



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 83

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# Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Song. A Psalm of Asaph*
- The author *Asaph* was the great singer and musician of David and Solomon's era (1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:5-7, 25:6)
- 1 Chronicles 25:1 and 2 Chronicles 29:30 add that Asaph was a prophet in his musical compositions
- This is the last of the Psalms that carry the name of Asaph
- In spite the fact that no records of the event of this Psalm had been preserved, but it is possible that the Psalm refers to some episode in Jewish history
- Scholars differ as to the occasion when this Psalm was written



# Introduction

- Some commentators think that the Psalm refers to the coalition against Jehoshaphat described in 2 Chronicles 20
- Many connect it with the events related in 1 Maccabees 5
- These enemies were provoked by the success of Judas in restoring the Temple, 1 Maccabees 5:9
- Others refer the Psalm to the Persian period, and connect it with the opposition to the rebuilding of the city described in Nehemiah 4:1,7, where Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites are mentioned among the enemies of Judah



# Introduction

- And others see the collection of many enemies set against Israel as not referring to one specific occasion, but to the constant danger the Israel lived under
- This Psalm may be applied to the enemies of the Church, all anti-Christian powers representing to God their coalitions against Christ and His Church
- The psalmist prays in the hope that all the enemies' plans will be thrown and defeated, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church



# Introduction

- This Psalm starts in the form of a collective lamentation; but ends as usual by a praise to glorify and thank God for His work with His people amid their affliction
- It is a prayer that though enemies from every side should conspire to destroy Israel, God's Church, and believers, God would block and prevent their plans and make their evil an opportunity to reveal His Own Sovereignty, Authority, and Omnipotence
- Although this Psalm bears the type of a collective lamentation, yet it is still called *a Song*, a praise



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- The Plans of the Wicked People 83:1-8
- An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15
- This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- Verses 1-4: An urgent prayer that God will come to the rescue of His people, whom their enemies are conspiring to destroy and wipe them out
- Asaph sang this prayer in a time of national crisis
- Enemies had come against Israel who were set on their national destruction
- If God were to *keep silent* or hold His *peace* or *be still* on behalf of Israel, they would be destroyed
- God seems to be indifferent to the danger of His people
- But He has only to speak the word, and their plans will be utterly stopped and disturbed

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- God oftentimes, seeming as though silent and not caring for the stirred-up enemies, the believer stands confused
- But if God seems as though silent, it is to exhort us not to be silent ourselves, but to pray to Him to arise and to rebuke the wind, so there would be great calm (Matthew 8:24)
- Asaph asked God to *behold* this crisis and to regard the enemies of Israel as His own *enemies*, as those who hated Him
- Asaph was confident that if God did this, He would act on behalf of Israel
- The enemies come like rolling waves of the sea



# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- *make a tumult*, They are excited; aroused; and moving in a wild, furious, rebellious manner, rushing on to the accomplishment of their plans
- They are like hungry wolves intending to devour the people of God, like a flock of sheep
- They have become proud; bold; confident of success, *have lifted up their head*
- The head is bowed down in sorrow and trouble; pride lifts it up; boldness, confidence, and wickedness, are indicated by its being thus lifted up

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- St. Augustine notices that the psalmist did not say: “They raised (their) heads” but said: “They raised (the) head”; as though the enemies have reached the point when they all gather together around one head; that head of the one about whom is said: *“who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:4)
- So that, if this Psalm is a cry out coming from the heart of the whole church, she cries out when the antichrist comes, who, in his haughtiness, *“sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God”*

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- All the wicked gather together under the leadership of the antichrist to oppose the church
- That is when the church seeks from her God not to remain silent, as the affliction has reached its maximum; and the antichrist assumes that no god could stand before him
- St. Jerome says, “The heretics talk, while the church people hold their peace; they are in tumult, while we keep silent; They blaspheme, while we are not offended ... He says it well: ‘They are in tumult’, They produce only noise, confusion, and division. ... ‘Those who hate You have raised their head’. The heretics are a great multitude; while Your believers are but a few.”

