



Sermon Notes | Help in the Psalms | Psalm 81

## **INTRODUCTION**

We will begin today in the Book of Deuteronomy, and then make our way to Psalm 81.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

This content of this proclamation will be familiar to many, even most. It is the Jewish Confession, the daily Jewish prayer which proclaims who God is. It is the 'Great Shema', meaning, the 'Great Hearing'. But, it is meaningless if the opening call is missed, 'Hear, O Israel'.

Moses, preparing Israel with God's requirements as they are about to enter the Promised Land, states:

Deuteronomy 6:1-3

*Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.*

The people are required to 'hear' the Commands of God. God instructs them in this important act. To begin, they must 'hear', for their sake, and for the sake of their children and grandchildren. It is no small matter. 'Hearing is fearing the LORD (verse 2), and 'hearing' is being careful to do what is heard because God has commanded it (verse 3). The blessing comes from 'hearing' and doing (verse 3b). This is true 'listening'. On the other hand, not hearing means not fearing God, that is, 'hearing', but not doing, 'hearing', but not 'listening' to the authoritative voice of the message. And this proved to be Israel. This was Israel, reciting and praying the words, but failing to act on the words.

Today we will examine God's Word to hear what it says about 'listening'. We will consider three points as we reflect on this topic of 'listening'.

1. God's Rule of 'Listening'.
2. Israel's Resistance to 'Listening'.
3. 'Listening's' Response.

Oh, That My People Would Listen to Me:

PSALM 81

*To the choirmaster: According to the Gittith of Asaph.*

*"Sing aloud to God our strength;*

*shout for joy to the God of Jacob!*

*Raise a song; sound the tambourine,  
the sweet lyre with the harp.*

*Blow the trumpet at the new moon,  
at the full moon, on our feast day.*

*For it is a statue for Israel,  
a rule of the God of Jacob.*

*He made it a decree in Joseph  
when he went out over the land of Egypt.*

*I hear a language I had not known;  
I relieved your shoulder of the burden;  
your hands were freed from the basket.*

*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.*

*Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!*

*O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*

*There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.*

*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.*

*But my people did not listen to my voice;*

*Israel would not submit to me.*

*So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow 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 foes.*

*Those who hate the LORD would  
cringe toward him,*

*and their fate would last forever.*

*But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."*

Father, as sang this morning, speak to us through these Your Words. As You did with Israel, do with us. May we have ears to hear. In Christ's Name. Amen.

Psalm 81 is a song. It is meant to be sung, perhaps with a gittith, a guitar or harp-like instrument, (likened to Psalm 5 which was meant for flutes). It was penned by Asaph to the choir director, one of twelve Psalms written by Asaph, who also wrote Psalms 50, and 73-83. Asaph was a Levite, a choir director, a chief musician, and responsible for sounding the cymbals.

1 Chronicles 16:4-5

*Then he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechariah, Jehiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiab, Obed-edom, and Jehiel, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals.*

This was all part of the continued call to 'sing' from the Psalms, and singing music is connected to 'listening'.

### **I. THE RULE FOR LISTENING: (vv. 1-7)**

Psalm 81:1-7

*Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob!  
Raise a song; sound the tambourine,  
the sweet lyre with the harp.  
Blow the trumpet at the new moon,  
at the full moon, on our feast day.  
For it is a statute for Israel,  
a rule of the God of Jacob.  
He made it a decree in Joseph  
when he went out over the land of Egypt.  
I hear a language I had not known:  
I relieved your shoulder of the burden;  
your hands were freed from the basket.  
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.*

In the Bible there are over 400 references to singing, and over 50 of these are commands to sing. Therefore, singing is important. Often these commands to sing are found in the Psalms. Today we consider this command to sing from a different angle. We sing not only because of the commands to do so, but we sing because God listens to our singing. He hears our singing. He 'hears' our prayers and our singing. 'Singing' was created to be 'given' to God, and for God's pleasure. God does not listen to sinners; God listens to those who sing in faith and worship.

