

HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR ENEMIES—AN OLD TESTAMENT

PERSPECTIVE

PSALM 83

Introduction:

God's people have always lived in an unfriendly world. There have always been evil alliances committed to the destruction of God's people. Prayer has always been a first response for God's people when faced with such enmity.

This psalm provides us with an intense expression of such prayer.

The particular circumstance out of which this prayer came is not clear. Many confidently relate this prayer to the experience of the nation during the reign of Jehoshaphat that is reported in 2 Chronicles 20. There many of the traditional enemies of Judah combined their efforts to overthrow the nation and bring destruction to it. The good king of Judah led the nation to face the crisis on their knees. This is very likely the incident that provoked this prayer. The efforts of the evil alliance were unprovoked, as far as we learn from the historical record.

Is there anything we can learn from this incident? We live with a mandate from our Lord to “pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” However Jesus did not specify the content of the prayer, but simply to pray for them. The implication is that we are to pray with their good in view, but

it is not defined. I doubt that this Old Testament prayer rises to the level set forth by our Lord in His sermon, but this should not surprise us. He lifted everything up to another level, as the whole Sermon on the Mount demonstrates. But there is profit for us in this prayer.

I. REMIND GOD OF THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP THAT HE HAS WITH HIS PEOPLE.

There are two sides to the covenant relationship which God graciously established between Himself and His people. On one side it obligated His people to a life of loyalty and obedience. But on the other side it obligated God to be the protector of His people. It made God one with His people. Any breach against His people should be considered as a breach against God.

1. Because of the covenant the enemies of God's people are His enemies.

Just as the treaty of our nation with many nations obligates us to come their defense if they are attacked, so this covenant obligates God to come to the defense of His people. "For behold, your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate you have lifted their head."

2. Because of the covenant the people of God are under His protection.

God's people are "Your sheltered ones."

Actually God's New Testament people are related to God through an even greater covenant—the New Covenant established at the Cross.

II. REMIND GOD OF WHAT HE HAS DONE TO DEFEND HIS PEOPLE ON OTHER OCCASIONS.

1. God has been faithful to defend His people. (v. 9-12)

The Psalmist finds examples of this primarily in the dark days of the Judges. Even though God used the Judges to defend His people, everyone rightly saw the hand of God in the deliverance of His people. Should not God do for Jehosaphat what he had done for Gideon, Barak, and Deborah, and others?

2. The current enemies are following in the steps of those God has defeated in the past. (v. 12)

III. REMIND GOD THAT HE IS ABLE TO JUDGE EVIL MEN.

1. God is able to use all of the forces of nature to defend His people (v. 13-15)
2. God is able to bring utter defeat to these enemies. (v. 16)

IV. ASK FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE ENEMIES.

1. "That they may seek Your name, O Lord."
2. "That men may know that you, whose name alone is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth."

What an expectation! That God may turn His enemies into humble worshippers?

God did this to a degree in the former Soviet Union. Many of those who imposed persecution upon the church under Communism today are disciples of Jesus Christ and work for the spread of the Gospel.

God has done this with many Muslims around the world. Before they opposed the spread of the Gospel, they are now agents of the Gospel.

God did this to my friend Gilbert Herrera in Lubbock in an isolated case.

This is the heart of God. He delights in salvation—not destruction. This is the prayer He is most likely to hear.

He did this Romania when he drew to himself a husband who threatened to kill his wife if she sought believer's baptism in the Baptist church. However when the church responded to his threats with prayer, God turned his heart toward salvation.