Judge the powerless and the orphan;
maintain the rights of the poverty-stricken.
Make the powerless poor secure;
save them from the hand of the wicked.

A Prayer for the Punishment of Enemies (83:1–19)

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Translation

1 A song;[a] an Asaphite psalm.[b]

2 (1) *O God,[a] do not rest;[b]* (3+3)
do not be silent or still, O God.[c]

3 (2) *For lo, your enemies are roaring[a]* (3+3)
and those who hate you have raised[b] their heads.[c]

4 (3) *Against your people they make plans,* (3+3)
and they conspire together against your treasured ones.[a]

5 (4) *They say:[a]* (1+3+3)
"Come and let us exterminate them as a nation,
and the name of Israel will be remembered no more."

6 (5) *For they have consulted together[a] with one mind;* (3+3)
(even) against you they are making a covenant.[b]

7 (6) *The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,[a]* (3+2)
Moab[b] and the Hagrites.[c]

8 (7) *Gebal[a] and Ammon and Amalek,[b]* (3+3)
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre.

9 (8) *Also, Assyria is joined with them,* (3+3)
they have become the arm for the sons of Lot.[a] SELAH.

10 (9) *Do to them as with Midian[a]—* (3+2+2)
as with Sisera and Jabin[b]
at the river Kishon,

11 (10) *who were destroyed at En-dor,[a]* (2+2)
who became dung for the ground—

12 (11) *Deal with their nobles[a] as with Oreb and Zeeb,* (4+3)
and with all their princes as with Zebah and Zalmunna,

13 (12) *who said,* (2+2+3)
"Let us take possession for ourselves
of the pasturelands[a] of God."

14 (13) *O my God, treat them as whirling dust,* (3+2)
as chaff before the wind,

15 (14) *as a fire which burns a forest,* (3+3)
as flames which set mountains ablaze!

16 (15) *So pursue them with your tempest;* (3+2)
terrify them with your storm;

17 (16) *fill their faces with humiliation,* (3+3)
so that they will seek your name,[a] O Yahweh.

18 (17) *Let them be put to shame and terrified, continually;* (3+2)
let them be abashed and perish,[a]

19 (18) *that they may know that you,* (2+3+3)
whose name is Yahweh, you only,[a]
are the Most High over all the earth.

Notes

1.a. See n. 65:1.c.

1.b. See n. 73:1.a.

2.a. Cf. אלהים here and in v 13 with יהוה in 17b, 19. Briggs sees the occurrences of יהוה as glosses within the "Elohistic Psalter" (Pss 42–83). Kraus treats יהוה as the original form which was emended to אלהים in the first two instances by the Elohistic redactor and proposes that we read יהוה in vv 2a and 13. The occurrence of both divine names in the psalm may indicate that it was used as a part of more than one collection.

2.b. LXX, Vg, and Syr indicate מי ידמה, "Who will be like you?" But MT is satisfactory, and LXX probably represents either dittography or haplography (see Briggs, II, 223). Cf. Ps 89:7; Isa 62:6.

2.c. The divine name אל is used here in place of אלהים. Dahood suggests that this is a vocative form, "O El," and that it forms an inclusion with a vocative אלהי (which he assumes as correct), as in v 14, at the beginning of the verse. Similar usage of vocative אל can be found in Pss 10:12, 16:1, 17:6, and 139:23.

3.a. The verb המה pictures a crowd-like murmuring or mob-induced confusion or tumult.

3.b. The phrase ומשנאיך נשאו, "and those who hate you have raised," has a wordplay on the verbs שנא and נשא.

3.c. Lit., "have raised a head." The collective idea conveys the idea of raising their heads in haughty arrogance or in victory. REB has "carry their heads high"; NJV is rather flat: "assert themselves." Cf. Judg 8:28, where the defeated Midianites are said to "lift up their heads no more." Heads are lifted up at the news of victory in Ps 24:7, 9. Cf. also Job 10:15; Zech 2:4 [1:21].

4.a. צפוניך, "your treasured one," (qal pass participle of צפן, "to treasure/hide"). Some ancient sources read צְפוּנֶיךָ, a singular noun meaning "your jewel" or "your treasure" (Gunkel; Schmidt), possibly indicating a sanctuary or temple. Dahood (II, 274) prefers the alternate reading and leans toward the meaning as a complement to עמך ("your people") at the beginning of the verse. Kraus (*Psalms 60–150,* 160) retains MT, but understands the צפוניך as "your charges" or "your protégés"—"those entrusted to your care." NRSV has "those you protect."

