

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Psalms: Living By Faith In God
LXXXI. Obtaining God's Livelihood Security
(Psalm 81:1-16)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Right now, most Americans view livelihood security to be a difficult or even an impossible goal to reach:

(1) "A new study from CNBC and Momentive reveals that an alarming 70% of Americans are dealing with financial pressure due to increasing costs and stagnant wages, and the situation is only worsening . . . No one is immune, as every income range reports stress, various types of debt, and dwindling savings." (Jon Dulin, "Study Shows 70% of Americans are Stressed About Money," September 27, 2023; [msn.com/en-us/money/realestate/](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/realestate/))

(2) Other reports support this finding: (a) United Way of Connecticut recently released its ALICE report, ALICE being "an acronym for Asset-Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed," those "unable to earn enough to make ends meet or keep from falling behind," and it stated that "39% of the 1.4 million Connecticut households" live below the ALICE threshold, and "68% female-headed households with children lived below the ALICE threshold." (Paul Hughes, "ALICE report offers stark figures for state," Republican-American, September 20, 2023, p. 1A) That threshold is "\$39,000 for a single person and \$126,000 for a family of four." (Ibid.) (b) Also, Serah Louis' September 14, 2023, article reported financial stress on higher wage earners, telling it in the article's title as follows: "An economic divide that is widening': Almost a third of Americans earning \$150,000 a year or more say they're living paycheck to paycheck and many rely on credit cards to close the gap." ([moneywise.com](https://www.moneywise.com))

(3) Government action has only enhanced this problem: The "standard of living" has fallen "since early 2021," and "Americans can afford less with their hard-earned dollars" since "Bidenomics' big spending has fueled higher inflation, resulted in larger-than-projected deficits and contributed to a record level of government debt." (Veronique de Rugy, "Are ordinary Americans buying 'Bidenomics'?" (Ibid, Republican-American, September 25, 2023, p. 8A)

(4) The national debt itself is a big concern to financial experts: Filip De Mott's story, "US debt interest payments are unsustainable and flash 'huge warning signs' as they take over federal spending, budget experts warns," (September 23, 2023; markets.businessinsider.com/news/) reported, "The trajectory of US debt interest payments is not sustainable Maya Mac Guineas told Insider."

Need: *So, we ask, "Is it possible in today's world to obtain livelihood security, and if so, how?!"*

- I. **Psalm 81 was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Psa. 81:3), a feast God instituted to cause Israel not only to thank Him for His agricultural provisions at the end of the harvest season, but also to recall His "protective care during the 40-year period in the wilderness . . . when Israelites lived in tents . . ." Lev. 23:43)." (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 208)**
- II. **God's protective care for Israel in the wilderness had been both comprehensive and reliable: He had daily given Israel manna as food for 40 years (Ex. 16:26, 35), He had brought water even out of a rock (Ex. 17:5-6), He had caused the people's clothes and shoes not to wear out for 40 years in the wilderness (Deut. 29:5) and he had given them victory in battle over humanly superior foes (Deut. 29:7-8; 3:1-11).**
- III. **Psalm 81:1-3 thus opens with a summons for Israel to praise the Lord and verses 4-7 briefly remind the people of the nation's Exodus from Egypt and of God's gracious provisions for Israel in the wilderness.**
- IV. **However, at Psalm 81:8-10, the psalmist urged Israel to recall God's call that she worship no other god but the Lord Who had provided so well for the nation in the wilderness, and if they were to continue to hold to Him alone, He would supply Israel with abundant livelihood provisions in the Promised Land.**
- V. **Nevertheless, the psalmist reported that Israel had often failed to cleave to the Lord alone as God, so He had let her indulge in her own lusts and wisdom to her loss of His livelihood provisions, Psalm 81:11-12.**
- VI. **The Lord then lamented the fact that Israel had often hurt herself by turning from Him, for had she hearkened to Him and obeyed Him, He would have subdued Israel's foes to leave them cringing before God, and He would have fed Israel with the finest of wheat and "honey from the rock," Psalm 81:13-16. This figurative "honey from the rock" phrase recalls Moses' claim in Deuteronomy 32:13 that God would cause the most barren, rocky land in Israel to be agriculturally very productive. (Ibid., p. 318)**

Lesson: *Recalling God's pledge richly to meet Israel's livelihood needs for heeding Him but recalling how Israel had often missed such blessing due to idolatry, the psalmist called Israel to cleave to God alone for her livelihood.*

Application: (1) *May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.* (2) *May we cleave to the Lord as our God and trust and obey Him instead of false "gods" or "idols" that He might fully meet our livelihood needs.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and provide additional guidance . . .)

