"An Uncomfortable but Biblical Response to National Antisemitism from Psalms 83"

**Abstract**
Ps 83 is a community lament that implores God to action to deal decisively with the numerous Gentile nations threatening Israel's existence. These nations have allied themselves and have plotted together to efface God's people "so Israel is remembered no more." An exegesis of this psalm suggests that this "song/mizmor" has been a godly response to national antisemitism from the time of Asaph and into the second temple when the book of Psalms was completed. While many are uncomfortable with imprecatory psalms, this ancient curse song should be employed as a contemporary prayer of God's people in response to antisemitism.

**Introduction**
While the term, "antisemitism" is not an old term, first used in the late 1800's, the concept is ancient. The nation and the people of Israel have always faced hatred and the threat of eradication from early on. An example of this ancient threat is found in Psalm 83, a psalm of Asaph. It is this psalm that provides an uncomfortable but biblical response to national antisemitism.[1] This is an uncomfortable truth for as we will see towards the end of this song, the answer to the threat is a forceful and decisive imprecation against Israel's enemies. Though the psalm is certainly biblical, believers are uncomfortable using imprecation in their prayers today. While there would be much to gain from a discussion of imprecatory psalms in general, I want to by-pass that discussion and limit this psalm to its ancient audience to whom it was written, the nation of Israel.

**Authorship and Date**
The superscription in our English Bibles (or v. 1 in Hebrew) acknowledge Asaph as the author of this psalm, לְאָסָף. David had appointed Asaph as chief of the Levites "to celebrate and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel" (1 Chron 16:4-7). While it is true that the lamad preposition has various uses in Hebrew, there is no legitimate reason to reject the lamad in לְאָסָף as a lamad auctoris.[2] Since Asaph was a contemporary of David, dating of this psalm would be around 1000 BC.

**Audience**

While a discussion of the audience of this psalm seems rather straight forward based on Asaph's authorship and date, we need to remember that the Psalter was not compiled into the collection we have today until after the exile. So, while Asaph's original audience was certainly pre-exilic, the readers of this song in the order we have today (as Ps 83, Book 3) was certainly post-exilic.[3]

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[1] I use the term "national antisemitism" to capture the hatred of the Jews not just as individuals, but as an entire nation. The "antisemitism" expressed in this song has as its singular goal of eradicating the entire country so she is remembered no more (Ps 83:4).
[2] Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake 1990), 206.
[3] Asaph had twelve psalms attributed to him. Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83. The inspired compiler of the Psalter rearranged Asaph's psalms to fit his intended purpose for the whole book and his new audience.

We do not know the circulation of this song during Asaph's time. Based on Israel's history after the division of the kingdom, it could have been a popular request at either temple or synagogue.[4] It certainly could have been during the exile (Esther) and afterwards since it was included in the final edition of the Psalter.

## Genre

In its superscription (Heb v. 1) the psalm self identifies as a שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר, a song, a mizmor. Neither term is overly descriptive or helpful. There is simply too much we do not know about ancient Hebrew music or its expressions. These are fairly common terms in the Psalter. At the moment, these words do not shed much light on the psalm except to state that it is a singular unity as a mizmor and song.

Recent scholarship has identified this psalm as a community lament[5] or in this case to be more specific, a national lament.[6] While this psalm is missing the author's use of the first-person plural as a major identification marker for a community lament, the theme of national threat is clearly visible by other means.

A community or national lament is generally categorized by having five elements: an address; the lament; community confession of trust; petition to God; and concludes with a vow of praise. Psalm 83 exhibits three of the five parts.[7]

*Structure*[8]

| | |
|---|---|
| 83:1 | Address to God |
| 83:2-8 | Lament to God |
| 83:9-18 | Petition to God[9] |

The three-stanza structure of the psalm is straightforward and uncomplicated.[10]

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[4] There is no evidence that the confederation of nations Asaph lists (vs 6-8) ever united against Israel during his lifetime. I will touch on the reason for this list later in this paper.