5.a. The translation above treats the אמרו ("they say") as an anacrusis outside the colons which follow. The colons in 5b and 5c are reasonably balanced without the deletion of עוד or שם (as proposed by Briggs, II, 223). Note the similar construction in v 13.

6.a. The expression לב יחדו is difficult to translate literally and is the recipient of suggested emendations: Gunkel (366) emends לב יחדו to read לב אחד, "one heart." For the verb without ("heart/mind"), see Ps 71:10; Isa 45:21; Neh 6:7. Briggs (II, 223) suggests a conflation of two readings: נועצו יחדו and נועצו לב אחד, which may be correct.

6.b. The phraseology, . . . על . . . ברית . . . כרת, "make a covenant *against*" is not used elsewhere in the OT. Covenants are usually made "with," not "against," another entity. Therefore, Dahood suggests reading עליך as a pl. participle from עלה ("your assailants make a covenant," with עלה in the sense of "rise up against to attack." But Dahood fails to give any convincing example of the verb with this meaning, although he could have cited Isa 7:6; Jer 4:13; Joel 4:9 [3:9]; etc.

7.a. The Ishmaelites are generally associated with tribes south of Judah. Paralleled here with the Edomites (descendants of Esau, Gen 36:1–17) we have a pair of references to the tradition of sons whose brothers were chosen over them (Isaac and Jacob) as patriarchs.

7.b. Moab refers to a tribal people located to the east of the Jordan, active in the time of Saul (as attested by 1 Chr 5:10).

7.c. The identity of the Hagrites (הגרים) is uncertain. They are associated with territory in Northern Arabia in 1 Chr 5:10, 19–20. Their mention with the Ishmaelites makes it natural to assume some connection with Hagar and Abraham (cf. Gen 16:1, 15). Hagrites are also mentioned in 1 Chr 11:38; 27:30.

8.a. Gebal (גבל) is identified by some (e.g., Dahood) as the Philistine city of Byblos. Mentioned elsewhere only in Ezek 27:9 (with *pathah*). More likely it refers to a location south of the Dead Sea near Petra in Edom since it is listed with Ammon. Syr has "borders of Ammon," which is adopted by Kissane, II, 62–63 (reading גבל). Briggs (II, 223) also eliminates the possibility of a placename by translating "lords of Ammon," emending MT to גבולי ("borders/territory of"), which he suggests may be a garbled form of בעלי, "lords/masters of."

8.b. Amalek was primarily a southern tribe from the area of the Negeb with very ancient roots (see e.g., Exod 17:8; Num 24:20).

9.a. The expression לבני לוט, "for the sons of Lot," is a traditional reference to peoples surrounding Judah; here most likely Ammon (Deut 2:19) and Moab (Deut 2:9).

10.a. The shift of "as Midian" (כמדין) to the beginning of v 11 is fairly common in commentaries (e.g., Gunkel, Schmidt, Oesterley, Kraus; see *BHS*), which gives the colons better balance. However, I have taken the formation of vv 10–12 as an envelope structure, with the insertion of the material in vv 10b, 10c, 11a, and 11c within the larger reference to the Midianites in vv 10a and 12–13 (the pattern is A X B [for references, see *Form/Structure/Setting*, Ps 69]). The short colons in 10b, c, and 11a, b are then well balanced.

10.b. Sisera and Jabin are defeated enemies mentioned in Judg 4–7.

11.a. The place name עין־דאר is spelled variously: עין־דר (Josh 17:11), עין־דור (1 Sam 28:7). Some commentators prefer to read עין־חרד as in Judg 7:1, a location associated with the Midianite raids on the Israelites. E.g., Gunkel (366) suggests that חרד was corrupted to דר and then identified with Endor (עין־דאר) in 1 Sam 28:3–25 and Josh 17:11–12. See *Comment*.

12.a. The construction שיתמו נדיבמו, "make them, their nobles," seems redundant. Perhaps the verb should be reduced to the nonsuffixed imperative, as in *BHS* (following LXX): שיתמ(ה) or שית. If MT is retained, the construction is probably emphatic. Delitzsch (II, 470) says that "the heaped-up suffixes . . . give to the imprecation the rhythm and sound of pealing thunder."

