

“Psalm 83: Prophetic War-Prayer” by Jon Ikin

Recently China shook the West by testing a new hypersonic missile, a weapon so fast and powerful that no ground-to-air defences in existence can resist it. This type of weapon is a potential game changer in modern warfare and one that will keep the defence industry busy for a long time. Yet the servants of God have a far greater weapon than even this, *prayer*. In fact, prayer has been likened to a missile itself:

- it can be ‘fired’ from any place in the world;
- it travels undetected at the speed of thought;
- it carries the greatest payload imaginable (and even beyond – see Eph.3:20);
- it always reaches its target;
- it can impact forward in time as well as across great distances;
- and best of all, when used in the will of God, there is no ‘anti-prayer missile’ that can bring it down (1 John 5:14-15).

What a weapon! And the prophets knew how to use it skilfully.

Asaph The Prophetic Prayer Warrior

Asaph is a good example of this. He was a priest who served in the temple, and as such produced twelve psalms for public worship, including one of the most dynamic end time prophecies for our day, Psalm 83. This is a psalm that students of prophecy have been more aware of in recent years due to the tensions in the Middle East, and quite frankly, many of us are sat on the edge of our seats waiting for it to be fulfilled. Yet the obvious is often overlooked. *It was originally a prayer*. Asaph was, in effect, launching a prayer missile down the centuries to impact the future of his people, Israel. We may well live to see it strike in our day, so let’s get familiar with it.

Asaph’s Problem

Looking through the telescope of prophecy, Asaph is concerned about the accumulating enemies of Israel and cries out to the Lord to act accordingly. It may have been that the situation of his own day – possibly that of 2 Chronicles 20 – made him aware of the future threat to Israel’s safety. Whatever it was

that gave him this insight, He pleads with the God of Abraham to see the danger that His covenant people are in and to do something about it. Listen to his opening words:

“Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold your peace. And do not be still, O God! For behold, your enemies make a tumult; And those who hate you have lifted up their head.” (v1-2)

Notice that he skilfully calls them *“your enemies”* and *“those who hate you”*. He draws the Lord’s attention, as it were, to the fact that the reason these enemies hate Israel is because of their God. They are being attacked, ultimately, because of who they stand for and are in covenant with – the Lord Himself. As such they are not just Israel’s enemies, they are the Lord’s enemies too.

This is exactly the situation we see in the Middle East today, isn’t it? Why do the Arab nations hate Israel? They say it is because of land issues, but ultimately it is because of spiritual ones. They are against the God of the Bible. Their own false religion is undermined by Israel’s true God, and Israel’s continuing presence in the land shows that their false god can’t drive them out. This is something we should remember when we hear the propaganda of the anti-Israel crowd. It is *the Lord* they are against, not just His people. Asaph was astute in his inspired words to recognise this.

He goes on in the following verses to describe their anti-Semitic ambitions:

“They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.’” (v3-4)

The clear, unarguable ambition of Israel’s enemies, as revealed here, is to destroy them as a nation. Not to bring them into slavery; not to disperse them among the nations; not even to reduce their borders...but to destroy them. In fact the very words that Asaph uses have been remarkably prophetic of modern Arab rhetoric against Israel. Back in the 1950s President Nasser of Egypt said that Israel was to be ‘driven into the heart of the sea’ (reminiscent of another Egyptian leader, see Exodus 14). Similarly on 1st January 2000, the

dawn of the new millennium, the front page of The Daily Telegraph bore this headline: *“IRAN CALLS FOR ISRAEL TO BE DESTROYED.”* That’s a call that has been consistently repeated by its leadership in recent years. It is also a well known fact that the charter for HAMAS denies Israel’s very right to exist. This is consistent with the fact that no Arab map of the Middle East features the name of Israel at all. Exactly what Asaph said: *“Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.”* The inspired prayer warrior could see the problem very clearly.

An Unholy Alliance

He could also see how their enemies would try and bring their ambition to pass. The psalm goes on to speak of the conspiracy between Israel’s neighbours to bring about her destruction.

