

Psalms 81:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony (עדות ביהוסף שמו)—Edut (testimony, witness) often refers to the tablets of the Law (Exodus 25:16). **Joseph** here represents the entire nation descended from Jacob, particularly Ephraim (Joseph's son), the leading northern tribe. **When he went out through the land of Egypt** recalls the Exodus.

Where I heard a language that I understood not—Israel's oppression under Egyptian taskmasters speaking a foreign tongue. The sudden shift to first person ('I heard') may represent the psalmist identifying with Israel's slavery, or it introduces God's direct speech (continuing through v. 16). This festival testimony ensured each generation would know the bitterness of slavery and sweetness of redemption.

Historical Context

Joseph's descent to Egypt (Genesis 37-50) providentially positioned Israel for 430 years in a foreign land (Exodus 12:40-41). The Egyptian language and culture were utterly alien to Hebrew shepherds. The Passover and other festivals were established as perpetual memorials (edut) so Israelites would tell their children 'what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does remembering past seasons of 'Egyptian bondage' (spiritual slavery, pre-conversion life) strengthen present faithfulness?
2. Why does God establish testimonies and memorials rather than trusting each generation to maintain spiritual fervor independently?
3. What 'strange language' (worldly philosophy, cultural pressure) threatens to drown out God's clear voice today?

Interlinear Text

בְּיַהֲוֵסֶת	בְּיַהֲוֵסֶת	שָׁמֵן	בְּצָאתָה	עַל
for a testimony	in Joseph	This he ordained	when he went out	H5921
H5715	H3084	H7760	H3318	
אֶלְעֶזֶר	מִצְרָיִם	שָׁפֵת	לֹא	אֲשִׁמָּעָה
through the land	of Egypt	a language	H3808	that I understood
H776	H4714	H8193	H3045	where I heard
				H8085

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 114:1 (References Egypt): When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;

Jeremiah 5:15 (Parallel theme): Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say.

Deuteronomy 28:49 (Parallel theme): The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

Psalms 77:15 (Parallel theme): Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

Exodus 12:27 (References Egypt): That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

Exodus 11:4 (References Egypt): And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt:

Exodus 12:12 (References Egypt): For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.