13.a. The word נאות is the plural of נוה, "place where one pastures/pasture ground," or more generally, "place/abode"; of Yahweh, see Exod 15:13; 2 Sam 15:25; Jer 25:30. Perhaps, we should read the singular (cf. *BHS*). LXX has θυσιαστήριον or ἁγιαστήριον: "the altar" or "the sanctuary" of God.

17.a. The second colon is problematic because of its seeming incoherence within the context of the psalm. As such, several have suggested emendations: Gunkel (and Schmidt) suggest reading שלומך for שמך and thus reading "that they may seek peace with you [your peace]." Dahood emends by placing the final *waw* of בקשו on שמך(ו) and reading בקש as "avenge" or "exact a penalty" (see Gen 31:39; 43:9; 1 Sam 20:16; 2 Sam 4:11; Ezek 3:18, 20; 33:8; Josh 22:23): "Let your name, Yahweh, avenge itself." It hardly needs to be said that his reading is highly questionable, especially since the verb with this meaning is normally followed by an explicit direct object. The difficulty of the statement is sometimes overstated; e.g., Dahood (II, 277) claims that it is "hardly amendable to coherent exegesis." Kraus (*Psalms 60–150*, 164) rejects Gunkel's idea of the nations "looking for peace" with Yahweh and correctly points to the expectation that the nations are to recognize the universal lordship of Yahweh.

18.a. Reading the imperfects as jussives. Gunkel (367) adds יחד to the end of the second stich to complete the meter, thus rendering "and let them perish together," but this is unnecessary.

19.a. Frequently commentaries and translations follow LXX and take לבדך ("alone") with the second half of the verse, sometimes with the omission of שמך ("your name") as in Kraus (*Psalms 60–150*,

160): "That they may realize that you, O Yahweh / alone are the Most High over all the earth." Oesterley (376) deletes both שמך and יהוה to read: "And let them know that thou alone / art Most High over all the earth." NJV seems to read וידעו ("and they will know/and let them know") as an anacrusis (cf. v 5): "May they know / that your name, Yours alone, is the LORD, / supreme over all the earth." I have chosen to read the verse with an A X B pattern (cf. the envelope pattern in vv 10–12), with שמך יהוה לבדך as the middle element, which is an explanatory statement emphasizing that the Most High (עליון) over all the earth is indeed Yahweh.

Form/Structure/Setting

Ps 83 is generally accepted as a national lament, manifesting several characteristics of this form. It implores Yahweh to come to the aid of his people who are being surrounded by a host of enemies. The speaker perceives the problem as being rooted in the evil of the heathen nations around Israel and not due to sinfulness within Israel. In this regard it is like other national laments with the absence of a call to repentance (e.g., Pss 44, 74, 80, 137). The psalm focuses on a petition urging Yahweh not to remain passive toward present threats; reminding him of his interventions in the past in destroying earlier enemies of Israel (vv 10–13).

The careful enumeration of Israel's enemies might lead the reader to believe that the psalm's historical setting could be easily determined. But the number of nations listed and their combination confuses the issue since there was never a period in Israel's history when all of these enemies threatened concurrently.

Kraus (*Psalms 60–150*, 161) comments on the "amazing" confidence of some commentators in their ability to fix the historical situation in this psalm: from the Assyrian period of pre-exilic Israel to the period of the Maccabees (one of the more popular contexts argued for is that reflected in 2 Chr 20, but the nations in Ps 83 are not mentioned in that passage). Kraus himself thinks that the list of nations is freely composed, as a more or less standard portrayal of an "assault of nations" against Israel. The fact that there are ten nations named supports the conclusion that we are dealing with a stereotypical list (cf. Dan 7:7, 20, 24). Such a large coalition of nations in alliance against Israel is both unknown and improbable (Deissler, II, 156).

The dating of the psalm tends to follow the historical situation presupposed. If "Assyria" in v 9 is taken as a direct historical reference, contemporary with the composition of the psalm, it would point to a date between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C.E. (cf. Schmidt, 158). It is more likely, however, that Assyria is mentioned as an *example* of one of the great world powers allied with the small states around Israel. It is rather strange that Egypt and Babylon are not mentioned, but Ezra 6:22 provides some evidence of Assyria as a stereotyped reference to a foreign power (the "king of Assyria" there seems actually to refer to Persia; cf. Hos 9:6; Zech 10:10–11; Lam 5:6; Isa 11:11; 19:23–25; 27:13; Jdt 2:1; 1 QM 1.2; 18.2; 19.10.

