

Psalm 83

A Song [or] Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 83: The ominous background of this psalm of national lament lies in the threatening confederacy of almost all of Israel's hostile neighbors (verses 5-8). Nowhere in the Old Testament is there such an assortment of enemies arrayed against the nation, with the possible exception of a similar group that opposed Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:1-12). In answer to this situation the psalmist offers an initial petition (verse 1), expresses his lament (verses 2-8), and then renews his petition for the Lord's intervention (verses 9-18). Citing both His deliverance in the past (verses 9-11), and His reputation at stake in the present crisis (verses 16-18).

Verses 1-18: This psalm, a national lament which includes prayer and imprecations, may be best studied with a map since several individual national enemies of Israel are noted. (2 Chron. 20:1-30), may record the specific historical event prompting this psalm, though some Bible students believe that the nations mentioned are only symbolic of all of Israel's enemies. The psalmist begs God to rescue Israel from its enemies as He had done so many times in the past.

- I. A Plea for Help (83:1).
- II. A Protest Against Israel's Enemies (83:2-8).
- III. A Petition for Divine Judgment (83:9-18).

Verses 1-8: Sometimes God seems not to be concerned at the unjust treatment of his people. But then we may call upon him, as the psalmist here. All wicked people are God's enemies, especially wicked persecutors. The Lord's people are his hidden one; the world knows them not. He takes them under his special protection. Do the enemies of the church act with one consent to destroy it, and shall not the friends of the church be united? Wicked men wish that there might be no religion among mankind. They would gladly see all its restraints shaken off, and all that preach, profess, or practice it, cut off. This they would bring to pass if it were in their power. The enemies of God's church have always been many. This magnifies the power of the Lord in preserving to himself a church in the world.

Psalm 83:1 "Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God."

Which he is thought and said to do, when he does not answer the prayers of his people, nor plead their cause, nor rebuke their enemies. When he does not speak a good word to them, or one for them, or one against those that hate and persecute them.

"Hold not thy peace": Or "be not deaf" to the cries and tears of his people, and to the reproaches, menaces, and blasphemies of wicked men.

"And be not still, O God": Or "quiet", at rest and ease, inactive and unconcerned, as if he cared not how things went (the reason follows in verse 2).

This Psalm of Asaph is an appeal to God to intervene and save Israel. When God speaks, the world listens. Asaph is not asking God to send a warrior to lead them back. Asaph is fully aware that God Himself could bring them back, if He would speak up.

Psalm 83:2 "For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head."

“Thine enemies”’: Throughout this psalm, the hostile nations are described as God’s enemies.

It appears to me that, these enemies of God and God's people are taking advantage of the fact that God is letting them fight their own battles. This is the chance for the enemy to come in and destroy Israel. They have even begun to brag about the conquest.

Psalm 83:3 "They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones."

The people of Israel, hereafter named, whom God had chosen and affirmed to be his people. These they dealt with delicateness, as the king of Egypt had done with their forefathers. And this, agreeably to their character, being the seed of the old serpent, subtler than any of the beasts of the field. These devised cunning devices, formed crafty schemes for the destruction of the Lord's people. But often so it is, that the wise are taken in their own craftiness, and their counsel is carried headlong.

"And consulted against thy hidden ones": Not hidden from the Lord, and unknown unto him, though from their enemies, and unknown by them, and so the object of their hatred and persecution. But hidden by him as his jewels and peculiar treasure, which he takes care of. Hidden under the shadow of his wings, in the secret of his presence and tabernacle, as in a pavilion. And therefore, it was a daring piece of insolence in their enemies to attack them. So the life of saints is said to be hid with Christ in God, which denotes both its secrecy and safety (see Col. 3:3). The Targum is, "against the things hidden in thy treasures". Meaning the riches of the temple.

We have discussed before how the enemies of God try to destroy God's people. This is the case here. God will stop them from destroying them. The hidden ones are hidden by God.

Psalm 83:4 "They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from [being] a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance."

“Cut them off”’: The hostile nations, under Satan’s influence, repudiated God’s promise to preserve forever the nation of Israel (compare Gen. 17:7-8; Psalm 89:34-37).

The Israel that they would like to stop are two-fold. They would like to stop the nation of Israel. They want to stop spiritual Israel (the church), as well. There is just One standing between them and victory, and that is God. Jesus has actually set up habitation in the church. Their memories of Israel are frightening. They knew that in the past they could not overcome Israel, because Israel's

God would fight for them. Now that they feel that Israel's God has forsaken them, they think they can whip Israel.