[5] C. Hassel Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Baker Academics, Grad Rapids, 2001), 146.

[6] Willem VanGemeren, "Psalms" vol 5 in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* rev. ed (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2008), 627. And Marvin E. Tate, "Psalms 51-100" vol. 20 in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Word Book Publisher, Dallas, 1990), 345.

[7] That there are variations in different psalms categories should not alarm. Any poet worth his salt would deviate from the "norm" to engage his audience in fresh and new ways.

[8] Ross, following VanGemeren, offers a chiastic structure which is creative. However, it seems to overshadow the elements that make up the community/national lament and does not show the movement of the psalm. Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms* vol. 2 (Kregel Academic, Grand Rapids, 2013), 731.

[9] Missing in this national/community lament are the "confession of trust" and "vow of praise."

[10] It should be noted that unlike other laments, even those of Asaph, there is no mention of Israel's sin that is the cause of this national threat, unlike Ps 81; 80; 79; and 78. While God has used national enemies to discipline his people in the past, this is not the case in this psalm.

**Exegesis Psalm 83[11]**

*83:1 Address to God*

אֱלֹהִים אַל־דְּמִי־לָךְ

אַל־תֶּחֱרַשׁ וְאַל־תִּשְׁקֹט אֵל׃

Verse 1 begins with God (Elohim) and ends with God (El),אֵל .... אֱלֹהִים This inclusio in the address seems to indicate that for Asaph the only resource that can meet the national threat he will share in the next verses begins and ends with none other than God himself.

This verse is composed of three negations fronting one noun (line A) and two imperfects (line B). BDB glosses the noun, דְּמִי, keep not quiet (inactive).[12] Following BDB, the first imperfect of line B, תֶּחֱרַשׁ, glosses as, "be silent, always of God's keeping silence when men pray."[13] HALOT glosses the last imperfect as, "to maintain a quiet attitude**."**[14] It is clear that Asaph wants God's attention and action.

Keeping in mind that we are reading ancient Hebrew poetry we must understand that Asaph wants us to read his poem understanding Hebrew parallelism. That is that line A is intensified or specified in line B or to read his poetic lines as: A line, what's more B.[15]

So, the address of A line reads:

O God, do not remain inactive (what's more…line B)
Do not be silent and maintain a quiet attitude, God.

Asaph prefaces his petition to God by forcefully imploring him not to stand idly by or be indifferent to this national risk. His vigorous opening address is the first element of his strategy in moving God to action on Israel's behalf.

*83:2-8 Lament to God*

כִּי־הִנֵּה אֹויְבֶיךָ יֶהֱמָיּוּן
וּמְשַׂנְאֶיךָ נָשְׂאוּ רֹאש׃
4 עַל־עַמְּךָ יַעֲרִימוּ סֹוד

[11] For ease I have maintained the English verse numbering. Hebrew numbering will follow when needed in parentheses.
[12] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 198.
[13] BDB, 361.
[14] Ludwig Koehler, et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1641.
[15] This is my summary of reading Robert Alter and Kugel. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Basic Books, 1985). James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1981).

וְיִתְיָעֲצוּ עַל־צָפוּנֶיךָ׃
5 אָמְרוּ֥ לְכוּ֙ וְנַכְחִידֵ֣ם מִגּ֔וֹי
וְלֹא־יִזָּכֵ֥ר שֵׁם־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל עֽוֹד׃
6 כִּֽי נוֹעֲצ֣וּ לֵ֣ב יַחְדָּ֑ו
a עָלֶ֥יךָ בְּרִ֝֗ית יִכְרֹֽתוּ׃
7 אָהֳלֵ֣י אֱ֭דוֹם וְיִשְׁמְעֵאלִ֑ים
מוֹאָ֖ב וְהַגְרִֽים׃
8 גְּבָ֣ל וְעַמּ֣וֹן a וַעֲמָלֵ֑ק
פְּלֶ֖שֶׁת עִם־יֹשְׁבֵ֣י צֽוֹר׃
9 גַּם־אַ֭שּׁוּר נִלְוָ֣ה עִמָּ֑ם
הָיָ֥ו זְרוֹעַ֙ לִבְנֵי־לֽוֹט סֶֽלָה׃

