

PSALM 83

This psalm is the last of those that go under the name of Asaph. It is penned, as most of those, upon a public account, with reference to the insults of the church's enemies, who sought its ruin. Some think it was penned upon occasion of the threatening descent which was made upon the land of Judah in Jehoshaphat's time by the Moabites and Ammonites, those children of Lot here spoken of (v. 8), who were at the head of the alliance and to whom all the other states here mentioned were auxiliaries. We have the story ~~<400>~~2 Chronicles 20:1, where it is said, The children of Moab and Ammon, and others besides them, invaded the land. Others think it was penned with reference to all the confederacies of the neighbouring nations against Israel, from first to last. The psalmist here makes an appeal and application,

I. To God's knowledge, by a representation of their designs and endeavours to destroy Israel (v. 1-8).

II. To God's justice and jealousy, both for his church and for his own honour, by an earnest prayer for the defeat of their attempt, that the church might be preserved, the enemies humbled, and God glorified (v. 9-18). This, in the singing of it, we may apply to the enemies of the gospel-church, all anti-christian powers and factions, representing to God their confederacies against Christ and his kingdom, and rejoicing in the hope that all their projects will be baffled and the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.

~~<880>~~ PSALM 83:1-8

COMPLAINTS AGAINST ENEMIES

A song or psalm of Asaph.

The Israel of God were now in danger, and fear, and great distress, and yet their prayer is called, *A song or psalm*; for singing psalms is not unseasonable, no, not when the harps are hung upon the willow-trees.

I. The psalmist here begs of God to appear on the behalf of his injured threatened people (v. 1): “*Keep not thou silence, O God!* but give judgment for us against those that do us an apparent wrong.” Thus Jehoshaphat prayed upon occasion of that invasion (⁴⁰¹¹2 Chronicles 20:11), *Behold, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession.* Sometimes God seems to connive at the unjust treatment which is given to his people; he keeps silence, as one that either did not observe it or did not concern himself in it; he holds his peace, as if he would observe an exact neutrality, and let them fight it out; he is still, and gives not the enemies of his people any disturbance or opposition, but seems to sit by *as a man astonished, or as a mighty man that cannot save.* Then he gives us leave to call upon him, as here, “*Keep not thou silence, O God!* Lord, speak to us by the prophets for our encouragement against our fears” (as he did in reference to that invasion, ⁴⁰¹⁴2 Chronicles 20:14, etc.); “Lord, speak for us by the providence and speak against our enemies; speak deliverance to us and disappointment to them.” God's speaking is his acting; for with him saying and doing are the same thing.

II. He here gives an account of the grand alliance of the neighbouring nations against Israel, which he begs of God to break, and blast the projects of. Now observe here,

1. Against whom this confederacy is formed; it is against the Israel of God, and so, in effect, against the God of Israel. Thus the psalmist takes care to interest God in their cause, not doubting but that, if it appeared that they were for God, God would make it to appear that he was for them, and then they might set all their enemies at defiance; for whom then could be against them? “Lord,” says he, “they are thy enemies, and they hate thee.” All wicked people are God's enemies (the *carnal mind is enmity against God*), but especially wicked persecutors; they hated the religious worshippers of God, because they hated God's holy religion and the worship of him. This was that which made God's people so zealous against them — that they fought against God: *They are confederate against thee*, v. 5. Were our interest only concerned, we could the better bear it; but, when God himself is struck at, it is time to cry, Help, Lord. *Keep not thou silence, O God!* He proves that they are confederate against God, for they are so against the people of God, who are near and dear to him, his son, his first-born, his portion, and the lot of his inheritance; he may truly be said to fight against me that endeavours to destroy my children, to root out

my family, and to ruin my estate. “Lord,” says the psalmist, “they are thy enemies, for they consult against thy hidden ones.” Note, God's people are his hidden ones, hidden,

(1.) In respect of secrecy. Their life is *hid with Christ in God*; the world knows them not; if they knew them, they would not hate them as they do.

(2.) In respect of safety. God takes them under his special protection, hides them in the hollow of his hand; and yet, in defiance of God and his power and promise to secure his people, they will consult to ruin them and *cast them down from their excellency* (^{<BIB>}Psalm 62:4), and to make a prey of those whom the *Lord has set apart for himself*, (^{<BIB>}Psalm 4:3). They resolve to destroy those whom God resolves to preserve.

2. How this confederacy is managed. The devil is at the bottom of it, and therefore it is carried on,

(1.) With a great deal of heat and violence: *Thy enemies make a tumult*, v. 2. *The heathen rage*, (^{<BIB>}Psalm 2:1). *The nations are angry*, (^{<BIB>}Revelation 11:18). They are noisy in their clamours against the people whom they hope to run down with their loud calumnies. This comes in as a reason why God should not keep silence: “The enemies talk big and talk much; Lord, let them not talk all, but do thou *speak to them in thy wrath*,” (^{<BIB>}Psalm 2:5).