John 9:31

*We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.*

God always 'hears' the believer's song. We make note of this fact. God Almighty of the Cosmos hears our song. He commands our song. He not only commands our song, but commands that we 'raise song' with 'instruments'.

Psalm 81:2

*Raise a song; sound the tambourine,  
the sweet lyre with the harp.*

'Song with instruments' are sweet and melodious sounds to God's ear. He commands 'song', but sweet song; beautiful song. And He calls for 'song' at specific times, for the yearly feasts, for the festival months, the feasts, and for specific days of the moon.

Psalm 81:3

*Blow the trumpet at the new moon,  
at the full moon, on our feast day.*

The importance of these times are noted and described in Leviticus. We read, for example, about the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast to the LORD, special 'times' set apart to celebrate, acknowledge, and worship Holy God.

Leviticus 23:23-25

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD."*

Leviticus 23:26-32

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath."*

Leviticus 23:39-43

*On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for*

*seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.*

It is noteworthy that all these special 'times' are associated with 'feasts'.

Leviticus 23:44

*Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the LORD.*

And so, Moses continues to provide the 'marching orders' for Israel's journey and life in the Promised Land, first transferring the 'torch' from himself to Joshua, his successor.

Deuteronomy 31:7-8

*Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it, It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."*

And then Moses commands that 'reading' be done, specifically, reading of the Law. The Law, given to Israel orally through Moses would now be 'read' through written text.

Deuteronomy 31:9-13

*Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this Law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that your going over the Jordan to possess."*

So, they are not only to sing, feast and remember, but there is to be 'hearing' and 'fearing' and 'doing', and therefore there is to be active participation.

Psalms 81:4-5

*For it is a statute for Israel,  
a rule of the God of Jacob.  
He made it a decree in Joseph  
when he went out over the land of Egypt.  
I hear a language I had not known..."*

It is established: It is the 'rule of God for listening', a song of statute. Why so? This is what God desires, for all of Israel to 'listen' for as long as they live, 'hearing', 'listening', learning, fearing, and doing! This is not new; it is what God has always asked of Israel, in

Jacob's time, and in Joseph's time. And God lamented that Israel failed to keep this decree.

Psalm 81:12-13

*So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels,  
Oh, that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!*

And so, it is a decree for all of Israel, for all generations, to sing and 'raise a song' to God, but why else must we sing and 'raise a song' to God? Let us look at the matter from another angle. So He hears it! He will not 'hear' if we do not sing.

We note the change in words from 'He' to 'I' where He states: "I hear a language I had not known," (Psalm 81:5). We 'sing' because we are the only ones that 'sing the worship' that God 'hears'. This is about the saints 'singing' God's song. God does not hear the false worship that goes on in many places. He does not hear sinful singing. The prophet Elijah declares this truth to Ahab who was not following God, but the Baals and other gods.

I Kings 18:18-21

*And he (Elijah) answered (Ahab), "I have not troubled Israel, but you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word."*

We read in the book of Amos that God wants nothing to do with false worship.

Amos 5:23

*Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.*

If God deserves 'worship', and He does, and if we are the ones who are 'fitted' to do so, to pray, and to 'sing', then, by implication, if we can do it, then WE MUST DO IT! We have been made to do it! For He only hears one language. He hears only the language of His people.

Psalm 81:6-7

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

He 'hears' His people. These words point to the Exodus, and their testing at Meribah. Israel's hands were freed of their burden. It was a time of deliverance. God 'heard' their cries of oppression, and He answered and delivered them. It demonstrates perfect 'listening'. This is God 'listening'. In Egypt, you spoke, and I 'listened'. Yes, I 'hear' you.

Today the world is filled with distracted children, selfish spouses, people just 'not listening', whereas 'real listening', 'true listening' results in focused 'action doing' as God demonstrated. He relieved burdens, freed hands, delivered the people, and then tested them. (Psalm 81:6-7) This is how we are to 'listen' also. As James points out, it is faith in God by doing works.