The lament stanza of this song is composed of two sections: verses 2-4 (Heb 3-5) and verses 5-8 (Heb 6-9). Each is introduced by a כִּי conjunction. The first section is the lament proper, and the second section mentions the identities of those who are the threats against the survival of God's people.

*83:2-4 Lament to God: The problem*

For look! Your enemies make an uproar
The ones hating you exalt themselves

Immediately following his introductory conjunction that will explain his nation's dire predicament, Aspah shares, כִּֽי־הִנֵּ֥ה, "for behold" (v. 2, Heb v. 3) The term, "behold" is employed here as a particle of immediacy that seeks to bring God into the same reality that the nation is experiencing. As we saw in verse 1—God is silent, inactive, not moving to Israel's aid. To motivate God to action, Asaph wants God to see what he is seeing. Another way to say this may be, Look!… .This imperative powerfully invites God as the addressee of the song to see and hear the menace arrayed against Israel. Asaph believes that if God truly sees and hears what he sees and hears, God will deal with the national threat.

In a community or national lament psalm it is in the lament section where the 1st plural usually occurs. The psalmist shares with God what "we" are going through and why "we" need his intervention. But in this psalm, Asaph does not appeal to the 1st person. Instead, he employs the 2nd person plural in v. 2. אֹויְבֶ֣יךָ יֶהֱמָ֑יוּן וּמְשַׂנְאֶ֥יךָ נָ֝שְׂא֗וּ רֹֽאשׁ׃, "your enemies" and "the ones hating you." This introduces the psalmist's second element of his strategy. By not using the 1st person he subtly or maybe not so subtly shifts the lament from a problem for his nation Israel, to a God problem for him to solve because his reputation and character are at stake. The use of the 2nd person squarely places these dangers as God's dilemma. Ross observes, "The psalmist

knows that this ancient hatred of Israel has always been an attempt to destroy the one true God."[16]

Note that the part of speech that each 2nd person is connected are participles. This suggests that being God's enemies and hating him are present and ongoing activities for these yet to be identified divine foes.

While God has been silent and inactive (v. 1), his enemies have been anything but (v. 2). They have made such a commotion (אֹויְבֶיךָ יֶהֱמָיּוּן) that they have exalted themselves (וּמְשַׂנְאֶיךָ נָשְׂאוּ רֹאשׁ). VanGemeren notes that this is "an expression of overt hostility and confidence."[17]

Verse 3-4 explains how those who hate God have exalted themselves:

עַל־עַמְּךָ יַעֲרִימוּ סֹוד
וְיִתְיָעֲצוּ עַל־צְפוּנֶיךָ׃

Against your people, they make crafty counsel
And they consult together against your treasured ones.

It is the height of pride to make ill plans against those who are God's own. This is how "**your** enemies" God have treated **you**—by making nefarious plans against those who are not only **your** people, but who are "**your** treasured" ones.[18] HALOT glosses the root צפן "to shelter."[19] This seems to indicate that the way God treasures his people is by providing them shelter. With this word use Asaph subtly reminds God that his sheltered ones are in dire jeopardy of losing their shelter.

While the "they" have yet to be identified specifically, they are united in their counsel against those **you** always treasure. וְיִתְיָעֲצוּ עַל־צְפוּנֶיךָ.

Note again, Asaph's strategy by employing the 2nd person. This national threat is not against "us" but against **you** and what is **yours**. While antisemitism may have as its near object the Jew and the nation of Israel, at its heart is a hatred for God, first and foremost.

