

PSALM 81

“A Festival Meditation”

- Asaph “here again dwells upon the history of his people; his great forte seems to be rehearsing the past in admonitory psalmody. He is the poet of the history and politics of Israel. A truly national songster, at once pious and patriotic.” (Spurgeon)
- Jewish tradition connects this Psalm with the Festival known as Tabernacles, in the 7th month of the year
 - Some rabbis connect it to the Passover based on vs. 5 given the Exodus references.
 - Some see the abrupt change in vs. 5 means two separate poems smashed together later into one psalm.
 - “To pass from summons for celebration to consideration of its religious significance is natural” (Kirkpatrick)
 - Most see it as one psalm
- Title: “The *gittith*” also Ps. 8:1– either (a) a musical instrument from the city of Gath, played by the Philistines, or (b) a winepress
 - Most scholars go with the winepress – “a tune associated with vintage songs, party songs!”

- **1-5 Summons to Observe the Festival**

vs. 1 addressed to laity; vs. 2 to the Levites; vs. 3 to the priests

“horn” = *shofar* -- First day of the 7th month, blow on the *shofar*; Numbers 29:1; Lev 23:24 {the Passover was not celebrated in this way so more likely Feast of Tabernacles}

“feast day” = *chag*. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem on 3 days: Passover, Harvest, and Tabernacles per Deut 16:16.

“Joseph” = all of Israel

- **6-7 God’s Redemptive Acts**

“his shoulder” = the toiling Israelite bent under his burden of heavy labor

“heavy tasks” = “baskets”, in Egypt they had carried baskets filled with bricks and other building materials

shift from 3rd to 2nd person = not unusual in Hebrew poetry

“thundercloud” = “secret places of thunder” (two Hebrew words)

“waters of Meribah” = Ex 17:6-7, water out of a rock

- **8-10 The Fundamental Lesson**

“hear” = Ref to the Great “*Shema*” of Deut 6:4

Word order, NLT is great translation. The pain of God wanting Israel to please start listening to me!!!

9- do not worship any strange ‘El, or foreign ‘El; followed in 10 by “I am YHWH, your ‘El, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

- **11-12 Israel’s Failures**

“hearken” = *shema* again, My people did not hear my voice! [parallelism with vs. 8]

“was unwilling toward me” = NLT “did not want me around”

“their own stubborn desires” = God does not compel obedience, without the exercise of free will, morality loses all meaning. The Rabbis said of this verse: “All is in the hands of God except the fear of God.”

- **13-16 God’s Appeal to Israel**

13- “oh that my people would listen to me;” cf. 77:1 “Oh that God would listen to me” [Asaphian parallelism]

16 – “finest wheat” = literally “the fat of wheat” [the richest ears of corn]; “honey out of the rock”, both of these allusions come from Deut 32:13-14