James 2:14-17

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

The rule then is to 'prove' your faith. Be responsible and active and demonstrate your faith in 'works'. 'Listening' is the active response that demonstrates that you have 'heard'. There is 'expectation' in the rule of 'listening'. Therefore, when we read our Psalm, it is expected that we will act on it.

Psalm 81:1

*Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.*

We are expected, by God Himself, if we are 'hearing' and 'listening', to then cry out expectantly, to 'shout for joy' and to 'sing aloud'.

Israel cried out to God in distress, and God 'heard' their cry and remembered His Covenant.

Exodus 2:23-25

*During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.*

This was how it all started. God 'heard' their cry. And God 'remembered' their cry. He was 'listening' and He 'heard'. And He remembered His Promise to Abram, and He responded. He moved, and He acted. And He delivered them. And initially, Israel 'sang' their praises.

Exodus 15:1-2

*Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying,  
“I will sing to the LORD, for he has  
triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has  
thrown into the sea.  
The LORD is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him.”*

But Israel would prove fickle when God put Israel to the test.

Exodus 15:22-26

*Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.*

*There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.*

So then, on the heels of their 'singing' they were found 'grumbling' and yearning for Egypt again, so they were not truly 'listening' to the voice of God. We read again of their post-Exodus responses to God, and how they tested the LORD.

Exodus 17:1-7

*All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarrelling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”*

Israel was 'not truly listening' to God's voice.



When you talk to God you 'expect' God to be 'listening' and you 'expect' Him to 'respond', and the expectation is that you in turn will also be 'faithful' and 'listening'. Israel has been called to worship their God, to 'sing aloud', to 'raise a song', to add in the beauty of the instruments, to celebrate the feasts with 'trumpet' song (Psalm 81:1-2.) This was God's desire for fulfilling worship of Him. It was decreed a rule, a statute for Israel to follow.

Psalm 95 is yet another psalm that calls Israel to 'sing' and to 'listen' to their God, and in which God laments about their history of failing to 'listen'.

Psalm 95:1-11

*Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the  
rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
For the LORD is a great God;  
and a great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.  
O come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!  
For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.  
Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,  
when your fathers put me to the test  
and put me to the proof, though they  
had seen my work,  
For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, "They are a people who go  
astray in their heart,  
and they have not known my ways."  
Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
They shall not enter my rest.*

And what of your rule for 'listening'? What is your 'measurement' for your 'listening' to God? Are you really 'listening' when people talk? How are you listening to God? How do you gauge that? We say, "Speak O Lord", but are you actually 'listening'? Do you read Scripture and just check it off as the 'finished' devotion and then move on to other things? Do you 'listen' for the 'voice of God'? Is the 'voice of God' in your ear, your mind? Does it penetrate your heart? Does it then come out of your lips and hands?

The Rule for Listening: TO 'LISTEN' IS TO 'ACT'.

## **II. THE RESISTANCE TO LISTENING: (vv. 8-11)**

Psalm 81:8-11

*Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!  
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!  
There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god,  
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,  
But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.*

Israel marked the festivals, knew the Shema and the Law, and they sang the Pilgrim songs, but were they 'listening' to God? To this day, they know what is expected, but do they really 'listen' and act?

No. The Orthodox Jews are very pious Jews, but they remain stiff-necked and have closed ears, and therefore their actions are rote and meaningless. They read the Law, they gather for festivals as commanded, but they do not really 'listen' to 'hear'. Israel deserved admonishment then, and now. Israel is 'resistant'.

Psalm 81:8

*Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!  
O Israel, if you would but listen to me.*

The prophet Jeremiah also speaks to Israel's behaviours and attitudes, their useless sacrifices. We note the connection to Psalm 81, and the same similarity of God's displeasure with Israel.