Psalm 83:5 "For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:"

Or "heart". Wicked men are cordial to one another, and united in their counsels against the people of God, and his interest. Whatever things they may disagree in, they agree in this, to oppose the cause and interest of true religion, or to persecute the church and people of God. Herod and Pontius Pilate are instances of this.

"They are confederate against thee": Or have made a covenant against thee. The covenant they had entered into among themselves, being against the Lord's people, was against him. And such a covenant and agreement can never stand; for there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord (Prov. 21:30). This the psalmist mentions to engage the Lord in the quarrel of his people, and not be still, and act a neutral part. Since those were his enemies, and confederates against him, and they are next particularly named.

The enemies of the nation of Israel are many. All of the countries driven out before them are enemies of Israel. It appears from this, that a group of nations have come together against Israel. The main thing they have in common is that they hate Israel. They are a confederacy, not only against Israel, but against Almighty God.

Psalm 83:6 "The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes;"

"Edom ... Hagarenes": The list of nations represents Israel's enemies throughout its history. Edom descended from Esau and lived southeast of Israel. The Ishmaelites, descendants from Abraham and Hagar, were Bedouin tribes. The Moabites descended from Lot (compare verse 8), and were tribal people living east of the Jordan (compare Judges 11:17-18; Isa. Chapters 15 and 16). The Hagarenes were a nomadic tribe living east of the Jordan (1 Chron. 5:10; 19-20).

Esau was the father of the Edomites. He thought so little of his birthright, that he sold it for a bowl of soup. He had always hated Israel, even though he was related to them. Ishmael had been the son of Abraham and the bondwoman. The Ishmaelites descended from him. They had always hated the Israelites, because they were Abraham's children with Sarah. Abraham gave Isaac (Israelite), the right hand (spiritual), blessing and gave Ishmael (son of the bondwoman Hagar), the left hand blessing [which is of the flesh]. It appears that the Hagarenes were the descendants of Hagar. This group of people felt as if they had been cheated, and they all hated Israel. In fact, this feud is still going on today between the Arabs and the Jews.

Psalm 83:7 "Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre;"

"Gebal ... Tyre": Gebal was probably a community south of the Dead Sea, near Petra in Edom. Ammon, a nation descending from Lot, was located east of the Jordan River. The Amalekites, nomads living southeast of the Jordan River, were descendants of Esau (compare Gen. 36:12, 16;

Exodus 17:8-13; Num. 24:20; Judges 6:3; 1 Sam. 15:1-8). Philistia was located southwest of Israel (see Judges chapters 14 and 15). Tyre was northwest of Israel (compare Ezek. Chapter 27).

Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek were all foes of Israel and had been for years. We know the Philistines were off and on in war with Israel all the time. The Philistines had blinded Samson, they were also the group that captured and desecrated the Ark. David had killed the giant from the Philistines. Tyre had many men who worked on the tabernacle, but that was for money. They were really never friends with Israel.

Psalm 83:8 "Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah."

This dominant nation of the eighth century B.C. took captive the northern 10 tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. Assyria used smaller nations, like Moab and Ammon (the children of Lot; compare Gen. 19:36-38), to accomplish its military goals.

Assur was just one more evil group to come against Israel. The children of Lot were the nations that formed from Lot through incest with his daughters.

Genesis 19:36-38 "Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father." "And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same [is] the father of the Moabites unto this day." "And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-ammi: the same [is] the father of the children of Ammon unto this day."

The nations of Moab and Ammon are part of this evil conspiracy. Selah; means it is time to pause and think of the evil of all these nations coming against Israel. This battle (in a sense), has never stopped. This is the battle of good and evil.

Verses 9-18: All who oppose the kingdom of Christ may here read their doom. God is the same still that ever he was; the same to his people, and the same against his and their enemies. God would make their enemies like a wheel; unsettled in all their counsels and resolves. Not only let them be driven away as stubble, but burnt as stubble. And this will be the end of wicked men. Let them be made to fear thy name, and perhaps that will bring them to seek thy name. We should desire no confusion to our enemies and persecutors but what may forward their conversion. The stormy tempest of Divine vengeance will overtake them, unless they repent and seek the pardoning mercy of their offended Lord. God's triumphs over his enemies, clearly prove that he is, according to his name JEHOVAH, an almighty Being, who has all power and perfection in himself. May we fear his wrath, and yield ourselves to be his willing servants. And let us seek deliverance by the destruction of our fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

Psalm 83:9 "Do unto them as [unto] the Midianites; as [to] Sisera, as [to] Jabin, at the brook of Kison:"

“Midianites ... Jabin”: The psalmist reminded God of famous past victories. Gideon had defeated the Midianites (Judges 7:19-25). Barak and Deborah defeated Jabin and his army commander, Sisera, near the Brook Kishon (Judges chapters 4 and 5).