Like verse 1 verse 3 is structured in an inclusio. A prepositional phrase both begins and ends the verse (against your people; against your treasured ones) and surrounds the plans of these enemies of God. By placing God's people first and last, it highlights the special place they enjoy before him no matter what the plans of others may threaten. It may also be a subtle reversal of verses 6-8. In these verses it appears that Israel is literally surrounded by enemies. However, verse 3 is the divine reality—Israel is "your people," "your treasured ones."

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[16] Ross, *Psalms*, 735.

[17] VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 628.

[18] עַל־צְפוּנֶיךָ is a participle which is in contrast to the continual hatred of God's enemies. While the enemies hatred for God is ongoing and so is God's treasuring of his people, Israel.

[19] HALOT, 1049.

Verse 4 announces what are these shrewd plans and counsel that God's enemies have united themselves around.

5 אָמְרוּ֤ לְכוּ֙ וְנַכְחִידֵ֣ם מִגּ֔וֹי
וְלֹֽא־יִזָּכֵ֥ר שֵֽׁם־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל עֽוֹד׃

They say, "Come, we annihilate them as a nation,
That the name of Israel will be remembered never again."

It is interesting that Asaph quotes the end game of these ones who hate God. Their goal is not secret. That Asaph can quote their very words shows how confident they are and how they have exalted themselves—they don't care who knows their plans—even their intended target. They do not care because no one, not even God himself, can stop their united purpose.[20]

Their plans are obvious. There is no ambiguity. As Ross notes, "The verb 'cut them off' (וְנַכְחִידֵם) in this line clearly means a complete annihilation of Israel. The result would be that the name of Israel would be remembered no more…. If these enemies of Israel had their way, the nation would have been exterminated and never be a reality they had to face. This has been and remains the desire of many people in the Middle East and beyond." [21]

*83:5-8 Lament to God: The people behind the problem*

6 כִּֽי־נוֹעֲצ֣וּ לֵ֣ב יַחְדָּ֑ו
עָלֶ֥יךָ בְּרִ֝֗ית יִכְרֹֽתוּ׃
7 אָהֳלֵ֣י אֱ֭דוֹם וְיִשְׁמְעֵאלִ֑ים
מוֹאָ֖ב וְהַגְרִֽים׃
8 גְּבָ֣ל וְעַמּ֣וֹן[a] וַעֲמָלֵ֑ק
פְּלֶ֥שֶׁת עִם־יֹ֝שְׁבֵ֗י צֽוֹר׃
9 גַּם־אַ֭שּׁוּר נִלְוָ֣ה עִמָּ֑ם
הָיָ֥ו זְרֽוֹעַ לִבְנֵי־לֽוֹט סֶֽלָה׃

The use of the second "ki" conjunction begins the second section of the second stanza of the lament which functions to introduce the ones who are plotting against God. Up to this point the enemies of God have been only alluded to in the 3rd person. In this section they are identified specifically.

Before Asaph moves to identification, he announces to God:

[20] It should be noted that the threats are not due to Israel's sin. While Asaph recognized that God has used enemies in the past to discipline his people (Ps 78, 79, 80, 81), this is not the case in this psalm. The threats of eradication are a response of people's hatred of God and what is his.
[21] Ross, *Psalms*, 734.

6 כִּ֤י נוֹעֲצ֣וּ לֵ֣ב יַחְדָּ֑ו
עָלֶ֥יךָ בְּרִ֖ית יִכְרֹֽתוּ׃

For they have counsel together *with one* heart
Against **you**, they make a covenant.