If the lexical criteria for dating Hebrew poetry set forth in *Form/Structure/Setting* of Ps 93 have any validity, Ps 83 is a late composition, with prose-like constructions (e.g., the את in v 13; also the relative pronoun אשר in 13.a). The psalm probably originated from a post-exilic context (Deissler, II, 156, cites v 2 as dependent on Isa 62:1), though a late pre-exilic date is possible. The "Judean perspective" and the "cultic traditions of Jerusalem" (Kraus, 162) are not out of harmony with a post-exilic date. In any case, Gunkel's proposal to refer אשור to the North Arabian Asshurim, who are listed as descendants of Abraham through his

wife Keturah in Gen 25:3–4 (cf. Num 24:2–4) is unlikely. Kraus (163) notes that such an insignificant group would not have been able to be an "arm for the sons of Lot" (the Moabites and Ammonites; Deut 2:9, 19; cf. Gen 19:37–38). To be an "arm" for someone is to provide strong and effective help (cf. Exod 6:6; 15:16; 2 Kgs 17:36; Job 22:8 ["a man of arm" possesses the land]; Isa 33:2; Jer 21:5; Dan 11:6).

The literary structure of the psalm is not complicated. V 2 is an opening plea to God, followed by complaint in vv 3–9; vv 10–19 is an extended run of petitions about the enemies. B. Costacurta notes a chiastic sequence in vv 3–6, framed by the use of כי at the beginning of vv 3 and 6:

v 3: enemies of God (כי . . . אויביך . . . משנאיך)
  v 4: enemies of Israel (על־עמך . . . על־צפוניך)
  v 5: enemies of Israel (נכחידם מגוי . . . ולא־יזכר שם)
v 6: enemies of God (כי נועצו . . . עליך)

A schema in vv 10–13 focuses on the names of ancient foes and their fate in a way which highlights the present situation (Costacurta, *Bib* 64 [1983] 520):

v 10: names of ancient foes
v 11: the fate of ancient foes
v 12: names of ancient foes
v 13: the threat of present foes

Also, see note 10.a. above.

The speaker is not identified, but we can think of a pious Israelite leader voicing a prayer for the people. A suitable setting would have been lamentation ceremonies in exilic or post-exilic Israelite communities.

Comment

A plea to God (83:2). God, who is Yahweh, is implored not to be at rest or quiet, i.e., inactive and silent when help is needed. The meaning is expressed well by NJV's translation of the second colon (where the verb is חרש): "do not hold aloof." The speaker seeks God's active help.

A complaint about enemies (83:3–9). These verses set forth to God an urgent complaint about an imminent military attack against the people of the speaker, who are referred to as "your people" (v 4). God is reminded, indirectly, of his obligation to defend Israel. The enemies are described with rather typical language: they are in a roaring rage (v 3; המה; cf. Pss 46:7, 4; 59:7, 15; Jer 6:23), arrogantly lifting up their heads, perhaps already sure of victory, and united in mind and purpose as they make their shrewd plans to attack and exterminate. Their overweening confidence is expressed in the short speech attributed to them in v 5. The complaint makes it clear that these are not only Israel's enemies but are also Yahweh's enemies: they are those "who hate you" (v 3) and they are about to try to exterminate "your people," "your treasured ones." The political alliance (ברית, "covenant") they have made (v 6) is "against you." Yahweh cannot afford to ignore this threat.

The enemies named in vv 7–8 are known from other references in the OT, though this combination is unique. For Edom, note Ps 137:7; Isa 34:5–6; 63:1; Ezek 35:1–15; for the Ishmaelites, see Gen 17:20; 25:18; 37:25–28; for Moab, see Judg 3:12–30; 1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:12; 2 Kgs 3:4–24; Isa 15–16; Jer 48; Zeph 2:8–11; for the Hagrites, a tribe with territory east of the Jordan with whom the Transjordan tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh fought, see 1 Chr 5:10, 19–20; cf. 1 Chr 27:30; 11:38; for Ammon and Amalek, see Judg 3:13; 2 Kgs 24:2; Jer 41:15; 49:1; Exod 17; Num 24:20; 1 Sam 15. Gebal may be a reference to a Canaanite and Phoenician port some twenty miles north of modern Beirut and known in Greek traditions as Byblos (modern Jebeil), listed in Josh 13:5 as among the lands not yet possessed by the Israelites (the expression in Josh 13:5 is הארץ הגבלי, "the Giblite land"; this term is also found in 1 Kgs 5:32 [18] and Ezek 27:9 in the expression זקני גבל, "elders of Gebal").

