

Psalm 83

Not in the Mass or the Prayer of the Church

Foreign nations are conspiring to wipe out Israel. The psalmist is pleading with God to destroy them the way he destroyed Israel's enemies at the time of the Judges. This way they will be forced to acknowledge YHWH* 'as the Most High God over all the earth' (verse 18). The title reads: 'A Song. A Psalm* of Asaph*.'

**¹O God, do not remain silent;
do not hold your peace and do
nothing, O God!**

**²Even now your enemies are in
an uproar. Those who hate you
hold their heads high.**

**³They lay crafty plans against
your people. They consult
together against those you
protect.**

**⁴They say, 'Come, let us wipe
them out as a nation; let the
name of Israel be remembered
no more.'**

**⁵They conspire together.
Against you they make a cov-
enant:**

**⁶the tents of Edom and the
Ishmaelites, of Moab and the
Hagrites, ⁷Gebal and Ammon
and Amalek, Philistia with the
inhabitants of Tyre.**

**⁸Assyria also has joined them;
they are the strong arm of the
children of Lot.**

This opening appeal recalls the following:

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted
sentinels. All day and all night they shall never
be silent. You who remind YHWH, take no rest,
and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusa-
lem and makes it renowned throughout the earth.

– Isaiah 62:6-7

They are threatened by enemies who are deter-
mined to carry out a form of 'ethnic cleansing'.

Edom is to the south-east of Judah. According to the biblical narrative Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Hagar (Genesis 16). According to Genesis 25:12-17, the Ishmaelites are in northern Arabia. Moab is east of the Dead Sea and north of Edom. The Hagrites tended their flocks to the east of Gilead. Gebal was a port north of Tyre. It may also refer to a town in Teman, the Edomite territory north of Petra. Ammon is north of Moab. The Amalekites were a nomadic people to the south of Judah, and Judah's traditional enemies. The Philistines commanded the coast to the west of Judah, and Tyre was the main port on the Mediterranean coast north of Galilee. In the biblical narrative Lot was Abraham's nephew and the ancestor of the people of Ammon and Moab (Genesis 19:30-38). Note the absence of any mention of Babylon or Egypt.



May the enemy be destroyed

Read the Book of Judges 6-8 for the biblical narrative of God's intervention against Midian. See also Isaiah 9:7. The defeat of Sisera and Jabin is recounted in Judges 4-5. The wadi Kishon flows westward through the Jezreel valley, to the north of the Carmel range and enters the Mediterranean at Haifa. En-dor was a town in the Megiddo Plain.

Oreb and Zeeb were princes of Midian who were captured and slain by the men of Ephraim when Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 7:25; 8:3). Zebah and Zalmunna were kings of Midian who were captured and executed because they had killed Gideon's brothers at Tabor (Judges 8:5ff).

This is a typical curse formula. Reading this as a Christian we should recall that Jesus reveals a very different God, one who lets his sun and rain nurture all, the just and the unjust alike (see Matthew 5:45).

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.

– John 8:28

God wants all to live 'and to live to the full' (John 10:10). Hell is not a punishment inflicted by God. It is the necessary consequence of our choice and obstinate and stubborn determination to reject God and God's offer of love.

**⁹Do to them as you did to Midian,
as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Wadi Kishon,
¹⁰who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground.**

**¹¹Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
¹²who said, 'Let us take the pastures of God for our own possession.'**

¹³O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind.

¹⁴As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze,

¹⁵so pursue them closely with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane.

¹⁶Cover their faces with shame, so that they may seek your name, YHWH*.

¹⁷Let them be forever put to shame and dismayed. Let them perish in disgrace.

¹⁸Let them know that you alone, whose name is YHWH, are the Most High over all the earth.