This is the second use of the verb root, יעץ to take counsel together. The first was in verse 3 (v. 4 Heb). These are united in their hatred and plans of annihilation. They have a single heart "לֵב" to carry out their mission. This is also the second time that Asaph has made plain the fact that these enemies are against God himself, "you" (vs 2 and 5). He fronts the prepositional phase with the 2nd person object in the second line of verse 5. Their hatred and plans of annihilation are clearly against God. Asaph's reminder of this fact builds his strategy that this is God's predicament. As Tate notes, "Yahweh cannot afford to ignore this threat."[22]

The danger God is facing is real and serious because his adversaries are united by a formal agreement, a covenant, בְּרִית, with all its stipulations and ramifications of fulfilling it. I wonder if his inclusion of the term, בְּרִית is a subtle move on Asaph's part to remind God of his covenant with Israel themselves (Gen 12:13 )? By announcing to God that these nations are in covenant with one another, he would be reminding God of their special covenantal relationship that also carries the special blessing of divine protection (Gen 12:3a,b).

The next three verses specifically identifies those who hate God and who have formally agreed to eradicate his people.

7 אָהֳלֵ֣י אֱ֭דוֹם וְיִשְׁמְעֵאלִ֑ים
מוֹאָ֖ב וְהַגְרִֽים׃
8 גְּבָ֤ל וְעַמּ֨וֹן֙ וַעֲמָלֵ֔ק
פְּלֶ֖שֶׁת עִם־יֹשְׁבֵ֥י צֽוֹר׃
9 גַּם־אַשּׁ֣וּר נִלְוָ֣ה עִמָּ֑ם
הָיָ֥ו זְר֝וֹעַ לִבְנֵי־ל֗וֹט סֶֽלָה׃

While Ross suggests that "the tents of Edom" ( אָהֳלֵ֣י אֱ֭דוֹם), is an idiomatic expression for the people of Edom,[23] it is probably better to see "tents of…", as synecdoche for the deployment of each country and its people against God's land, Israel. To see tents is to see a country's military mobilized. Through ellipsis Asaph's wants his readers to read "tents of" before each country and each people group even though the phrase is not in subsequent lines. That Assyria has "joined" them gives evidence that the plan of verses 2-4 now have been given feet (גַּם־אַשּׁ֣וּר נִלְוָ֣ה עִמָּ֑ם). Assyria has not only allied in their plans by covenant, but this nation has also accompanied them on the ground by becoming, הָיָ֥ו זְר֝וֹעַ לִבְנֵי־ל֗וֹט the "arms of the children of Lot" (v. 8). This confederation of nations is deployed to accomplish their united goal.

[22] Tate, *Psalms*, 346.
[23] Ross, *Psalms*, 735.

Also note, that the list of enemies is a combination of both the country and inhabitants which are identified in verses 6-8 (e.g. Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites). This underlines the fact that the enemies are not simply a few individual leaders of each country but also each of its inhabitant. Their hostility is shared both nationally and individually, a hatred by all and of all which is God's.[24]

There are ten nations mentioned by Asaph with the **לִבְנֵי־לֹוט** "children of Lot" repeated in verse 8 (Edom v. 6 and Ammon v. 7). While there is a generally encircling of these nations around Israel geographically, this is probably not Asaph's purpose for this listing. With the naming of Edom and the Ishmaelites first (v. 6) and the children of Lot last (v. 8), the psalmist may be revealing that their hatred is ancient and ongoing. The itemization shows historical animosity against God, his plan and his people from Israel's inception.[25]

However, Asaph adds a political powerhouse to the list group in his list in Assyria (v. 8). No nation in this list could or would rival the power of Assyria during the psalmist's time. To have them as an ally would certainly be a boom and a guarantor of success for the rest of the nations listed. To have Assyria as an ally would certainly cause them to "exalt" (v. 2). While we have no biblical record of Assyria being a threat to Israel during Asaph's time, their inclusion is probably to balance the historical animosity of the previous verses with the fact that national antisemitism draws "new" enthusiasts all the time. The threat of national annihilation of God's people is both ancient and modern.[26]

