

Psalm 83

The song of the last days (1)

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It is 26 July 2006, and a psalm book dating from between 800 and 1000 A.D. is discovered in an Irish peat bog.

Despite the inherent fragility of the documents, the book has survived remarkably intact. The book is open at the pages containing Psalm 83, written in Latin script. (For fuller detail see <http://web.israelinsider.com/Articles/Culture/8953.htm>).

COMMENTATORS cannot pinpoint an exact time in ancient Jewish history where this psalm has been entirely relevant. During her history Israel has been under threat by any combination of the aggressors named in the psalm, not to mention a great many more nations not named there. But she has never faced the threat of extinction by the comprehensive list of surrounding races given. Therefore we must draw a tentative conclusion that it is a prophecy still either to be fulfilled or in the process of being fulfilled at this time. If this psalm is about the last days of human affairs on this earth, by reference to known historical events it offers impressive pointers to a developing scenario between Israel and her Arab neighbours.

But first, a brief analysis of the psalm.

A nation in peril

The psalm divides neatly into two parts: verses 1-8 relate the nature of the danger facing the nation; verses 9-18 are a prayer to the Lord to act on their behalf.

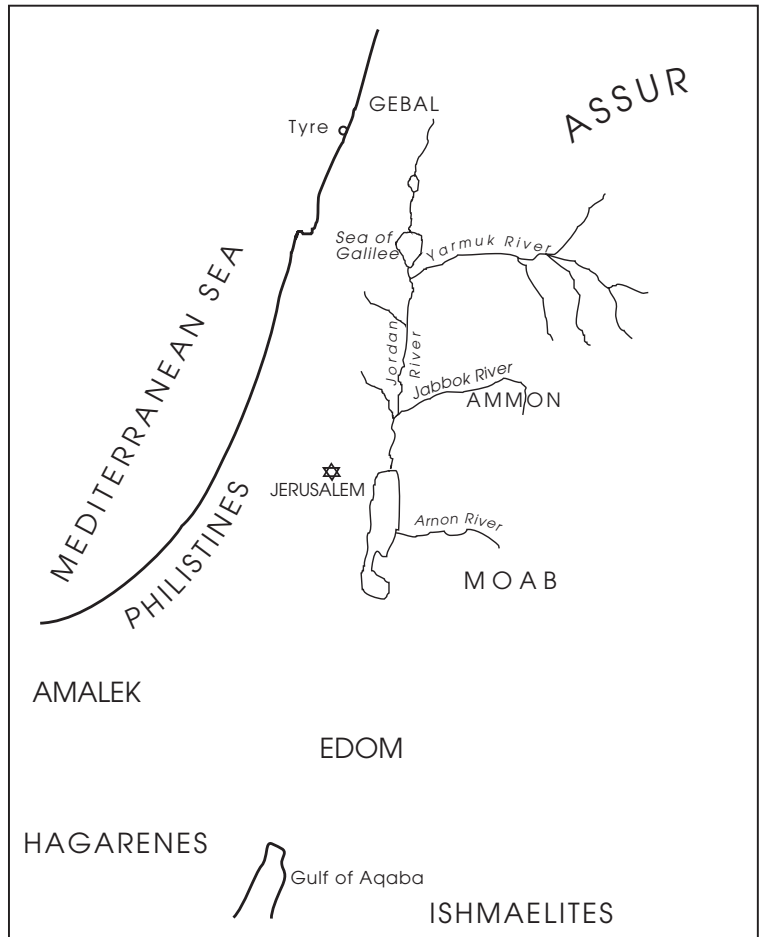
And what danger! A glance at the map will show that the nation is facing aggressive action from every point of the compass. Furthermore, this action is not just a war of attrition,

or even conquest. It has the stated aims:

“let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance” (v. 4); and:

“Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession” (v. 12).

That is a two-pronged objective: first, to take physical possession of the Land and of the spiritual heritage of the Jewish nation, and secondly, to exterminate the people so that the name of Israel will be forgotten. It is a comprehen-



Psalm 83

1 Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.
2 For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head.
3 They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.
4 They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.
5 For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:
6 The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes;
7 Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre;
8 Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.
9 Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison:
10 Which perished at En-dor: they became as dung for the earth.
11 Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna:
12 Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.
13 O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind.
14 As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;
15 So persecute them with Thy tempest, and make them afraid with Thy storm.
16 Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O LORD.
17 Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish:
18 That men may know that Thou, Whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.

sive policy to wipe the nation off the face of the earth.

To reinforce this objective we see in verse 5 that there is a common consent, a united objective—in itself a remarkable thing amongst nations renowned for their discord and infighting. Despite their manifest differences, they stand together in their hatred of the Jewish people.

