

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 83 — Enemies of God's People Are God's Enemies

1.0 Introducing Psalm 83

- Psalm 83 is the Psalter's last psalm by Asaph (Psalms 50, 73–83).
- Verses 9-17 contain requests for judgment on enemies in much the same manner as the imprecatory psalms (Psalms 7; 35; 69; 109).
 - ✓ See the Introduction to Psalm 35 in the notes on that psalm (www.drbarrick.org/sermons.html).
- “One is tempted not to bother with the message of this little-read psalm. It could be said that its main claim for attention is that canonical tradition has placed it between two better-known psalms: 82 and 84.”—Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 349.

2.0 Reading Psalm 83 (NAU)

83:1 A Song, a Psalm of Asaph.

O God, do not remain quiet;
Do not be silent and, O God, do not be still.

83:2 For behold, **Your enemies** make an uproar,
And **those who hate You** have exalted themselves.

83:3 They make shrewd plans against **Your people**,
And conspire together against **Your treasured ones**.

83:4 They have said, “Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation,
That the name of Israel be remembered no more.”

83:5 For they have conspired together with one mind;
Against You they make a covenant:

83:6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites;

- 83:7** Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
- 83:8** Assyria also has joined with them;
They have become a help to the children of Lot. **Selah.**
- 83:9** Deal with them as with Midian,
As with Sisera *and* Jabin at the torrent of Kishon,
- 83:10** Who were destroyed at En-dor,
Who became as dung for the ground.
- 83:11** Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb
And all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
- 83:12** Who said, "Let us possess for ourselves
The pastures of God."
- 83:13** O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like chaff before the wind.
- 83:14** Like fire that burns the forest
And like a flame that sets the mountains on fire,
- 83:15** So pursue them with Your tempest
And terrify them with Your storm.
- 83:16** Fill their faces with dishonor,
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.
- 83:17** Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever,
And let them be humiliated and perish,
- 83:18** That they may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD,
Are the Most High over all the earth.

For the choir director; on the Gittith.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 83

3.1 Outline

- I. Petition for Divine Attention (v. 1)
- II. Presentation of Danger All Around (vv. 2-8)
- III. Precedents for Divine Action (vv. 9-12)
- IV. Prayer for Destruction and Acknowledgement (vv. 13-18)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** "O God"
 - Names of God in this psalm are as follows:
 - ✓ *'Elohim* (verses 1a, 12, 13)
 - ✓ *'El* (verse 1b)
 - ✓ *Yahweh* (LORD, verses 16, 18a)
 - ✓ *'Elyon* (verse 18b; cp. Psalm 82:6)
 - The threefold appeal in verse 1 is typical Hebrew emphasis.

- v. 2 “Your enemies . . . those who hate You”
 - Enmity against God’s people is actually enmity against God Himself.
- v. 3 Chiasm
 - A against Your people
 - B They make shrewd plans
 - B’ And conspire together
 - A’ against Your treasured ones
 - “Your treasured ones” (literally, “Your hidden ones”); cp. Psalm 27:5.
- v. 6 “Hagrites”
 - The Hagrites are most likely descendants of Hagar (Genesis 16) = Ishmaelites.
 - They may have been a nomadic tribe living east of the Jordan (1 Chronicles 5:10, 18-20).
- v. 7 “Gebal”
 - Gebal is probably an ancient name for Byblos in Phoenicia (Ezekiel 27:8-9).
 - It forms an inclusio of this verse with another Phoenician city, Tyre.
- v. 8 “Selah.”
 - “We cannot always tell why these *selahs* occur where they do, but this is an example of a pause well placed, for it is important for us to reflect on the terrible persecutions of these ancient people of God before going on to the prayer that God might judge their enemies.”—James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 2:684.
- v. 9 “Midian” (see Judges 7)
 - Asaph appeals to the testimony of history, like a legal precedent.
- v. 9 “Sisera and Jabin” (see Judges 4–5)
- v. 10 “En-dor”
 - “Although ‘En-dor’ does not feature in Judges 4–5, it is mentioned alongside Taanach in Josh. 17:11, and Taanach was the site of the decisive battle against the Canaanite alliance according to Judg. 5:19.”—Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 275.
- v. 11 “Oreb and Zeeb” (see Judges 7:25)
- v. 11 “Zebah and Zalmunna” (see Judges 8:21)
- v. 13 “the whirling dust”
 - A thistle or tumbleweed might be more accurate as a translation.

- This “is the thistlelike wild artichoke plant (*Gundelia Tournefortii*) which in Arabic is called ‘*akkūb*. It separates itself from its root, assumes the form of a spiral, and then, driven by the wind, like a wheel (גלגל) rolls over the fields”—Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, trans. by Hilton C. Oswald, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 163.
 - Compare Isaiah 17:13.
 - Asaph employs images in a crescendo building from plants (the tumbleweed and the chaff) to a raging fire to a full-blown storm of cyclonic proportions.
- **vv. 16, 18** “That they may seek . . . That they may know”
 - Such statements do not necessarily refer to the conversion of the nations. It could mean nothing more than that they are forced into submission (cp. Philippians 2:10-11).
 - The phraseology “know that I am the LORD” (or, “know that I am the Lord GOD”) occurs 63 times in Ezekiel.
 - See Exodus 7:5; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 19:19; 2 Chronicles 20:29; Isaiah 37:20; Ezekiel 25:11 (Moab), 17 (Philistia); 26:6 (Tyre); 35:15 (Edom); 36:23 (nations).

4.0 Singing Psalm 83

O God, No Longer Hold Thy Peace

Tune: “I Sing the Mighty Power of God” and “There Is a Fountain”

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| <p>1 O God, no longer hold Thy peace,
No longer silent be;
Thine enemies lift up their head
To fight Thy saints and Thee.
Against Thine own, whom Thou dost
love,
Their craft Thy foes employ;
They think to cut Thy people off,
Thy church they would destroy.</p> <p>3 Make them like dust and stubble
blown
Before the whirlwind dire,
In terror driv’n before the storm
Of Thy consuming fire.
Confound them in their sin till they
To Thee for pardon fly,
Till in dismay they, trembling, own
That Thou art God Most High.</p> | <p>2 Thine ancient foes, conspiring still,
With one consent agree,
And they who with Thy people strive
Make war, O God, on Thee.
O God, Who in our fathers’ time
Didst smite our foes and Thine,
So smite Thine enemies today
Who in their pride combine.</p> |
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— *The Psalter*, 1912

5.0 Praying Psalm 83

- Father, answer my prayer. [v. 1]
- Protect Your people, O God. [v. 3]
- Lord, put Your enemies to shame. [v. 17]
- Make the unbelievers understand that You are the Most High. [v. 18]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 83

- Divine omnipotence makes man's power impotent.
- An attack on God's people is an attack on God Himself.
- Even in judgment the Most High reveals Himself.

Let all kings and tyrants, all oppressors whatever their role and status, take notice. Let the people of God whenever they are ringed about with threatening foes lift up their hearts. The king of all nations and the judge of all the earth hears prayer and will in his own time and ways sweep his foes away as a fire roars through a forest and sweeps over the mountains in blazing fury. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the LORD."

—Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC, 349

Surrounded — 10 Enemies of Israel in Psalm 83:

