

May 21

Scriptures: Read Psalms 81, 82 & 83

Key Verse: “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!”
(Psalm 81:13)

Overview

Psalm 81 was likely composed by Asaph, the musical Levitical choir leader who was a contemporary of King David. The psalm is a liturgical hymn that may have been used on the occasion of one or more feasts, such as the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Trumpets. We read a descriptive account of the opening ritual of the feast that was accompanied by an assortment of musical instruments, as well as the blasts of the trumpet, or ram’s horn (shophar), at specific times according to the lunar calendar. Asaph declared that it should be done in the prescribed way, for it was a law of God (81:4; Numbers 10:10).

With a prophetic utterance, Asaph speaks the words of God, who declares how He had freed His people from bondage in Egypt and gave them water from the rock at Meribah (81:7b; Exodus 17:6-7). He warns them not to turn to idolatry, for He has proven Himself to be their all-powerful God in whom they have all they need. Like trusting sheep, they need only open their mouths and the good Shepherd will feed them. If people today would only listen to Him (81:8) and obey Him, then they too would have all they need to fill their empty hearts and souls. God is truly our all-sufficiency!

Sadly, the Lord continues to tell how His people did not listen to Him. They persisted in doing evil, and so they suffered the most fearful of punishments — being given up to their sins without the restraint of His grace upon them (81:11,12; Romans 1:21-28). The Lord longed that they would return to Him, for if they had, they would have enjoyed only blessings and victory instead of curses and defeat.

In Psalm 82 Asaph rebukes the corrupt judges of his day. He warns that the Lord God stands to oversee every courtroom (2 Chron. 19:6-7). He brings judgment upon the judges, who are called “gods” because they are overlords in lofty positions (cf. John 10:33, 34-38). The judges were favouring the wicked and not giving justice to the common person, which implies that they were taking bribes. A judge in Israel was to represent God, so theirs was a great responsibility. Like God, they were to defend, give justice, and save the needy from the oppressors (82:3-4; Deut. 1:17). Only Jesus was one just Judge who rightly represented God. Truly these unjust, corrupt judges walked in darkness (82:2), and their sin was so great that Asaph felt it shook the very foundation of society (82:5); this is so true, for if the justice system fails, then wickedness goes unchecked.

Asaph further warns that although they are important, wealthy, and prestigious, in the end they will die like any other man and “fall like one of the princes” (82:7). A “prince” often symbolized the tyrants of the land, so if one behaves treacherously, they will ultimately suffer the treacherous consequences (Hebrews 9:27). There is hope, however, for on an appointed day in

the future, God will arise to judge the earth, and the great King, our Lord Jesus, will inherit all nations and rule righteously (82:8).

Psalm 83 is a prayer for God's protection from hostile neighbouring nations that were conspiring together against Israel. The most probable occasion was during the reign of Jehoshaphat when Moab and Ammon ("the children of Lot", 83:8; Gen. 19:37-38), the principle powers, formed a coalition and invaded the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Allied with this coalition was Edom, Syria, and others that are not mentioned by name in the Chronicles account but likely include some or all of the nations mentioned in this psalm (83:6-7; 2 Chronicle 20:1-2, 10-11). Interestingly, one of the sons of Asaph named Jahaziel, was moved upon by the Spirit of the Lord to declare that the battle is the Lord's and they need not fear (2 Chron. 20:14-17). He may well have been the Asaphite author of this psalm, for to have such faith in God's deliverance he likely spent much time in prayer that God would not "keep silent" (83:1) but "pursue", "frighten" (83:15), and "let them be confounded and dismayed" (83:17). As the history in 2 Chronicles records, this prayer was indeed answered, for God put the enemy in such confusion that they fought against each other and perished (2 Chron. 20:22-24).

In the psalmist's prayer, he referred to the many victories that God had given Israel during the time of the Judges, such as those against the Canaanite and Midianite coalitions (Judges 4:15-24; 7:25; 8:12). If God could win these victories, the psalmist was encouraged that God would do it again, and in so doing He would shame the enemies. The psalmist voiced God's ultimate goal in the destruction of the wicked: that these heathen nations may know that He alone is the Most High God and that they might seek Him and experience His salvation (83:16, 18).

Prayer

You, oh God, are our all-sufficiency, and You long to bless and deliver us if we will but listen to You and obey. We yield our stubborn wills to Your leading. Use us today, we pray.