

Psalm 81:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

God speaks to Israel: "Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me" (Hebrew sh-ma ammi v-a-idah b-kha Yisra-el im-tish-ma li). "Hear" (Hebrew shema) echoes Deuteronomy 6:4, the Shema. "I will testify" (Hebrew ud) indicates covenant lawsuit—God bears witness. "If thou wilt hearken" makes blessing conditional on obedience. The verse is a tender appeal: God desires relationship, pleading with His people to listen. Covenant love motivates divine testimony.

Historical Context

The covenant lawsuit (rib) pattern appears throughout prophets (Micah 6:1-8, Hosea 4:1-3). God indicts Israel for covenant breaking while offering restoration if they return. The Shema commanded Israel to "hear" and obey (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Jesus repeatedly said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15, 13:9). Hearing requires responsive obedience, not mere auditory reception.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between hearing God's word and truly hearkening to it with responsive obedience?
2. How does God's tender appeal ("O my people") despite Israel's failure reveal His covenant love?
3. In what ways does the Holy Spirit enable Christians to "hear" and obey what Scripture commands?

Interlinear Text

תְּשִׁמְעָה עַמִּי וְאַתָּה יִדְעָה בְּנֵי שְׁבָא לְ אֶם תְּשִׁמְעָה
Hear O my people and I will testify unto thee O Israel Hear
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Additional Cross-References

Psalms 50:7 (Witness): Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.

Isaiah 1:19 (Parallel theme): If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

Exodus 15:26 (Parallel theme): And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

John 3:11 (Witness): Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

1 John 5:9 (Witness): If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

Acts 20:21 (Witness): Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalms 81:13 (References Israel): Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

Deuteronomy 5:27 (Parallel theme): Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.

Deuteronomy 32:46 (Witness): And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law.

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