*3:9-18 Petition to God*

[10]עֲשֵׂה־לָהֶם כְּמִדְיָן
כְּסִיסְרָא כְּיָבִין בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן:
[11]נִשְׁמְדוּ בְעֵין־דֹּאר
הָיוּ דֹּמֶן לָאֲדָמָה:
[12]שִׁיתֵמוֹ נְדִיבֵמוֹ כְּעֹרֵב וְכִזְאֵב
וְכְזֶבַח וְכִצַלְמֻנָּע כָּל־נְסִיכֵמוֹ:
[13]אֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ נִירָשָׁה לָּנוּ
אֵת נְאוֹת אֱלֹהִים:

[14]אֱלֹהַי שִׁיתֵמוֹ כַגַּלְגַּל
כְּקַשׁ לִפְנֵי־רוּחַ:

[24] Grateful to Rev. Kurt Bricker, Lynchburg, VA for the country/inhabitants insight.

[25] While not technically, numerical parallelism, "n+1", the listing of ten nations and then the addition of the children of Lot could signal that v. 8 is the climatic ending of the list. See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (Sheffield Press, England, 2001), 148.

[26] The purpose of this list is not to fit the geographical puzzle pieces in place to identify threats to Israel's security. The purpose is to show the scope of the threat: both ancient and modern and numerically significant. It can also be noted that as we stand on this side of Asaph's psalm, time has not dulled nor diminished the multiple national threat against Israel. On the contrary, history has added new ones.

15 כְּאֵ֣שׁ תִּבְעַר־יָ֑עַר
וּכְלֶ֖הָבָה תְּלַהֵ֣ט הָרִֽים׃
16 כֵּ֤ן תִּרְדְּפֵ֨ם בְּסַעֲרָ֗ךָ
וּבְסוּפָתְךָ֥ תְבַהֲלֵֽם׃
17 מַלֵּ֣א פְנֵיהֶ֣ם קָ֑לֹון
וְיבַקְשׁ֖וּ שִׁמְךָ֣ יְהוָֽה׃
18 יֵבֹ֖שׁוּ וְיִבָּהֲל֣וּ עֲדֵי־עַ֑ד
וְיַחְפְּר֖וּ וְיֹאבֵֽדוּ׃
19 וְיֵדְע֗וּ כִּי־אַתָּ֤ה שִׁמְךָ֨ יְהוָ֥ה לְבַדֶּ֑ךָ
עֶלְי֖וֹן עַל־כָּל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃

Just as the lament contained two sections, Asaph's petition to God in this last stanza has two parts as well. The first petition is verses 9-12 (Heb 10-13), the second is 13-18 (Heb 14-19).

While there is some discussion in Hebrew poetry concerning the existence of a tetra colon, it is best to read verses 9-10 (Heb 10-11) as one unit of thought. Here Asaph directly refences the well documented historical destruction of Israel's enemies in the past.

This first line of this section opens with the imperative עֲשֵׂה and its object is followed by a simile. The second line intensifies line A by adding two more historical similes.

Do to them as Midian
As Sisera, *as* Jabin at the wadi of Kishon.
They who were exterminated at Endor
Who became dung for the ground.

The psalmist's plea here is direct and specific: do to them (vs 6-8) in the same manner and to the same degree as you have dealt with your enemies, Sisera and Jabin in the past (Judges). Note that in keeping with imprecation in the Psalms, Asaph pleads for the same judgment to befall his enemies as they want for God's people (v. 4). These ancient foes were שׁמד "exterminated."

The second tetra colon reaches back to Judges as well.

Make their noblemen as Oreb and Zeeb
And Zebah and Zalmunna like all their leaders.

Tate observes well,

> The request for judgments is rooted in the traditions of salvation-history of Israel, which had accounts of how Yahweh dealt severely with those who attacked his people in the past (vv10-13). 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 verses 10b-11 to the defeat of Sisera and Jabin and their forces (Judg 4-5). These were "close-in" enemies who threatened the whole enterprise of Yahweh and his people.[27]

In keeping with his rhetorical strategy, Aspah does not mention the judges as human instruments of victory. Since these were God's enemies, the success was God's as well.[28] His petition desires a historical repeat.

