

## 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\*.

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

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

**<sup>3</sup>They lay crafty plans against  
your people. They consult  
together against those you  
protect.**

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

**<sup>5</sup>They conspire together.  
Against you they make a cov-  
enant:**

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

**<sup>8</sup>Assyria 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 north-  
ern 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.

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

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

**<sup>13</sup>O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind.**

**<sup>14</sup>As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze,**

**<sup>15</sup>so pursue them closely with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane.**

**<sup>16</sup>Cover their faces with shame, so that they may seek your name, YHWH\*.**

**<sup>17</sup>Let them be forever put to shame and dismayed. Let them perish in disgrace.**

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