In common with many of the great and effective prayers of Scripture, the supplicant has nailed his colours firmly to the mast; but does not pray for deliverance for its own sake, he appeals to God to

see how these enemies are rising up, not against Israel, but against Almighty God, and that God's Name is being impugned. (For a similar template, see Hezekiah's prayer against Sennacherib [Isa. 37:20] or Daniel's prayer for the restoration of the nation [Dan. 9:15,16]; also Moses, on the two occasions when he made intercession for the nation [Ex. 32:12,13; Num. 14:14-18]. The common thread is an acknowledgement of the greatness of God and an appeal for Him to vindicate the purpose associated with His Name.) So the psalmist cries out:

"For, lo, *Thine* enemies make a tumult: and they that hate *Thee* have lifted up the head" (v. 2).

However, he does demonstrate a desire for the ultimate wellbeing of these foes:

"Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O LORD" (v. 16).

This in itself shows a commendable spirit. Whatever the gravity of the offence of these protagonists, or for that matter however corrupt the world may become, the true prayer of the believer is for mankind to seek God's Name and find ultimate resolution of the strife and chaos upon the earth.

And if they will not repent, he invokes utter destruction upon them all.

Who and where are they?

- 1 The ancient peoples of Edom and Amalek resided in the areas of what is presently known as southern Jordan and the lower region of the Gaza Strip.
- 2 The Ishmaelites were located in the northern region of modern-day Arabia and the area surrounding the modern Arab Emirates.
- 3 Moab is Jordan.
- 4 The Hagarenes find their roots through their mother, who was Hagar from Egypt. Also perhaps the area of Sudan might be included when considering its ancient affiliation with Egypt.
- 5 Gebal and Tyre are Lebanon.
- 6 The modern-day Philistines would find their equivalent in the Palestinians located in the stretch of land called the Gaza Strip.
- 7 Assur and the children of Lot are Iraq along with Jordan, joined in a special relationship, according to this prophecy. This binding union can be found in other related prophecies, and has repeatedly been shown to be unwaveringly true for these latter days. During the Persian Gulf War, and continually thereafter, Jordan has defied the UN in its show of sympathy

and even allegiance with Iraq. The present king of Jordan has demonstrated an even closer relationship with Iraq than his father did.

- 8 Assur must also include modern-day Syria. This fact is supported by numerous other passages of Scripture. Assur, or Assyria, was the powerful ancient world power formed by the uniting of Babylon and Syria. Babylon (Iraq) and Syria were bitter enemies, even up to the Persian Gulf War in 1990. Today this is no longer true, as Iraq and Syria have made major political, economic and military agreements between themselves, and have cited Israel as a common enemy that must be destroyed.

It only takes a glance at the Biblical identities of the unholy alliance to see that they totally surround Israel, outnumbering them by an overwhelming factor; and as year follows year they are developing a military superiority that will make it increasingly difficult for the nation at the centre to be able to envisage survival by force of arms alone. It is as if a fit, lean athletic man is surrounded by ten less able men who want to kill him. While only one or two at a time attack him, he can hold his position. He can defend himself, though he is uncomfortably aware that every cut or blow he sustains is a wound he can ill-afford. But, should all ten combine forces, humanly speaking the unfortunate man is doomed!

An appeal to history

The psalmist has a wealth of available material to choose from to remind God of His actions in support of the nation previously. He could have

chosen the great battles of the early years of Saul's reign, or David's victories over the neighbouring states. The conquest of the Land under Joshua supplies ample material to make a point. However, the writer under inspiration selects two consecutive episodes from the book of Judges (curiously in reverse order!). He draws our attention to the defeat of Jabin and his commander Sisera by Deborah and Barak, and the defeat of the Midianites by Gideon. Why?

It is worth mentioning straight away the context of the book of Judges. Twice the book states, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25).

It is a chilling epitaph for a period of Jewish history marked by shameless corruption, desperate reformation, terrible oppression and bloodshed, and bare-faced hypocrisy. No king; no rule of moral law; every man free to make his own worship—here was a recipe for disaster. As such it provides a pointer to the state of the Jewish nation at the time of the fulfilment of the military scenario contained in the psalm. Israel has no king as we speak, and the nation is a cross-section of morality ranging from the ultra-Orthodox right across to the stridently humanist. Add to this the recent history of both of those ancient judges, and modern Israel is remarkably similar: a nation that has been planted in the midst of hostile neighbours. In this the psalmist has chosen his backdrop well.

But it is in the details of the events he has highlighted from Judges that we start to see exciting comparisons.

[\(To be continued\)](#)