Asaph concludes the second tetra-cola with the crime which resulted in such divine disaster:

Those who said, "Let us possess for ourselves
The settlement[29] of God."

While there is no record in Judges that these ancient foes utter such a desire, their intended actions said as much. They attacked Israel in the Promised Land, because they wanted the land. To obtain the land they needed to destroy God and his people. This ancient threat once put down by God during the time of the judges is once again a dire threat. This time the antagonists are more numerous. Again, keeping with his rhetorical strategy the land that is threatened is none other than God's own settlement. The unspoken motivation is that if God would not act on Israel's behalf; he will certainly move on his own.

The use of the root יׇרַשׁ, to possess, may be another shrewd ploy by the psalmist to remind God that the land these enemies crave has already been promised to Abraham and his descendants forever by his own divine unilateral covenant (Gen 15). To allow these foes to "acquire" what was divinely promised by God to his people calls God's veracity into question. This word choice is meant to move God to action.

The second part of the petition (13-16) introduces the first and only use of the 1st person that specifically aligns himself with God, אֱלֹהַ֗י, "my God." Up to this point Asaph has been somewhat distant with his use of 3rd and 2nd person pronouns and possessives. Now in this phrase he personally and forcefully identifies himself with God.

O, my God, make them like the whirling of dead thistles[30]
Like chaff before the wind.

Like fire which consumes a forest
And like a flame which devours the mountains.
So, pursue them with your heavy gale

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[27] Tate, *Psalms*, 348.

[28] VanGemeren notes, "The omission of the names of the judges indicates that the primary deliverer was the Lord himself." VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 631.

[29] While some translations have "green pastures" as a gloss for נְאָוֹת אֱלֹהִים , HALOT also glosses it as "settlement," 678–679. BDB glosses it as, "*pastures of God*, i.e. the land of Canaan."[29] BDB, 627.

[30] For an image of this simile picture "tumble weed" of the old West. HALOT, גַּלְגַּל, Or. גּ: = I metaph.: "wheel-plant", wheel-shaped calyx of dead thistle, *Gundelia Tournefortii* (Dalman *Arbeit* 1:53; Rüthy 27ff) Is 17:13 (JArm.$^{t}$) Ps 83:14. HALOT, 90.

And with your devasting storm horrify them

If his historical references were not clear directions for what Asaph wanted God to do with these divine enemies, his four similes and two metaphors in rapid succession would be. The imagery is vivid and clear. Asaph wanted God to treat his opponents in the same way the wind removes dead thistles and chaff, that is completely eradicate the divine enemies.

God's "heavy gale" and "devasting storm" are not watery images of hurricanes or tsunamis. When combined with verse 14 (thus creating another tetra-cola), these are tempests of fire that totally consume forest and mountains. The result of this type of storm is complete and utter annihilation of his foes.[31] There would be nothing left. Again, this is keeping with the psalmist praying his imprecation in line with what his foes wanted for Israel, that the name of Israel be eradicated and remembered no more (v. 4).

The final imperative to his plea is in verse 16. It focuses on the results of what he requested (vs. 9-15).

Fill their faces disgrace
That they would seek your name, Yahweh.

To have their faces filled with disgrace is a figure of speech that demonstrate that their plans against God have come to naught. Although line B seems to indicate that grace and mercy would be the result of the having them filled with great dishonor, it is best to read this line that they would realize that Yahweh was the cause of their destruction.[32] Just as Asaph delayed the identification of the enemies in the first part of the psalm, here he delays the identity of his God until verse 16. He wants God's enemies to know their executioner. His name is Yahweh, the name of the covenant keeping God of Israel.

Asaph concludes his psalm by heaping more ill yearnings on these enemies of God with the ultimate result that they die.