Commentators have usually preferred to identify Gebal as some tribal area south of the Dead Sea in relation to Edom and Moab. Perhaps insufficient attention has been paid to the possibility that the peoples listed form a rough circle around Israel, beginning in the south, up the Transjordan region, over to Tyre (and Gebal), and back down the coast to Philistia. This approach would be strengthened if there were some kind of neat pattern in the way the ten names are listed, but at the moment I do not see one (except in v 8 there could be a kind of chiastic pattern: Gebal—Ammon and Amalek—Philistia—Tyre.

A Gebal — Philistia B
B Ammon and Amalek — Tyre A

If the Phoenician Gebal (Byblos) is intended, archaeological excavations have shown it to have had a long history from the Neolithic period (c. 8,000 B.C.E.) down to its conquest by the Muslims in 636 C.E. It was a major trade center, but lost some importance and power to Tyre after c. 850 B.C.E. It remained, however, as a significant city throughout the entire period of Israelite history. Philistia and Tyre are well known and hardly need references (e.g., Judg 3:3, 31; 1 Sam 4–6 for the Philistines and Amos 1:9–10; Isa 23:1–18; Jer 25:22; Ezek 26–28 for Tyre).

Assyria is the great power which joined with and supported hostile nations ringing Israel. As already discussed above, "Assyria" is probably a stereotyped name for the great nations of the ancient Near East. Typically in several periods of history, the small states in Palestine-Syria were either in coalition against Mesopotamian powers (as against the Assyrians in 853 B.C.E.) or in some sort of league with Mesopotamian states, or with Egypt.

The "sons of Lot" is most probably a direct reference to the Moabites and Ammonites who were traditionally considered to be descendants of Lot through incestuous intercourse with his daughters (see note 9.a.). The references are lacking to demonstrate it, but I suggest that the expression had also become stereotypical by the time this psalm was composed, in the manner that Edom became the prototypical enemy of Israel after the exile (as, e.g., in Obadiah; note Ps 60:1 [title], 10–11).

Petitions for divine judgment of the enemies (83:9–19). This is a rather extensive and vivid section of petitions asking for varied forms of judgment on the enemies. The requests for judgment are rooted in the traditions of the salvation-history of

Israel, which had accounts of how Yahweh dealt severely with those who attacked his people in the past (vv 10–13). The defeat of the Midianites and the execution of their leaders Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, and Zalmuna by Gideon (Judg 6–8) is recalled—a victory which was really Yahweh's, of course. Included in this account is also a retrospect in vv 10b–11 to the defeat of Sisera and Jabin and their forces (Judg 4–5). These were "close-in" enemies (like those in vv 7–8) who threatened the whole enterprise of Yahweh and his people.

V 13 matches v 5 in recalling the arrogant speech of foes in the past, who sought to take possession for themselves of the very "pasturelands" of God (reading the speaking in v 13 as that of the ancient enemies in vv 10–12 rather than to current enemies in vv 2–9, as in most interpretations on the grounds that there is no reference to such a statement by the Midianites in Judg 6–8 [e.g., Oesterley, 377], but such expectation of exact quotation is not required; note Durham, 343). The present enemies are trying to play the role of ancient enemies and they should suffer the same fate; at least that is the prayer of the speaker. That fate is, of course, a terrible one: a "hideous picture of corpses that were scattered like so much dung on the field" (Kraus, 163, on v 11b; cf. Jer 8:2; 9:22).

In the middle of the petitions, the speaker makes a personal appeal to God in v 14a: "O my God." The petitions are personalized in this way; the speaker's personal welfare merges with that of the country. The individual and the corporate are inseparately meshed. The speaker could be a king, especially if the psalm is from the pre-exilic period, but it matters little. Any congregational leader could integrate personal concern with community distress. The kings were not the only ones who were concerned with the nation's welfare.