(2.) With a great deal of pride and insolence: *They have lifted up the head*. In confidence of their success, they are so elevated as if they could overtop the Most High and overpower the Almighty.

(3.) With a great deal of art and policy: They have *taken crafty counsel*, v. 3. The subtlety of the old serpent appears in their management, and they contrive by all possible means, though ever so base, ever so bad, to gain their point. They are *profound to make slaughter* (^{<BIB>}Hosea 5:2), as if they could outwit Infinite Wisdom.

(4.) With a great deal of unanimity. Whatever separate clashing interest they have among themselves, against the people of God they *consult with one consent* (v. 5), nor is *Satan's kingdom divided against itself*. To push on this unholy war, they lay their heads together, and their horns, and their hearts too. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri — Even an enemy may instruct*. Do the enemies of the church act with one consent to destroy it? Are the kings of the earth of one mind to give their power and honour to the beast? And

shall not the church's friends be unanimous in serving her interests? If Herod and Pilate are made friends, that they may join in crucifying Christ, surely Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Peter, will soon be made friends, that they may join in preaching Christ.

3. What it is that is aimed at in this confederacy. They consult not like the Gibeonites to make a league with Israel, that they might strengthen themselves by such a desirable alliance, which would have been their wisdom. They consult, not only to clip the wings of Israel, to recover their new conquests, and check the progress of their victorious arms, not only to keep the balance even between them and Israel, and to prevent their power from growing exorbitant; this will not serve. It is no less than the utter ruin and extirpation of Israel that they design (v. 4): “*Come, let us cut them off from being a nation, as they cut off the seven nations of Canaan; let us leave them neither root nor branch, but lay their country so perfectly waste that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance, no, not in history;*” for with them they would destroy their Bibles and burn all their records. Such is the enmity of the serpent's seed against the seed of the woman. It is the secret wish of many wicked men that the church of God might not have a being in the world, that there might be no such thing as religion among mankind. Having banished the sense of it out of their own hearts, they would gladly see the whole earth as well rid of it, all its laws and ordinances abolished, all its restraints and obligations shaken off, and all that preach, profess, or practise it cut off. This they would bring it to if it were in their power; but *he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them.*

4. Who they are that are drawn into this confederacy. The nations that entered into this alliance are here mentioned (v. 6-8); the Edomites and Ishmaelites, both descendants from Abraham, lead the van; for apostates from the church have been its most bitter and spiteful enemies, witness Julian. These were allied to Israel in blood and yet in alliance against Israel. There are no bonds of nature so strong but the spirit of persecution has broken through them. *The brother shall betray the brother to death.* Moab and Ammon were the children of righteous Lot; but, as an incestuous, so a degenerate race. The Philistines were long a thorn in Israel's side, and very vexatious. How the inhabitants of Tyre, who in David's time were Israel's firm allies, come in among their enemies, I know not; but that *Assur* (that is, the Assyrian) *also is joined with them* is not strange, or that (as the word is) they were *an arm to the children of Lot*. See how numerous the enemies of God's church have always been.

Lord, how are those increased that trouble it! God's heritage was as a speckled bird; all the birds round about were against her (²⁴¹⁰Jeremiah 12:9), which highly magnifies the power of God in preserving to himself a church in the world, in spite of the combined force of earth and hell.

~~1810~~ PSALM 83:9-18

PROPHETIC IMPRECATIONS

The psalmist here, in the name of the church, prays for the destruction of those confederate forces, and, in God's name, foretells it; for this prayer that it might be so amounts to a prophecy that it shall be so, and this prophecy reaches to all the enemies of the gospel-church; whoever they be that oppose the kingdom of Christ, here they may read their doom. The prayer is, in short, that these enemies, who were confederate against Israel, might be defeated in all their attempts, and that they might prove their own ruin, and so God's Israel might be preserved and perpetuated. Now this is here illustrated,

I. By some precedents. Let that be their punishment which has been the fate of others who have formerly set themselves against God's Israel. The defeat and discomfiture of former combinations may be pleaded in prayer to God and improved for the encouragement of our own faith and hope, because God is the same still that ever he was, the same to his people and the same against his and their enemies; with him is no variableness.

1. He prays that their armies might be destroyed as the armies of former enemies had been (v. 9, 10): *Do to them as to the Midianites*; let them be routed by their own fears, for so the Midianites were, more than by Gideon's 300 men. Do to them as to the army under the command of Sisera (who was general under Jabin king of Canaan) which God discomfited (⁴⁰⁰⁵Judges 4:15) at the brook Kishon, near to which was Endor. *They became as dung on the earth*; their dead bodies were thrown like dung laid in heaps, or spread, to fatten the ground; they were trodden to dirt by Barak's small but victorious army; and this was fitly made a precedent here, because Deborah made it so to aftertimes when it was fresh. (⁴⁰⁵³Judges 5:31, *So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!* that is, So they shall perish.

