just, it's really crazy.

So what happens when you keep suppressing and keep suppressing and keep suppressing? Well, eventually, Paul says there in Romans chapter 1 that you're going to be given over to the futility of your own thinking. And that's what he writes. They literally become foolish, and they begin to spout total foolishness because they've been given over to foolishness. (Romans 1:21-22 and 1:28)

This Psalm talks about how in verse 12, God gave them over—in this case, to the stubbornness of their hearts—and look at this: to follow their own counsel. You know, what does that mean? That means my wisdom. If I continually exalt

my wisdom above God's wisdom, eventually I'm going to be given over to that, to the point where I'm just going to follow my own stupid wisdom. And that's pretty much all I have because I'm denying God at every turn. Pretty soon, I'm just given over.

And when you think about the “wisdom” I put that in quotation, of this world that is spouted around you and me all day long, we can see that man has been given over to the futility of his own thinking. I mean, we've gotten really dumb about things.

Even though we're living in this information age, where we've got more information available to us now than we ever have in the history of mankind, we're getting dumber because we're given over to the futility of our thinking, and it's something that God said was going to happen.

Paul talks about it—these prophetic statements in Romans chapter 1. For example, take time to read it when you get a chance. You don't want to be given over.

Verse 13, He continues to kind of bemoan the situation:

“Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! ¹⁴ I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes.”

I would do the things that they want me to do if they would but listen, if they would but walk in my ways. He says,

“¹⁵ Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him, and their fate would last forever. ¹⁶ But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

So the Lord says, if you would but listen and follow, I would subdue your enemies, I would feed you. And that idea of honey from the rock is just the picture of the provision of the Lord—the supernatural provision of the Lord.