Jeremiah 7:21-26

*Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers."*

God says to Israel, 'Hear Me and Obey!', but no, they did not obey or incline their ear. They were not 'listening' to God. They were following their own counsel. They were

worse than their fathers had been. They were 'stiff-necked' and had 'closed ears' and were 'stubborn'. Christ Himself stated that Israel's leaders, the very Scribes and Pharisees, "preach, but do not practice". (Matthew 23:3) They spoke with right words, but had wrong actions. They would not 'submit' to God.

Psalm 81:9-11

*There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.  
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.  
But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.*

We note: Three Forms of Resistance:

1. Idolatry:

Idols are the things that you can not let go of. But God states that no idols shall come before Him.

Psalm 81:9

*There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.*

There are to be no other gods; only Him. God states this from the beginning.

Exodus 20:3

*You shall have no other gods before me.*

And yet, only twelve chapters and forty days after the Exodus, Israel is found idolizing a gold calf.

Exodus 32:1-4, 7-9

*When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the of Egypt!" ...*

*And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and*

*sacrificed to it and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people."*

The Prophet Isaiah reinforces that there is but One God and that idolatry is folly.

Isaiah 44:6-8

*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel  
and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts;  
I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.  
Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.  
Let him declare and set it before me,  
since I appointed an ancient people.  
Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.  
Fear not, nor be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and declared it?  
And you are my witnesses!  
Is there a God besides me?  
There is no Rock; I know not any.*

Isaiah 44:9-21

*All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together. The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"*

*They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"*

*Remember these things, O Jacob,  
and Israel, for you are my servant;  
I formed you; you are my servant;  
O Israel you will not be forgotten by me.*

Hosea 4:12

*My people inquire of a piece of wood  
and their walking staff gives them oracles.  
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,  
and they have left their God to play the whore.*

Idols, the things you cannot let go of; foolish and sinful idols. Idolatry will impair your 'listening' to God and to His Word, every time. Idolatry 'closes our ears', and ruins our 'listening'. The Apostle John warns us:

1 John 5:21

*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

2. Self Sufficiency:

Psalm 81:10

*For 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.*

You were a 'helpless' people, Israel, calling out to God.

And God heard their cry, and delivered them, and God fed them and provided for them in the wilderness. God kept them. But they failed to honour this truth, and they failed to remember God's Word or provision.

Zephaniah 3:1-2

*Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,  
the oppressing city!  
She listens to no voice;  
she accepts no correction.  
She does not trust in the LORD;  
she does not draw near to her God.*

Psalm 23:1-6

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Though God had protected and guided Israel, they failed to trust Him. Israel was bent to 'Self Sufficiency'. They would not trust God. They objected to correction. They would not 'listen'.

Are we bent to 'self sufficiency' also? Do we feel that we can trust no one? Do we feel that we are in need of no correction? Do we feel we are good, and therefore fail to 'listen'? 'Self Sufficiency' is harmful. It is a 'feigned' independence. But to 'depend' is to 'listen'.

### 3. Insubordination:

Psalm 81:11

*But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.*

By definition, the essence of 'insubordination' is when a person is 'unwilling to listen'. It has a trickle down effect, always!

And Israel would not submit to God. It has been a 'wicked habit' through the ages, from Adam's fall, through Saul's election, to Israel's outright rejection of their incarnate King, Israel has failed to submit to God. They continually refuse to 'listen'. We read in the book of Daniel his understanding of the matter.

Daniel 9:6

*We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.*

'Insubordination' is like 'self control'; it is a problem. It affects all parts of our life. It creates 'resistance' to 'listening' and 'hearing'. May we never lament our 'listening' but be active 'hearers and doers'.

### **III. THE RESULT OF LISTENING: (vv. 12-16)**

Psalm 81:12-16

*So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,*

*to follow 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 foes,  
Those who hate the LORD would cringe toward him,  
and their fate would last forever.  
But he would feed you with the finest  
of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock  
I would satisfy you.*

God "gave them over" (Psalm 81:12) to their stubborn hearts. This was God's judgment on those who would not 'listen'. The Apostle Paul also writes about God 'giving them over'.

