

The Key to Restoration of Israel and Guaranteed Blessing

Psalms 80-81

In Psalm 80 Asaph gives us the key to the restoration of Israel as the vine. In Psalm 81 Asaph gives us the key for guaranteed blessing from the Lord.

Background Notes for Psalm 80

The title of Psalm 80 says it is a psalm of Asaph. It was set to the tune of *Shoshannim*, meaning “lilies,” and was used in worship. *Eduth* means “a testimony.” The Asaph who wrote Psalm 80 was probably a descendant of the Asaph of David’s time, because it seems that the occasion of this psalm was sometime after the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom of Israel, because the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, (the tribes descended from Joseph), are asking for restoration.

In verses 1-7, the figure of a shepherd and his flock is used. The Shepherd of Israel is the Lord Himself, who is seen as enthroned above the cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant. Verses 1-3: *“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us! Restore us, O God! Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”*

The sheep of the northern kingdom of Israel recognized that their tears, their disgrace, and their defeat were God’s discipline upon them because of their sins. *“O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure. You have made us a strife to our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved! (v4-7).”*

In verses 8-16 the figure for Israel changes from a flock of sheep to a grapevine, another frequently used symbol for Israel. The vine is seen as transplanted from Egypt. It has taken root in the land and spread out in all directions - west to the Mediterranean Sea and northeast to the Euphrates River. *“You have brought a vine out of Egypt. You have cast out the nations and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea and her branches to the River.”*

Then the Lord, as vineyard Keeper, is seen as taking down the protective hedge around the vineyard and allowing wild animals to steal its fruit. *“Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it. Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts. Look*

down from heaven and see, and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch that You made strong for Yourself” (v12-15).

The root and branch, or the shoot and son (v15), is not a reference to the Lord, but to Israel that had been cut down and burned by the invading Assyrians. *“It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance” (v16).*

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 80

1. The key to healing is recognition of the Son.

Psalm 80:17-19: *“Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. Then we will not turn back from You. Revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts. Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”*

Verses 17-19 are the Messianic portion of this psalm. Even a number of Jewish scholars see these verses as messianic. These words go beyond Israel as a “son” or “branch” to the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the Son of Man, and the Man of God’s right hand. He alone, the Lord Jesus, is the key to Israel’s healing and restoration. When Israel turns back to the Lord and receives her Messiah whom she rejected (and continues to reject), then and only then will the nation of Israel be revived and restored.

Then the threefold prayer request of this psalm will be answered.

Verse 3 – *“Restore us, O God. Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”*

Verse 7 – *“Restore us, O God of hosts. Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”*

Verse 19 – *“Restore us, O LORD God of hosts. Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”*

The key to Israel’s healing is the recognition of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and Savior - and this is the key to every individual person’s healing from the sickness of sin. Have you recognized the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and received Him as your only way of salvation? He is the only means of having God’s face shine upon you with blessing and favor. The key to healing is recognition of the Son.

Psalm 81:1-7 – *“Sing aloud to God our strength. Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. Raise a song and strike the timbrel, the pleasant harp, and the lute. Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob. This He established in Joseph as a testimony when He went throughout the land of Egypt. There I heard a language I did not understand. I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the baskets. You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah”*

Background Notes for Psalm 81

In Psalm 81 we have the key for continued blessing from the Lord. From the title, we see that Asaph is also the author of this psalm. It is for the choir or music director, on the Gittith, either the name of a tune or a musical instrument.

It's easy to see from the first couple of verses that this psalm is for joyful celebration! Was this joyful psalm sung at Israel's Feast of Trumpets, or at the Feast of Tabernacles? Maybe both! The first part of verse 3 says, "*Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon.*" This seems to indicate that the Feast of Trumpets was in view. This feast was held at the new moon of the seventh month, and it began the new year of the Hebrew civil calendar. The Feast of Trumpets is known as Rosh Hashanah.

However, the last part of verse 3 says, "*At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.*" This seems to point to the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival was in the middle of the seventh month, at the time of the full moon. The Feast of Tabernacles is known as Sukkot.

In either case, this psalm was used for a time of joyful celebration. God ordered it for His people to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt, and for His continued patience with them (v4-5). God did not listen to the language of the Egyptians who were not His people (v5) but He rescued Israel from their slave baskets and burdens of bricks and clay (v6). He protected them with His cloud covering in the wilderness and provided for them as well as tested them at the waters of Meribah (v7).

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 81

1. The key to blessing is obedience to the Lord.

In verses 8-16, we see God's key for blessing as He reviews and summarizes the overall history of Israel.

Psalm 81:8-16 - "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him, but their fate would endure forever. He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat, and with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."

These verses are an overview of Israel's history from the time of the Exodus. God gave His people the Law and promised to bless them if they would obey. But Israel did not listen to the Law, and they did not follow and obey the Lord. So God gave them over to the stubbornness of their own hearts, and they would reap what they had sown (v12). If only Israel had

walked in obedience to the Lord, how different their history would have been (v13)! The enemies who hated the Lord would have been quickly subdued and judged (v14-15), and they would have been blessed with an abundant harvest (v16).

The fact that verse 16 ends with a second person “you” indicates that when this psalm was written, it was not yet too late for Israel to repent and turn back to the Lord. In fact, we know from the prophetic Scriptures that Israel will return to the Lord in the future. Both the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles have prophetic implications: the re-gathering of Israel to the Land is seen in the Feast of Trumpets, and a great time of blessing during the millennial kingdom of Christ is seen in the Feast of Tabernacles.

Of course, there is the present-day application of these verses for all believers. The key to blessing is obedience to the Lord!

Practical Application

1. Don't make practical applications beyond the limits of Scripture!

Our application comes from Psalm 81:10 – *“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.”*

Some lazy Christians have used this verse to justify a lack of preparation for teaching a Bible study or preaching a sermon, or even answering a difficult Bible question. After all, they say, the Lord promises that all you have to do is open your mouth and He will fill it with the words for you to say. That is ***bad hermeneutics!***

You may have heard the hermeneutical principle “One interpretation, many applications.” In its context, the one interpretation of Psalm 81:10 is: Israel, if you follow the Lord and obey the Lord, then He will bless the nation abundantly. And a valid application of this promise for today is: Christians, if we follow the Lord and obey the Lord, He will bless us. This application is certainly backed up by the rest of Scripture. But saying we don't have to prepare a sermon or a Bible study but just open our mouths and start talking - no way! That's an unbiblical stretch! It's beyond the limits of the rest of Scripture.

But what about Matthew 10:19, where the Lord said, *“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak for it will be given you in that hour when you should speak.”* This verse means that in times of severe crisis, the Lord will give us the right words to speak.

Don't use Psalm 81:10 or Matthew 10:19 as justification for being lazy and not preparing properly. Don't make practical applications beyond the limits of Scripture!