“For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against you: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; They have helped the children of Lot.” (v5-8)

Who are these demonically inspired hopefuls, plotting the next holocaust? Can we recognise them by their modern day labels? With little difficulty we can see exactly who they are:

- Edom, Moab, Ammon, Amalek and Lot are all Biblical names for the present country of Jordan;
- The Ishmaelites and the Hagrites (taken from the name Hagar) are Egypt (remember, Ishamel was her son);
- Tyre is Lebanon;
- Philistia is the Gaza strip;
- Assyria is part Iraq, part Syria.

That’s quite a list, isn’t it? Nearly all of Israel’s immediate neighbours are mentioned. And they appear to put Israel in a dangerous position for her survival. No wonder Asaph is praying.

Asaph’s Prescription

Despite the terrifying scenario that this Psalm presents for any Israeli living at the time of its fulfilment, Asaph's 'prayer missile' is already launched. The ancient priest has already interceded for his people ahead of time and called for a powerful destruction of their enemies. Here Asaph prescribes a dramatic answer to the problem.

“Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the Brook Kishon, who perished at En Dor, who became as refuse on the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, ‘Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession.’” (v9-12)

No, you are not going cross-eyed, those are real names! They are the *Who's who* of defeated enemies in the Old Testament book of Judges. Midian, Sisera and Jabin were all defeated by Deborah and Barak in Judges 4-5; Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna were all defeated by Gideon in Judges 7-8. They came against Israel in great force and with Satanic hatred, but the Lord crushed their attempts to destroy them and set Israel free from their tyranny. Basically, Asaph is praying, 'Do it again, Lord! What you did back then, in the book of Judges – do it again!' He is using historical examples to illustrate his prescription to Israel's future problem. But he also uses some examples from creation, too.

“O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like chaff before the wind!” (v13)

Can you imagine a bit of tumble weed being blown along in a low budget cowboy movie? Or have you ever seen chaff being blown away from the threshing floor in an old farming book? If so, then you have some idea of what Asaph is asking for. In modern terms he is calling for them to be 'blown away' by the judgment of God.

“As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with your tempest, and frighten them with your storm.” (v14-15)

Graphically, Asaph calls for a judgment that will be similar to a forest fire in devastation and a great storm in terror. There's no soft praying here. He is obviously wants the Lord of creation to both terrorise and terminate Israel's murderous foes in ways that are understood from nature. This is bold and brave intercession indeed. But there's more...

“Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O Lord. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes let them be put to shame and perish.” (v16-17)

The closing request for judgment is that God would leave Israel's enemies perishing in shame. He is not afraid to ask for such severe judgment, knowing that annihilation was actually what they also had in mind for the Jews. Let us remember, this psalm was inspired by the Holy Spirit, so it will definitely come to pass, perhaps in our life time. Exactly how these prayers will be answered remains to be seen. The earlier reference to the book of Judges may suggest an unprecedented military victory for Israel. On the other hand, the examples from nature may suggest a supernatural response through creation which will bring about the answer to this prayer. What is certain is that the anti-semites will be totally undone when this 'prayer missile' strikes, leaving her without threat from her near neighbours. Is this why she is at peace when Gog strikes in Ezekiel 38?

Asaph's Final Plea

The closing request of this prayer is the clincher:

“That they may know that You, whose Name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.” (v18)

The one unbreakable rule or prayer is that God should be glorified in any answer. This is exactly what Asaph asks for, and it is as prophetic as it is wise. When the abominable prayer calls go out from minarets across the Middle East, calling false religions to worship, what is it they are actually saying? That their false god is “great” or even “greater.” But when this true prayer of Asaph's is answered every Arab in the Middle East, and all the watching world, will know that actually the Lord is the one true God, and that He is, “*the Most High over*

all the earth.” What a prophetic prayer request! How can this prayer not be answered? The Lord will do so to His own glory and Israel will be saved. Let us learn from Asaph the connection between prayer and prophecy. Let us watch in confidence for its answer and be inspired to pray ourselves.

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