Romans 1:21-26a, 28-32

*For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions...*

*And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

And supporting this judgment call of 'giving over' we read in Job:

Job 8:4

*If your children have sinned against him,  
he has delivered them into the hand  
of their transgression.*

The result of 'not listening' is awful disaster: God 'giving them over'. Stubborn behaviour leads to disaster. Rarely do we hear 'I will not listen to God. I choose disaster.' But the result of 'not listening' is to 'follow their own counsels', their own counsels referring to wickedness. It is an 'I think it is good', 'it seems right to me' choice, but in truth, it is 'ill listening'. We recall the 'quiet disaster' that fell on King Rehoboam when

he 'listened' to his friends instead of his proper advisers; the United Kingdom dividing into two once again.

1 Kings 12:3-15a, 20

*And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you." He said to them, "Go away for three days, then come again to me." So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" And they said to him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever." But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. And he said to them, "What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?' " And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,' thus shall you say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.' "*

*So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, "Come to me again the third day." And the king answered the people harshly and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him, he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." So the king did not listen to the people...*

*And when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. There was none that followed the house of David (Rehoboam) but the tribe of Judah only.*

And we recall the 'quiet disaster' that fell upon the Prodigal Son who thought he knew best, and called to be given 'his share' before leaving home. And once again, 'our own counsel' proved to be awful.

Luke 15:11-15

*And he [Jesus] said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything."*

There is no worse fate for man than to 'listen to his own counsel'. No worse fate "can overtake a man than to be left to do what he chooses" when we fail to 'listen'.



Psalm 81:13

*O that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!*

God equates 'listening' to walking in His Ways! Not skipping by too quickly, but walking with God, and walking in His Ways. Skipping by too quickly equates with 'not listening', not knowing Him. These are desperate expressions: to hear God, but to not walk out what is heard. Not walking with God is not to know God, but rather is listening to one's own counsel. Proverbs calls us to be wise and to avoid our 'own counsel', and to trust in God's Ways.

Proverbs 3:5-7,23

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.  
Be not wise in your own eyes;  
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.  
Then you will walk on your way securely,  
and your foot will not stumble.*

'Listening' for Israel, directly, meant Covenant blessings: subdued enemies, satisfaction, and regeneration. Covenant blessing came with Covenant faithfulness and whole hearted devotion to God, 'listening' to His purposes and acting on them; living for Him.

Psalm 81:1

*Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob.*

Psalm 81 was specifically directed to the Jews and to Israel, and thus, we as Gentiles (the Church) only derive principles here (as we do with many Old Testament texts). So, as we look to examples from this psalm, let us note: This is the people of the God of Jacob (Psalm 81:1). We are not some new Israel. We are Gentiles, saved by faith (like the faithful Israel). We are grafted into the tree.

We also share some of the same blessings, and indirectly, all of them, but we are not a 'new Israel'. We are completely different people, not Jews. But having been 'grafted in', we obtain and experience some of the blessings now. Walking with God, we gain a new heart, and eyes that can see Yahweh.

Matthew 28:10

*Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."*

And we gain ears that can hear about subjection and enemies. And when we 'listen' to God as New Covenant believers, we experience 'subjection' to the Holy One in our souls.

Jew or Gentile, the results of 'listening' are positive, gracious, and worthy.

Let us Consider Three Examples of the Results of 'Listening' as presented in Psalm 81.

1. Enemy Subjection: (vs 14)

Psalm 81:14

*I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes.*

By 'listening' to God and finding favour with Him, God promised His chosen people their own land, the LORD's Land for Israel, which they would access by the LORD's provision and Hand. He would subdue the enemy, making them captive slaves for Israel to rule over. This is His Promise of restoration, and victory over the enemy.