2. He prays that their leaders might be destroyed as they had been formerly. The common people would not have been so mischievous if their princes had not set them on, and therefore they are particularly prayed against, v. 11, 12. Observe,

(1.) What their malice was against the Israel of God. They said, *Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession* (v. 12), the *pleasant places* of God (so the word is), by which we may understand the land of Canaan, which was a pleasant land and was Immanuel's land, or the temple, which was indeed God's pleasant place (^{<2341>}Isaiah 64:11), or (as Dr. Hammond suggests) the pleasant pastures, which these Arabians, who traded in cattle, did in a particular manner seek after. The princes and nobles aimed to enrich themselves by this war; and their armies must be made as dung for the earth, to serve their covetousness and their ambition.

(2.) What their lot should be. They shall be made *like Oreb and Zeeb* (two princes of the Midianites, who, when their forces were routed, were taken in their flight by the Ephraimites and slain, ^{<0025>}Judges 7:25), and *like Zeba and Zalmunna*, whom Gideon himself slew, ^{<0081>}Judges 8:21. "Let these enemies of ours be made as easy a prey to us as they were to the conquerors then." We may not prescribe to God, but we may pray to God that he will deal with the enemies of his church in our days as he did with those in the days of our fathers.

II. He illustrates it by some similitudes, and prays,

1. That God would *make them like a wheel* (v. 13), that they might be in continual motion, unquiet, unsettled, and giddy in all their counsels and resolves, that they might roll down easily and speedily to their own ruin. Or, as some think, that they might be broken by the judgments of God, as the corn is broken, or beaten out, by the wheel which was then used in threshing. Thus, when a *wise king scatters the wicked*, he is said to *bring the wheel over them*, ^{<0016>}Proverbs 20:26. Those that trust in God have their hearts fixed; those that fight against him are unfixed, like a wheel.

2. That they might be chased as *stubble*, or chaff, *before the fierce wind*. "The wheel, though it continually turn round, is fixed on its own axis; but let them have no more fixation than the light stubble has, which the wind hurries away, and nobody desires to save it, but is willing it should go," ^{<0014>}Psalm 1:4. Thus shall *the wicked be driven away in his wickedness, and chased out of the world*.

3. That they might be consumed, as wood by the fire, or as briars and thorns, as fern or furze, upon the mountains, by the flames, v. 14. When the stubble is driven by the wind it will rest, at last, under some hedge, in some ditch or other; but he prays that they might not only be driven away as stubble, but burnt up as stubble. And this will be the end of wicked men (³⁰⁸ Hebrews 6:8) and particularly of all the enemies of God's church. The application of these comparisons we have (v. 15): *So persecute them with thy tempest*, persecute them to their utter ruin, and make *them afraid with thy storm*. See how sinners are made miserable; the storm of God's wrath raises terrors in their own hearts, and so they are made completely miserable. God can deal with the proudest and most daring sinner that has bidden defiance to his justice, and can make him afraid as a grasshopper. It is the torment of devils that they tremble.

III. He illustrates it by the good consequences of their confusion, v. 16-18. He prays here that God, having filled their hearts with terror, would thereby fill their faces with shame, that they might be ashamed of their enmity to the people of God (²³¹ Isaiah 26:11), ashamed of their folly in acting both against Omnipotence itself and their own true interest. They did what they could to put God's people to shame, but the shame will at length return upon themselves. Now,

1. The beginning of this shame might be a means of their conversion: "Let them be broken and baffled in their attempts, *that they may seek thy name, O Lord!* Let them be put to a stand, that they may have both leisure and reason to pause a little, and consider who it is that they are fighting against and what an unequal match they are for him, and may therefore humble and submit themselves and desire conditions of peace. Let them be made to fear thy name, and perhaps that will bring them to seek thy name." Note, That which we should earnestly desire and beg of God for our enemies and persecutors is that God would bring them to repentance, and we should desire their abasement in order to this, no other confusion to them than what may be a step towards their conversion.

2. If it did not prove a means of their conversion, the perfecting of it would redound greatly to the honour of God. If they will not be ashamed and repent, let them be put to shame and perish; if they will not be troubled and turned, which would soon put an end to all their trouble, a happy end, *let them be troubled for ever*, and never have peace: this will be for God's glory (v. 18), that other men may know and own, if they

themselves will not, *that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH* (that incommunicable, though not ineffable name) *art the Most High over all the earth*. God's triumphs over his and his church's enemies will be incontestable proofs,

- (1.) That he is, according to his name JEHOVAH, a self-existent self-sufficient Being, that has all power and perfection in himself.
- (2.) 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.
- (3.) That he is so, not only over the land of Israel, but *over all the earth*, even those nations of the earth that do not know him or own him; for his kingdom rules over all. These are great and unquestionable truths, but men will hardly be persuaded to know and believe them; therefore the psalmist prays that the destruction of some might be the conviction of others. The final ruin of all God's enemies, in the great day, will be the effectual proof of this, before angels and men, when the everlasting shame and contempt to which sinners shall rise (~~2~~²Daniel 12:2) shall redound to the everlasting honour and praise of that God to whom vengeance belongs.