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- As the Lord's enemies gather together against His believers, and rely on deception and craftiness in planning their plots, the believers seek from God to support and protect them
- Commenting on the words *consulted together*, St. Augustine says that they make more noise than a talk or a conversation
- The enemies oppose the church by the spirit of violence and tumult, and make plans without understanding, nor prudence, or rational debate
- *sheltered ones*, God takes them under His special protection, hides them in the hollow of His hand

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- They are *sheltered* under the shadow of His wings, in the secret of His presence
- And yet, in disobedience to God and His power and promise to *shelter* His people the enemies *have taken crafty counsel against* His *people* to destroy them
- St. Jerome says, “They only think of how to make men of Your church stumble, and to fall into their trap.”
- These enemies were not content to invade their country, take their cities, rob them of their substance, and carry them captives, but utterly to destroy them

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- Israel has had its battles and Christianity has also been opposed, and some have sought to completely *cut Christians off*
- One example was the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284-305 AD)
- Diocletian boasted that he had destroyed Christianity and liked to think that he had defeated Christianity
- He ordered a medal to be made with this inscription: “The name of Christianity being extinguished.”
- But this desperate and dreadful plan, did not take effect; but, on the contrary, the several nations hereafter mentioned, who were in this conspiracy, are no more and have not had a name in the world for many hundreds of years

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- Asaph again emphasized that these enemies were not only against Israel, but against the Lord, Israel's God
- These wicked men are friendly to one another, and united in their counsels against the people of God, and His interest
- Pilate and Herod were made friends together against Christ  
Luke 23:12
- They have one desire and one purpose; to oppose and persecute the church and people of God
- *They form a confederacy against You*, Literally, have entered into a covenant against God

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- According to St. Augustine, the evil adversaries against the church of God form a confederacy among themselves to become stronger
- They bear the spirit of unity in evil
- St. Jerome says, “How miserable creatures we are, the people of God! when we cannot come together, the way the evildoers do.”
- The psalmist mentions here the names of the nations, adversary against the church, which, according to St. Jerome are 11; being unable to reach the figure 12, of perfection
- Both St. Augustine and St. Jerome believe that the name of each of those nations refers to its nature



# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- In the listing of these enemies, the Psalmist seems to follow a geographical order
- He first glances southwards and eastwards, then turns to the west, and, finally, to the north
- Edom was always among the bitterest of Israel's enemies, and naturally took a part in almost every combination that was made against them
- Though sometimes subjugated (2 Samuel 8:14; 1 Kings 11:15-16), it continued hostile during the whole period of Israelite and Jewish history

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- The word 'Edom' is translated as (the earthly); and the word 'tents' is the right expression, as the Edomites do not live in houses with well-established foundations, but in temporary tent
- The Ishmaelites were the chief inhabitants of Northern Arabia (Genesis 25:13-18)
- The word *Ishmaelites* refers to the fact that they have the appearances of (listeners); but they actually do not care much for God
- They do not often appear among Israel's enemies

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- Moab, on the contrary, is a persistent adversary (Numbers 22:6; Judges 3:12-30; 1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:2; 2 Kings 1:1,3:4-27; 2 Chronicles 20:1-10)
- The word *Moab*, means (from the father); who was born a fruit of the illegal and unholy relationship between 'Lot', the father, and one of his daughters
- The *Hagrites* are only mentioned here and in 1 Chronicles 5:10,19-22
- They dwelt to the east of the land of Israel, so called from Hagar, the handmaid of Abraham

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- *Gebal* A part of Edom, East of the Dead Sea; meaning a fruitless barren valley
- The prefix 'Ge' means (valley); and the suffix 'bal' means (empty)
- The word Ammon means son of my people
- Ammon was also the son of Lot by his youngest daughter, Genesis 19:38
- The Ammonites dwelt beyond the Jordan in the tract of country between the streams of Jabbok and Arnon
- *Ammon* means (non-peaceful people), or (people of grief)
- *Ammon*, like Moab, was a persistent enemy of the Jewish people from their entrance into Palestine to the time of the Maccabees

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- The Amalek were a very ancient people who inhabited the regions on the south of Palestine, between Idumea and Egypt, Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 13:29; 1 Samuel 15:7
- The Amalek, on the contrary, disappear from history from the time of their destruction by the son of Simeon in the reign of Hezekiah (1 Chronicles 4:42-43)
- *Philistia* Persistent enemies, like Edom, Moab, and Ammon (1 Maccabees 5:66) and it was natural that they should be engaged in such an alliance as this
- *Tyre*, in early times, was friendly to Israel (2 Samuel 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1-18,9:26-28)

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- And is not elsewhere mentioned as hostile until the reign of Uzziah (Amos 1:9)
- *Tyre* rejoiced, however, when Jerusalem was destroyed (Ezekiel 26:2)
- Why *Tyre* should unite in this alliance is not known
- The purpose seems to have been to combine as many nations as possible against the Hebrew people, and - as far as it could be done - all those that were adjacent to it, so that it might be surrounded by enemies, and so that its destruction might be certain

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- Assyria supporting Moab and Ammon confirms that this Psalm was written before Assyria becomes a great empire
- St. Augustine says, “Now, the word Assyria is most probably used as a symbol of the devil ‘the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience’ (Ephesians 2:2).”
- They were an arm *to the children of Lot*
- The Moabites and Ammonites appear to have been the chief leaders in this war and the leaders of the alliance, 2 Chronicles 20:1