Vivid figures of speech are used to describe the desired defeat of the enemies in vv 14–19. The "whirling dust" of v 14a (גלגל) is derived from גלל, "to roll," and the word גלגל can mean a "wheel." It could be simply a "rolling thing," but it is frequently identified as the wheel-shaped dry calix of the wild artichoke (*Gundelia Tournefortii*) which rolls over the fields before the wind like thistledown or tumbleweeds. I assume that the reference is to rolling thistles, dry leaves, mixed with dust and driven by the wind. The simile of chaff or stubble whirling in the wind is found in other contexts: see, e.g., Isa 40:24; Jer 13:24; with מץ ("chaff"), see Ps 1:4; 35:5; Hos 13:3; Job 21:18. The graphic depiction of a fire burning in a dry forest and roaring up the sides of mountains, as it were, to set the mountains themselves ablaze (v 15), may be compared with Deut 4:11; 5:20 [23]; 9:15; Isa 9:18–19; Ezek 21:3 [20:47]. For the rout of enemies by a storm (v 16), compare Josh 10:11; Isa 28:2, 17; 29:6; Hos 8:7; Amos 1:14; Nah 1:3; Job 21:18; 27:20–23; Prov 1:27; 10:25. For v 17, compare Mic 7:10; Ezek 7:18; Obad 10; Jer 46:12. This psalm is a good example of traditional language being put together in a composition with good poetic artistry. The language is basically conventional, but the composition is unique and effective.

The ultimate result of the treatment of the enemies prayed for in the petitions is expressed in v 19: that they may know that Yahweh rules as the Most High (עליון, see Ps 92:2b) over all the earth. God is asked to act in such ways as to bring the prototypical enemies to recognize his universal lordship. To "know" Yahweh is to recognize his name and submit to his will. The concept emerges out of a long tradition in the OT: e.g., Exod 5:2; 7:5; 14:4, 18; 1 Kgs 2:13, 28; Ezek 7:2–4; 25:3–5; 28:25–26. Of course, "knowing" Yahweh applies to Israelites as well as to foreigners; both are brought together in the Deuteronomistic text in the prayer of Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:43 (also, 2 Chr 6:33): "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name" (RSV). Cf. Ps 46:11. The tradition of "knowing" God is extensively treated by W. Zimmerli in his *"Erkenntnis Gottes Nach dem Buch Ezekiel"* (originally published in 1954 [ATANT 27], now in English in *I Am Yahweh,* tr. D. W. Stott [Atlanta: John Knox, 1982] 29–98). Weiser (564) summarizes the end of Ps 83 with the contention that the power and the grace of God have the final say: "The ultimate goal of God's terrible judgments . . . is that his enemies, too, will be made ashamed and will seek him, that they will turn to him in penitence and will come to realize that power and glory upon the whole earth belong alone to God who has revealed his name Yahweh."

Explanation

One is tempted not to bother with the message of this little-read psalm. It could be said that its main claim for attention is that canonical tradition has placed it between two better-known psalms: 82 and 84. The language and the content of the psalm are conventional and seem to offer nothing really different from that found in a number of individual and communal laments. On the other hand, the canonical tradition, however it was transmitted, is worthy of our respect. In church tradition, the psalm has been excessively spiritualized and the speaker, ringed by enemies, has been taken as a prototype of Christ on the cross. As such, the psalm has been included in liturgies for Good Friday (see Deissler, II, 158; Jacquet, II, 615–16). Although we will do well to respect the piety of this tradition, we will do better to read the psalm more directly in its context.

Ps 83 merits our consideration from at least two perspectives. First, it is a good example of relatively late Hebrew poetry. Its style is not marked by great subtlety; it is rather straightforward and simple. The fine distinctions and intricate patterns of some psalms are missing. However, it is effective and expresses prayer with both economy of words and well-crafted figures of speech.

Second, the psalm serves as a paradigmatic prayer of lament and complaint for a people surrounded by hostile nations and threatened with overwhelming force. The psalm reminds us that the greatest resource of the people of Yahweh is prayer, which appeals both directly to him and is based on his powerful acts of intervention and deliverance in the past. The foes that ring the land would ravage the very "pasturelands of God" (v 13) for themselves; appearing "as a sinister counterfeit of God's kingdom, a kind of anti-church. . . . But Israel relies on a passionate intercession in which two features stand out: the remembrance of ancient salvation, and the controlling motive of serving God's glory" (Eaton, 208). The most severe judgments of God are reserved for those, whether individuals or nations, who set themselves to take over the "pasturelands of God," seeking to exterminate his people and his enterprise in human history. Let all kings and tyrants, all oppressors whatever their role and status, take notice. Let the people of God whenever they are ringed about with threatening foes lift up their hearts. The king of all nations and the judge of all the earth hears prayer and will in his own time and ways sweep his foes away as a fire roars through a forest and sweeps over the mountains in blazing fury. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the LORD."