Midian was the location of God’s victory through Gideon, and “Sisera” was defeated by Deborah and Barak. God could be counted on to fight for His people in the future as He had in the past.

We see Asaph looking back at the miraculous destruction God had brought about in the past against those who opposed Israel. Asaph is saying, do the same thing to these enemies.

Psalm 83:10 "[Which] perished at En-dor: they became [as] dung for the earth."

Aben Ezra and Kimchi understand this of the Midianites. But rather it is to be understood of Jabin and Sisera, and the army under them, who perished at this place, which is mentioned along with Taanach and Megiddo (Joshua 17:11). Which are the very places where the battle was fought between Jabin and Israel (Judges 5:19). According to Jerom, it was four miles from Mount Tabor to the south, and was a large village in his days, and was near to Nain, the place where Christ raised the widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11).

"They became as dung for the earth": Being unburied, they lay and rotted on the earth, and became dung for it (see Jer. 8:2). Or were trodden under foot, as dung upon the earth. So the Targum, "they became as dung trodden to the earth."

This is speaking of the brook suddenly overflowing its banks and drowning the enemy of Israel.

Psalm 83:11 "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna:"

“Oreb ... Zalmunna”: These men were chiefs of the Midianites when they were defeated by Gideon (compare Judges chapters 6-8).

This is just saying, kill the ruler as same as the foot soldier. Gideon captured and killed Zebah and Zalmunna.

Psalm 83:12 "Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession."

Not the kings and princes of Midian just mentioned, but the confederate enemies of Israel, named in (Psalm 83:6 above). To whom the like things are wished as to the Midianites and others, because they said what follows.

"Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession": Not only the temple, which was eminently the house of God, but all the habitations of the Israelites in Jerusalem, and other places, where the Lord granted to dwell. Unless this should be ironically spoken by their enemies calling them so, because they pretended, as they reckoned it, to have and to hold them by the gift of God. Whereas, of right, they belonged to them, at least some of them. Such a claim was made

by the Ammonites in the times of Jephthah (Judges 11:13). And to dispossess the Israelites was the intention of the Ammonites and Moabites in the times of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:10).

The houses of God had great possessions of silver and gold. Their eyes were on the wealth they could loot. They did not realize, to rob God is a fatal mistake. We have people now, who are breaking into churches and stealing things they can use or sell. This is a very dangerous thing to do. The curse this type of action would bring would be an eternal curse.

The psalmist uses several dramatic similes in his prayer for the destruction of Israel's enemies.

Psalm 83:13 "O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind."

Which, as the Targum adds, is rolled, and goes on, and rests not in a downward slope. Let them be as fickle and inconstant as a wheel. Being in high, let them be in slippery places, and brought down to desolation in a moment; like a wheel set running downhill, so let them swiftly and suddenly come to ruin. Or be in all kind of calamities, and continual troubles as the wheel is always turning. Some think there is an allusion to the wheel by which bread corn was bruised (see Isa. 28:28). But the word signifies a rolling thing before the wind, as a wisp of straw or stubble, which is easily carried away with it. Jarchi interprets it of the tops or down of thistles, which fly off from them, and roll up, and are scattered by the wind (see Isa. 17:13). And which agrees with what follows.

"As the stubble before the wind": Which cannot stand before it, but is driven about by it here and there. And so wicked men are, as chaff and stubble, driven away in their wickedness, with the stormy wind of divine wrath and vengeance. And chased out of the world, which is here cursed.

Perhaps, this wheel means that they will turn over and over and never stop. The stubble of the field blows away with the wind. This unattached wheel would be like the stubble, it would roll over by the slightest wind, but never get anywhere.

Psalm 83:14 "As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;"

Or "forest"; which is sometimes done purposely, and sometimes through carelessness, as Virgil observes. And which is done very easily and swiftly, when fire is set to it. Even all the trees of it, great and small, to which an army is sometimes compared (Isa. 10:18).

