

The psalmist Asaph calls on Israel to praise and celebrate God in this psalm, reminding them of the goodness that God has shown them when He rescued Israel from their slavery in the land of Egypt. Speaking in God's voice, Asaph reminds Israel of God's provision and protection in the past and that rebellion against God results in poverty and being oppressed by their enemies.

To the chief Musician upon Gittith, *A Psalm* of Asaph.

“To the chief Musician” – This psalm was intended to be used by the worship leader at the temple/tabernacle for the worship of the LORD.

“upon Gittith” – The meaning of the Hebrew word “gittith” is uncertain. Some commentators speculate that it is the name of a musical instrument or perhaps a musical style to be played when reciting this psalm.

“A Psalm of Asaph” – The words “A Psalm” are in italics, indicating that they are not present in the original Hebrew. The Hebrew literally reads “of Asaph,” indicating that Asaph was the author of this psalm.

1 Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

“Sing aloud unto God our strength” – The psalm begins by inviting Israel to worship God in song. God is described as being “our strength,” acknowledging that they were helpless without Him and that He was the One Who made them strong.

“make a joyful noise [to shout in triumph or applause] unto the God of Jacob” – The idea seems to be to celebrate God in much the same way as fans celebrate their favorite sports team at a stadium. They shout and applaud to express their love and approval for their team and the psalmist urges us to do the same for God.

2 Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.

When making this “joyful noise,” the psalmist suggests utilizing psalms and musical instruments such as the timbrel (tambourine) and harp to glorify God. Music is one of the most effective means we humans have to express emotions such as love and admiration, and the psalmist wants us to utilize it to glorify God.

3 Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. 4 For this was a statute for Israel, *and* a law of the God of Jacob.

“Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day” – The seventh month in the Hebrew calendar began a series of celebrations to honor the LORD. It commenced with the blowing of trumpets at the beginning of the month, followed by the Day of Atonement on the 10th and the Feast of Tabernacles on the 15th. The psalmist is reminding Israel to observe these celebrations.

“For this was a statute for Israel, *and* a law of the God of Jacob” – These celebrations were required by the Mosaic law (Ex. 12:18; Lev. 23:24).

5 This he ordained in Joseph *for* a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: *where* I heard a language *that* I understood not.

Joseph here represents Israel, who led the way into Egypt for his family. The psalmist is remembering when God delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, a place where they “heard a language [they] understood not.” The fact that the Egyptians spoke a language they did not understand was a reminder that they were strangers in Egypt and they were not to permanently dwell there. The celebrations of the seventh month were a “testimony” and a reminder of what God did for Israel when they were in Egypt.

6 I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. 7 Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

“I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots [baskets]” – By speaking in the LORD's voice, the psalmist reminds Israel of how the LORD delivered them from the labors and burdens of Egypt where they carried bricks in baskets.

“Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee” – God heard the cries of His people and He rescued them through Moses (Ex. 3:7 “*And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows*”).

“I answered thee in the secret place [place of hiding or shelter] of thunder” – This may be a reference to Mt. Sinai where the presence of God was manifested by lightning and thunder. God answered their calls for help by bringing them to Mt. Sinai, away from the Egyptians.

“I proved [tested; examined] thee at the waters of Meribah [strife; dispute]” – Meribah was the place where Israel complained to Moses about the lack of water and the LORD had him strike the rock in order to provide water for the people. God brought them to Meribah as a test and their complaints and attitude showed that they failed (Ex. 17:1-7). Their failure should inspire gratitude to God for His forgiveness of their sin.

“Selah” – Most commentators believe this word is an instruction to stop and consider what has been said. Asaph may be urging his listeners to stop and think about what God has done for them.

8 Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;

Continuing to speak in God's voice, Asaph calls on Israel to listen to and obey what the LORD commands them to do.

9 There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. 10 I *am* the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

“There shall no strange [foreign] god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god” – The LORD forbids Israel from worshipping any of the gods of the other nations. These gods are foreign to Israel and they are to remove all such idols from their land.

“I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt” – The LORD reminds them that He is the One Who brought them out of Egypt. No other god did that for them and no other god should have a place in their heart as an object of worship.

“open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” – The LORD, as their God, brought them out of Egypt and He promises to provide for them if they will look to Him for their needs. The LORD wants to fill their mouths with food like a mother bird filling the open mouths of her babies.

11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. 12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: *and* they walked in their own counsels.

“But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me” – The LORD points out that despite all that He’s done for Israel, they did not obey Him. The phrase “Israel would none of me” could be slightly rephrased as “Israel would have none of me,” which is a strong statement describing their outright refusal to obey the commands of the LORD.

“So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust [stubbornness]; *and* they walked in their own counsels [plans; ideas]” – Since they did not want to obey the LORD, He allowed them to follow the plans of their own stubborn hearts and thus experience the consequences of their rebellion (v. 14). The heart of mankind’s sinful nature is rebellion against God. We think our ways are the best and we stubbornly follow our own plans and ideas instead of submitting ourselves in obedience to God.

13 Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, *and* Israel had walked in my ways! 14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

“Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, *and* Israel had walked in my ways!” – The LORD expresses His sorrow over the fact that Israel did not listen and obey Him. He wanted to be good to Israel and bless them but their rebellion prevented that. No doubt God has the same sorrow when Christians do not listen to His word nor walk in His ways.

“I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries” – If Israel had not rebelled then the LORD would have gladly intervened between them and their enemies. However, He could not bless them in their rebellion and so He withdrew His hand of protection from Israel.

15 The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.

“The haters of the LORD should have submitted [to deceive; to feign obedience] themselves unto him” – Many people in Israel pretended to submit themselves to the LORD, but they actually hated Him in their heart. They went through the motions of obedience, but not because they loved God (**Isa. 29:13** “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men”).

“but their time should have endured for ever” – Some commentators interpret this line to indicate the eternal punishment of the haters of the LORD. Others see it as referring to the LORD’s desire to establish a time of endless or eternal blessings for His people, a thought that easily flows into the next verse.

16 He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.

This verse further expresses the LORD’s desire to provide the best for His people, a desire that He could not fulfill due to Israel’s rebellion. When will we learn that our sin is a barrier to God’s blessing? God wanted to bless Israel but He could not bless them because of their sin. **Isa. 59:1-2** “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Isaiah is saying that the reason the LORD was not blessing Israel was not because of a deficiency in the LORD. The problem was that Israel’s sin had caused the LORD to turn away from them.