Let them be ashamed and terrified forever
And let them be ashamed and perish.

God's fiery storm disrupted their boastful plans. With their campaign in ashes, all they have left for the rest of eternity is the shame of their failed attempt of annihilating Israel. They will die in disgrace. History will only record their humiliation at the hands of Yahweh.

The psalm concludes with a final result from the previous request (vs. 17).

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[31] Watson labels the use of these four similes a "cumulative similes." "Similes cast in this form tend to heighten the suspense slightly by delaying the final line," in this case v. 15. Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 258.

[32] While some see grace and compassion in this verse, the utter destruction that he wants to befall those in verses 9-12 and the calamity requested in verses 13-15 (and v 17), argues against such a reading. This is more in line with Rev 16 and another Asaph psalm, 76:10, "For the wrath of man shall praise You; With a remnant of wrath, You will gird Yourself." For the grace and compassion view see Tate, *Psalms*, 349; Ross, *Psalms*, 740-741 and VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 632.

That they would know that You, your name Yahweh, alone
Are the Most High over all the earth.

Since the enemies and their threat have been divinely disposed, this concluding verse act as a caution to any that follow this ill-conceived plan to eradicate Israel. All should know that Yahweh is the Most High and he reigns over all the earth. The "they" in this verse is not only those who have been mentioned in this mizmor. The "they" also represents all who might attempt to follow in their wicked footsteps. As Ross remarks, "The desire of the psalmist is not simply the destruction of wicked enemies, but that God would do it in such a way that all the world would know that Yahweh is the one true and sovereign God of the whole earth. He is not a national God for Israel; he controls the destiny of the whole world."[33] Thus it is the height of foolishness for any nation (past, present or future) to threaten Yahweh and what is his.

**Conclusion**

When confronted with a countrywide threat such as recorded in this song, one can imagine the urgent calls for additional "defense spending." As this psalm demonstrates so clearly, the danger of annihilation is very real; the enemies have mobilized together, and their plan is singular and focused: exterminate Israel so she be remembered no more.

This psalm does not negate a strong and ready military. However, its message is not a call to arms. It is a call to lament to God first and foremost.

The book of Psalms as a whole and the laments specifically were not written simply for us to read. They were and are poems written by others who had a unique experience with God and were able to capture poetically that experience in words. They were written for Israel to mimic when she found herself in the same dire predicament as the psalmist.

While Asaph and I offer this as the basic step in the proper strategy for Israel against national antisemitism, first and foremost it takes truly knowing Yahweh before imploring him to save his treasured people and land.

**Implications/Application**

1) Antisemitism is not new. It is as ancient as the rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau and their descendants.

[33] Ross, *Psalms*, 741.

2) While such imprecation sounds uncomfortable to modern ears, this national lament should be the song sung to Yahweh when the threat of eradication and annihilation are real for Israel and her people.[34]

3) While many would make direct application to the church, that is not the first place one should start. The Church is not a nation and does not suffer the same nationalistic threats as the country of Israel. This song should be sung by national Israel.

4) One cannot say I love God and hate his people, the Jews, or her nation. As this psalm shows plainly, to hate one is to hate the other.

5) For those who hate the Jews, and/or the nation of Israel—their antagonism is not just against a people group or land mass, it is against the Most High God, himself.

6) The discussion about who owns the land should not begin with Israel. Based on 83:12 the land is first and foremost, God's settlement. It is in the land of Israel he chose to localize his presence. While Israel has a just and rightful claim to the land, it must be acknowledged that the land is God's possession and his habitation.

7) Asaph's last song provides a legitimate prayer for believers today when God's treasured people, national Israel, find themselves in a similar and dire contemporary situation.

[34] While many reject praying imprecation, these prayers: 1) are consistent with the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:3); 2) do not seek personal vengeance (so they do not violate Rom 12:19); and 3) leave the timing and method of implementing the imprecation in God's hands and according to his will.