"And as the flame setteth the mountains on fire": Either the mountains themselves, as Etna, Vesuvius, and others; or rather the grass and trees that grow upon them, smitten by lightning from heaven, which may be meant by the flame. In like manner, it is wished that the fire and flame of divine wrath would consume the confederate enemies of Israel, above mentioned. As wicked men are but as trees of the forest, and the grass of the mountains. Or as thorns and briars, to the wrath of God, which is poured out as fire, and is signified by everlasting burnings.

Fire burns the wood and leaves nothing but ashes. Lightning striking a tree in the forest can destroy a large area of trees. Sometimes forest fires look as if the whole world is on fire.

Psalm 83:15 "So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm."

Pursue them with thy fury, follow them with thy vengeance. Cause it to fall upon them like a mighty tempest.

"And make them afraid with thy storm": God has his storms and tempests of wrath and vengeance, which he sometimes causes to fall upon wicked men in this life. To their inexpressible terror, and with which he takes them out of this world. And he has still more horrible ones to rain upon them hereafter (see Job 27:20).

Asaph is asking God to let His vengeance come upon these evil people. God really controls the wind, sea, the lightning, and all other things of nature. God could send whatever problem He desired upon them.

Psalm 83:16 "Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD."

For their sins, or rather through disappointment, not being able to put their desperate and deep laid schemes into execution. Or "with lightness"; instead of a weight of honor and glory upon them, let them be despised. R. Joseph Kimchi renders it, "fill their faces with fire"; let their faces be as if they were on fire, as men's faces are, who are put to an exceeding great blush, or are most sadly confounded and ashamed.

"That they may seek thy name, O Lord": Not they themselves, who are filled with shame; for it is cursed, that they be ashamed, and troubled for ever, and so as to perish (Psalm 83:17). But others; for the words may be supplied, as in (Psalm 83:18), "that men may seek thy name, or that thy name may be sought". The judgments of God upon wicked men are sometimes the means of arousing others, and putting them upon seeking the Lord, his face, and his favor. That God would be merciful to them, pardon their iniquities, avert judgments from them, and preserve them from threatened calamities. And this is a good end, when answered (see Isa. 26:9).

I guess one of the best examples in all the Bible, about someone being shamed for what they had done, was Paul. He had actually persecuted the Christians. When he came face to face with the Light of this world, he repented and changed. Asaph is saying here, show them your face and make them ashamed for what they have done.

Psalm 83:17 "Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish:"

As long as they are in this world, and to all eternity in another; a dreadful portion this.

"Yea, let them be put to shame, and perish": Wholly and eternally, in soul and body, for evermore.

He is saying here, that since they will not change, bring your everlasting judgement upon them. He is asking the Lord to destroy them, before they destroy Israel.

Psalm 83:18 "That [men] may know that thou, whose name alone [is] JEHOVAH, [art] the most high over all the earth."

“Know ... most High”: The purpose of the maledictions against the hostile nations is neither personal nor national, but spiritual: that the nations may know and glorify God.

“May know ... is JEHOVAH”: The Gentile nations need to know that the God of the Bible is the only God.

So many times in prayer, I have said, Lord, show them who You are. This is what Asaph is saying here. Asaph says to God, defeat these mighty nations that have come against Israel, and all of the nations will glorify your name. We do know that the incident at the Red Sea made many a country reluctant to come against Israel, because of the Mighty God that had done the miracle for them. When this was written a good amount of time had passed since God had brought Israel out of Egypt with His mighty Hand, and these nations around Israel had forgotten that God fights for Israel. If God were to do this for Israel here, Asaph says, all the nations around would know the power of JEHOVAH the Almighty God. JEHOVAH, THE SELF EXISTING ONE, THE ETERNAL ONE, whatever you choose to call Him, there is no greater. He is Supreme Ruler of the universe.

Psalm 83 Questions

1. What is the 83rd Psalm asking?
2. The hidden ones, in verse 3, are whom?
3. What Israel are they trying to destroy in verse 4?
4. This group of nations that have come against Israel have one thing in common, what is it?
5. Who was the founder of the Edomites?
6. Who are the Ishmaelites?
7. Who were the Hagarenes?
8. What were two terrible things the Philistines did to Israel?
9. What had Israel done to the Philistines?
10. What were the two evil countries that came from Lot and his two daughters?
11. What happens to those who rob God's house?
12. What happens to wood that is burned?

13. Which natural elements does God control?
14. Who is the best example in the Bible of someone, who was ashamed of what he had done, and then came to Christ?
15. What is God called by in verse 18?
16. What are some other names He goes by, just as powerful?