Isaiah 14:1-2

*For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.*

2. Enemy Judgment: (vs 15)

Psalm 81:15

*Those who hate the LORD would cringe toward him, and their fate would last forever.*

Yahweh will judge the enemies of Israel. Ezekiel addresses the prophesies against the specific nations in chapters 25-32 of his book. We will note two of them, Edom and Philistia:

Ezekiel 25:12-14

*Thus says the Lord God: "Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them, therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance," declares the Lord God.*

Ezekiel 25:15-17

*Thus says the Lord God: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy*

*the rest of the seacoast. I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I lay my vengeance upon them.”*

The context also establishes that the enemies within Israel, the unfaithful, the 'non listeners', those that cringe, those who feign/pretend submission (NKJ), will also be dealt with, and will be 'exposed finally'.

Ezekiel 20:38

*I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*

This provides a principle for God's people, in Israel, but also in the Church.

By 'listening' to God your vision and discerning heart become clear.

Whereas, the 'non listener', the rebel, will 'cringe' and pretend, and feign submission to God, and will 'cringe' before 'true listeners'. Paul, the Apostle, addresses such when he states:

1 Corinthians 11:18-19

*...when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.*

3. Faithful Blessing: (vs 16)

Psalms 81:16

*But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.*

God blesses the 'listener'. This is Yahweh's loving kindness, and especially for Israel, for the day will come when they will repent and be blessed.

Ezekiel 37:11-14

*Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel; And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.” ’”*

Joel 3:17-18

*So you shall know that I am the LORD your God,  
who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.*

*And Jerusalem shall be holy,  
and strangers shall never again pass through it.  
And in that day  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and the hills shall flow with milk,  
and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water;  
and a fountain shall come forth from  
the house of the LORD  
and water the Valley of Shittim.*

Jerusalem shall be a happy place. Back in the Land, secure, and lavishly being fed, they will be satisfied, as promised in verse 16 of the Psalm.

And there is a principle for us as well. To be satisfied is 'to listen'; for the LORD satisfies and richly blesses the faithful and the obedient. 'Listen', obey, and be blessed.

The LORD provides a detailed list of blessings and curses, the full chapter of Deuteronomy 28, blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience. We read in part, a sampling of the chapter.

Deuteronomy 28:1-6

*And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.*

Deuteronomy 28:15-19, 47a

*But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments, and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out... Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart...*

The Apostle Paul addresses the idea of blessings and curses in spiritual terms.

Galatians 6:7-9

*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

Philippians 4:11-13, 19

*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me... And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

James also addresses wrongful actions and attitudes that fail to meet God's standards, and encourages us to act righteously.

James 5:1-9

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is a hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

One must 'listen' in order to be blessed, therefore examine your heart: What of its fruit?

Help in the Psalms Application: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

1. Listening 'rightly' requires the mind.

We must set our mind on God, not on the things of man. Therefore remove the distractions.

Mark 8:29-31

*And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."*

*And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

2. Listening requires courage.

Find, engage, and understand what is said. Have no fear of man. Avoid laziness and idleness. Flex your muscles and be diligent. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Our

passage demonstrates that we must not be fearful of asking for clarification so that we understand the truth.

#### Mark 9:1-13

*And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. And they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."*

#### Mark 9:14-29

*And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."*

#### Mark 9:30-32

*They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the*

*hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

Do not be afraid to ask questions!

### 3. Listening requires humility.

We must 'listen' without our own agenda. Pride impairs Biblical listening and understanding.

We note the arrogance and pride of the disciples. They were not listening.

Mark 10:32-40

*And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

God opposes the proud. He wants us to be mindful of Him, not ourselves. It is to be God's Way, not our own.

### 4. Listening requires salvation:

'Listen' and 'Hear'.... Salvation makes the eyes right by God.

Mark 10:46-52

*And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.*

Bartimaeus had no sight, only ears to 'hear', and he 'listened'. He heard the Saviour, and he responded in faith with cries for mercy. Jesus made his eyes right, and Bartimaeus became a follower of Him. By Christ he was given sight, both physical and spiritual eyes.