

Psalms 81:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

Analysis

God laments Israel's stubbornness: "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" (Hebrew *lu ammi shome'a li Yisra'el bid-rakai yehaleku*). The interjection "Oh that" (Hebrew *lu*) expresses divine pathos—God's genuine desire for His people's obedience, not for His benefit but theirs. "Hearkened" (Hebrew *shama*) means more than hearing; it indicates responsive obedience. "Walked in my ways" pictures ongoing life conduct aligned with God's revealed will. The verse reveals that covenant disobedience grieves God and harms His people.

Historical Context

This echoes the tragic pattern throughout Judges and Kings: Israel repeatedly rejected God's ways, pursuing idolatry and alliances with pagan nations. Deuteronomy 5:29 records similar divine longing after giving the Ten Commandments. Jesus wept over Jerusalem with similar pathos (Luke 19:41-44).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does God's expressed desire for obedience reveal about His character and your relationship with Him?
2. In what areas of life are you walking in your own ways rather than God's, and what are the consequences?
3. How does Christ fulfill perfect obedience on behalf of His people, and how does His Spirit enable us to walk in God's ways?

Interlinear Text

וְלִי עַמִּי שָׁמַע לִי יְהוָה ! שְׁכֵנִי בְּדִרְכֵי
Oh that my people had hearkened unto me and Israel in my ways
H3863 H5971 H8085 H0 H3478 H1870

וַיֵּלֶךְ
had walked
H1980

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 48:18 (Parallel theme): O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea:

Deuteronomy 5:29 (Parallel theme): O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!