# The Plans of the Wicked People

## 83:1-8



- The phrase occurs in Deuteronomy 2:9,19, the only other passages in Old Testament outside of Genesis where Lot is mentioned
- It points to the unbrotherly character of the hostility of these nations by recalling their common descent
- If we look at a map of that day, we will note that these nations literally surrounded Israel
- Clearly there was good reason for Asaph to pray!
- The people of God were surrounded by the enemies of God
- *Selah*: There was a good reason for a pause when God's people was in such jeopardy



# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- In verses 9-12 Asaph offers prayer for their destruction as the Canaanites were destroyed by Deborah and Barak, and the Midianites by Gideon
- He is praying that they be overthrown and destroyed as the Midianites were
- The reference here is to the complete overthrow of the Midianites
- God's victory over *Midian* through Gideon is described in Judges 6-8
- The victory of Gideon over the confederate forces of the Midianites, Amalek, and Arabians (Judges 7 and 8) is referred to by Isaiah as a typical triumph (Isaiah 9:4,10:26)

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- *“For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian.”* (Isaiah 9:4)
- *“And the LORD of hosts will stir up a scourge for him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb.”* (Isaiah 10:26)
- *As to Sisera, Captain of the army of Jabin, king of Canaan*
- *He was totally defeated by Deborah and Barak, (Judges 4:14-15), near Mount Tabor, by the river Kishon; and himself, after having fled from the battle, slain by Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, (Judges 4:17-21)*

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- He prays that their leaders might be destroyed as they had been formerly
- When God wills it, a brook can be as deadly as a sea
- Kishon was as terrible to Jabin as was the Red Sea to Pharaoh
- En Dor is not mentioned in the narrative of Judges, but it was situated in the same valley as Taanach and Megiddo, which are named in Judges 5:19, *“The kings came and fought, Then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; They took no spoils of silver.”*

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- *Who became as refuse*, Being unburied, they lay and rotted on the earth
- Their flesh manured the soil, “*and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field.*” (2 Kings 9:37); “*Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.*” (Zephaniah 1:17), which added to the defeat of Israel’s enemies
- Then in verse 11 the Psalmist returns to Gideon’s victory
- *Oreb and Zeeb* were the leaders of the Midianites (Judges 7:25; Isaiah 10:26) and were taken prisoners and slain by the Ephraimites who pursued after Midian

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- *Zebah and Zalmunna*, were the kings of Midian slain by Gideon himself (Judges 8:21)
- The prayer here is, that the enemies who had conspired against the land of Israel might be utterly destroyed
- *Who said*, This is not to be understood as that of Oreb and Zeeb, of Zebah and Zalmunna, but of the enemies referred to in the Psalm, who had entered into the conspiracy to destroy the nation of Israel
- God regards Israel as *His pastures*
- *possession*, Not only the temple, which was the house of God, but all the dwellings of the Israelites where the Lord promised to dwell

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- *The pastures of God for a possession*, Nearly the words spoken by the alliance when they came to attack Jehoshaphat, *“to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit.”* (2 Chronicles 20:11)
- Satan will not cease until he sets himself a god in the hearts of mankind
- Israel faced threats to her existence in the days of the Judges, and God delivered her
- Asaph’s prayer reminded Israel of God’s previous rescue of Israel, using it as a reason to trust Him in the present crisis

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- In verses 13-15, we see a renewed prayer for the dispersion and destruction of the enemy expressed by figures from nature
- The ultimate end and object of all is that they may acknowledge God to be supreme
- Asaph prayed that God would take these many enemies, determined to destroy Israel, and scatter them like *chaff before the wind* and the *whirling dust*
- The prayer here is, that they might be utterly destroyed, or driven away
- *the whirling dust* Anything whirled away before the wind may be meant

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- It is the dust that is caught up by a whirlpool of wind, and twisted round and round (Isaiah 17:13)
- And in other translations is *like a wheel* which is very unstable
- *like a wheel* when once tumbled down from the top of a hill, runs with great force and speed, and stays not till it comes to the bottom
- They promise themselves a sure possession, let them be like a wheel which is very unstable, and soon removed, and which, when once tumbled down from the top of a hill, runs with great force and swiftness, and stays not till it comes to the bottom



# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- The meaning is that they never to settle down, never to have a steady place, always on the move
- St. Augustine says that this is not a wish, but a prophecy
- Some think that in this and the following verse the psalmist refers to the manner of thrashing in Judea; which was generally performed on a mountain, where the corn was thrashed by means of a wheel which run over the stalks or the branches and trunks
- *The chaff*, on account of this situation, was easily blown about by the wind; and, it being customary likewise to burn what remained, the Psalmist concludes the description with these words, *as the flame sets the mountains on fire*

