

Psalm 81: If only you would listen



## Psalm 81 (80) (Mode 1. 5....65 / 3.....23)

The psalmist, from the northern kingdom (Joseph), calls on the assembly to celebrate the festival in obedience to God's decree. Suddenly (verse 5c), he utters an oracle from God, calling on the people to heed God's word. To celebrate according to tradition is good, but we must always be open to the surprise of God's voice!

Note the covenant background: 'your God'(verse 10); 'my people' (verses 8, 11 and 13).

Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.  
Raise a song, and sound the timbrel,  
the sweet sounding harp and the lute.  
Blow the trumpet at the new moon,  
and when the moon is full, on our feast.

For it is a statute for Israel,  
a command of the God of Jacob,  
who decreed it for the house of Joseph,  
when we marched from Egypt.

We heard an unknown voice:

‘I relieved your shoulder of the burden;  
your hands were freed from the load.

You called in distress, and I rescued you.

Heavy loads were carried in large baskets. God heard their cry of distress.

‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them’(Exodus 3:7-8).

I answered you, hidden within the thunder.  
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.  
Hear, O my people, while I admonish you.  
O Israel, if only you would heed!

‘On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled’(Exodus 19:16).

See Exodus 17:7 for the ‘waters of Meribah’.

There are to be no strange gods among you;  
you will not bow down to an alien god.

I am the Lord your God.

It was I who rescued you from Egypt,

And I fed you when you were hungry.

‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you  
out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of  
slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.’

(Deuteronomy 5:6-7; see Exodus 20:3)

‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and  
incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.’

(Joshua 24:23)

But you would not listen to my voice.

Israel, you would not obey.

So I left you with your stubborn hearts,  
to follow your own designs.

‘You have behaved worse than your ancestors, for here you are, every one of you, following your stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me’(Jeremiah 16:12).

## Romans 1:24-28

‘Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts: to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves ... For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions ... And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.’



O that my people would heed me.

Israel, if only you would walk in my ways!

‘O that you had paid attention to my commandments!’

(Isaiah 48:18)

At once I would subdue your foes,  
and use my power against your enemies.

Those who hate the Lord would cringe before you,  
and their doom would last forever.

But you, Israel, will feast on the finest wheat,  
and on honey from the rock.’