Trusting the Lord as our God and obeying His Word versus cleaving to false "gods" or "idols" handles all the issues of financial concern that are presented in our sermon introduction, and we clarify this truth (as follows):

(1) Though most of us who live in Western nations generally do not worship pagan gods or idols, Colossians 3:5b states that *pleonexia*, "seeking to have more; greed" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 699; Richard C. Trench, *Syns. of the N. T.*, 1973, p. 81) is the sin of "idolatry." This vice is a common sin in our world, and it is spreading worldwide, showing up as materialism, a lust for acquiring more possessions for fulfillment and/or for security.

(2) Addressing this sin by cleaving to the Lord as one's true Source of livelihood security solves the issues of concern mentioned in our sermon introduction (as follows): (a) The fact that 39% of Connecticut's households live below the ALICE annual income threshold of "\$126,000 for a family of four" (Ibid., Hughes), and that almost a third of Americans earning \$150,000 a year live paycheck to paycheck with many subsidizing that income by increasing their credit card debt (Ibid., Louis) ***point to a spiritual problem, for many families I know in our area take in less than even \$100,000 per year, but they still do well financially!*** (b) For the solution, then, the Bible directs us (+) not to covet as a condition for God to meet our material needs (Hebrews 13:5-6), but many people go heavily into debt to buy things they really do not need, living on a thin margin of financial safety, and when inflation hits them, they go under! [In listening to a Dave Ramsey program one day, I heard a couple call to complain that they were unable to pay their bills, and their annual income was \$240,000! They were making payments on big, frothy debts for new vehicles, a huge mortgage, large credit card debts and extensive student loans!] Thus, (+) Scripture calls us to do our own work for a living (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), (+) to be frugal (John 6:12), (+) to budget (Luke 14:28-30), (+) to plan and save for the future with what we already possess instead of squandering it (Proverbs 21:20), (+) to avoid financial debt (Proverbs 22:7; 11:15), (+) to prize what we already possess to remain wisely frugal (Proverbs 12:27), and (+) not to love costly pleasures and possessions lest we squander our money and become poor (Proverbs 21:17; 25:16)! (+) We must thus rely on the Holy Spirit to be content with what God supplies for our needs and responsibly manage our income so that we wisely use our money! (c) Regarding the fact that 68% of female-headed households with children live below the ALICE threshold in Connecticut (Ibid., Hughes), Megan McArdle's column, "Children will benefit if we face this fact: Married parents are ideal" (Ibid., *Republican-American*, September 22, 2023, p. 6A) reported, "The evidence is overwhelming that the decline of marriages over the past few decades has been very bad for children and . . . for society . . . More than 1 in 5 American children now live with an unpartnered mother . . . Boys appear to especially suffer from the lack of a father in the home. They are less likely to finish high school or graduate from college, more likely to be incarcerated, (and) more likely to have children of their own outside marriage . . . (O)ne of the best predictors of economic mobility is growing up in a neighborhood full of two-parent families . . . (N)o government program can replicate the benefits of two parents in the home . . ." We thus must heed Scripture to (+) rely by faith on the Holy Spirit for behavior control (Galatians 5:16, 22-23) that we might (+) obey God's Word in getting married before being physically intimate and having children (Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:18a) that we might avoid many social ills, including needless financial poverty! (d) As for financially difficult times due to the actions of government officials that cause inflation and other related monetary problems, God's Word (+) at Psalm 37:8-9 states, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." This passage in light of Philippians 4:10-19 for the Church era shows that all we materially need to fulfill God's calling for us in our current era will be provided by the Lord as we heed His calling for our lives. (+) Also, God promises to take care of our livelihood needs so that we need not fret over them even though wicked rulers financially harm the economy with their actions, for David in the same psalm where he addressed the problem of abusive people, in Psalm 37:3-4, wrote: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." In verse 25 of that same psalm, David added: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." One's right spiritual relationship with the Lord elicits God's oversight to meet his livelihood needs regardless what difficulties he faces over which he has no individual control.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we then cleave to the Lord as our sole God and trust and obey Him instead of looking to false gods like greed and materialism that He might adequately meet all of our livelihood needs.