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- He prayed they would be consumed *like fire burns the woods*
- Cause them to consume away and perish, as a burning forest, or as blazing brushwood on a mountainside
- According to St. Augustine, the fire and flame here refer to God's verdict of punishment on the wicked
- And according to Jerome, to burn the pride in them
- To the Israelites at that time, there was nothing more powerful than the *tempest* or the *storm*
- The psalmist prayed that God would not only defeat Israel's enemies, but also *pursue* and *frighten them* with His great power

# An Earnest Plea for the Overthrow of the Enemy 83:9-15



- The Lord will follow up His enemies, warn them, and pursue them till they are defeated and crushed
- He did this for His servant Jehoshaphat; and in like manner He will come to the rescue any of His children
- About the destiny and fate of the wicked, the righteous 'Job' says:  
*"Terrors overtake him like a flood; A tempest steals him away in the night. The east wind carries him away, and he is gone; It sweeps him out of his place"*(Job 27:20-21)
- *"pursue them with Your tempest ... He did not say 'Kill them', but "pursue them", to return to You."* (St. Jerome)

# This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18



- Asaph ended this Psalm with an unexpected turn
- After praying for the destruction of Israel's enemies, he prayed that they would be thoroughly humbled *Fill their faces with shame* so they would be led to *seek* the Lord
- He prayed for their disgraceful defeat
- But this is only as the means to the higher end, that *they may seek Your name, O LORD* and submitting themselves to His Will
- Asaph had this deeper desire in his heart than the enemies' destruction
- He wishes that they should be turned into God's friends and he wishes for their chastisement as the means to that end

# This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18



- The goal of all this is their salvation, and not their perdition
- St. Jerome says, “Fill their faces with shame’, and not with punishment.’ Why does not he seek their perdition? The words of inspiration give the answer by saying: ‘that they may seek your name, O Lord’. For once they seek, they will get; those who were deceived by the heretics and return to the Lord.”
- Verse 17 is an expansion of the thought contained in the first clause of the preceding verse, *Fill their faces with shame*
- In case they do not return to the Lord by repentance, and seek His name, they will perish

# This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18



- There will be nothing before them except “shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2)
- Asaph recognized that not all of God’s enemies would respond appropriately by repentance and faith
- St. Jerome says, “He who feels ashamed of his sins would be close to forgiveness.”
- He also says, “Notice that destruction here does not mean perdition but rather salvation. What is to follow? *‘That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.’*”

# This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18



- And St. Augustine explains, “Again, he returns to these last, who in the same company of enemies are to be made ashamed for this purpose, that they may not be ashamed for ever: and for this purpose to be destroyed in as far as they are wicked, that being made good they may be found alive for ever. For having said of them, “Let them be ashamed and perish,” he instantly adds, *‘That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth’*”
- The aim of the prayer in the Psalm is that all people come to the belief in the true and only God

# This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18



- This great humbling (*let them be put to shame and perish*) would lead to their surrender and submission to the God who is *Most High over all the earth*
- This Psalm began with a plea that God would not remain silent, and ends with the idea of His fame and glory going out to all the earth
- According to St. John Chrysostom, it is befitting of us to praise the Lord, and to give him thanks for all His amazing works; not only when He saves us from evil, but also when He allows for us to go through troubles and afflictions, which we may count as evils



# This Was to be Done for the Glory of God 83:16-18



- Asaph recognized that, ultimately, every enemy of God will bow the knee in recognition of His lordship
- They will acknowledge that He is the *Most High* God, sovereign Lord of all, above all gods, above all kings, above all that exalt themselves and pretend to be high
- They will recognize that He is so, not only over the land of Israel, but *over all the earth*
- He was confident in knowing that the Lord would have the last word
- All peoples would come to acknowledge His Holy Name



# Discussion

- What appeal to God did Asaph present?
- Why did the nation of Israel need God's help?
- What is the main idea of this prayer?
- This Psalm shows us that all sin and evil is ultimately fighting against God (verse 2). How might it change your experience and feelings towards enemies to understand that they are fighting God more than they are fighting you?

# Discussion



- How did the psalmist describe the threats against Israel?
- What was the goal of Israel's enemies?
- Who formed an alliance against Israel?
- How had the Lord demonstrated His power?



# Discussion

- Why did the psalmist compare God's judgment to fire?
- What motive did Asaph have in asking God to deliver Israel?
- What is the best weapon against aggression?
- In what ways has this Psalm challenged or impacted you?