

“GIVE THANKS WITH A GRATEFUL HEART!”

PSALM 83:1-19

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INTRODUCTION

It is important for a believer to give thanks—in good times and in bad! Paul said, “In everything give thanks,” and “Give thanks always.” Now, that means that even when our world seems to be caving in around us, we must still trust God and pause to praise Him, worship Him, and give Him the thanks due to His name.

We have a perfect example of this kind of praise, thanks, and worship in dire circumstances in II Chronicles 20 when good King Jehoshaphat of Judah was about to be confronted by a huge army of confederate nations who were intent not only on defeating Israel, but on destroying them totally so that they no longer existed as a nation and then possessing their territory (II Chr. **20:1-2.**)

When Jehoshaphat heard this news he was afraid, but “turned his attention to seek the Lord,” fasted, and gathered God’s people together from all the cities in order to seek help from Yahweh, their faithful, covenant keeping God (**3-4**). Then Jehoshaphat led the congregation in a prayer to God: **20:5-13**—a wonderful prayer mentioning God’s almighty power and control over the world, God’s mighty works on their behalf when making them a nation and giving them their land, God’s previous promises to them of answering their prayers, the mention of the present trouble with the invading armies, a request for God’s judgment on these nations, and finally **his own admission of his helplessness and ignorance of what to do in such circumstances.**

What happened next is one of the most remarkable events recorded in Scripture. The Spirit of the LORD came upon a prophet named Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph. He told Jehoshaphat and all Judah not to be afraid of the great multitude, **“for the battle is not yours but God’s”** (vv. 14-15). He instructed them to go meet the approaching army but that they would not need to fight against them; they must station themselves, “stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not fear or be dismayed...the LORD is with you” (vv. 16-17). Then both king and people, at the lead of the Levitical singers worshiped the Lord and sang praise to Yahweh, the God of Israel with a very loud voice (vv. 18-19).

Please note that what started out as prayer ended in praise—and this praise came before the actual answer from God and the victory against the enemy. We will see the rest of the story at the end of the message!

YOU MUST NOT WAIT UNTIL GOD ANSWERS YOUR PRAYERS IN ORDER TO GIVE HIM PRAISE—PRAISE HIM NOW!

Now, why do I connect this story with Psalm 83? Because I am convinced that the occasion is the same, and that the enemy nations attacking are those mentioned in II Chr. 20; the psalm fills out some details not given in II Chronicles.

As we read Psalm 83, the whole world as it seems, was at war with Israel. The exact confederacy described in this psalm is not depicted in either Kings or Chronicles. Possibly some of the nations mentioned here were more actively involved in the attack tactics, and others were supporting them in a more passive way. It is noteworthy that several key expressions of Psalm 83 are found in the description of the “battle” against these nations described in II Chr. 20:

- 1) God is called “ruler of all the kingdoms of the nations” in 20:6; compare v. 19, “You alone are Most High over all the earth.”
- 2) Jahaziel, the prophet who delivered God’s message to Jehoshaphat, is described as from the “sons of Asaph” (v. 14). Therefore, it is quite **possible** that he is the author of this psalm and that the psalm was composed before the Spirit gave the answer to him to give to the king and the people.

- 3) The intent of the enemies in II Chr. 20 was “to drive us out from your possession which you have given us as an inheritance” (v. 11). Note verse 12 of this psalm: Who said, ‘Let us possess for ourselves the pastures of God’; compare also v. 4: “Come and let us wipe them out as a nation...”
- 4) The aftermath of Yahweh’s defeat of these people through their own self-destruction was that “the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel” (v. 29). Compare “that they may seek Your name” in v. 16, and “that they may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth” (18). The passage in II Chr. 20:29 seems like the answer to the prayer given in Ps. 83.
- 5) Another factor in favor of this incident is the internecine warfare that took place among this confederation when Judah went forth to battle; the result was that the armies were all dead bodies (II Chr. 20:22-24). If there was such natural animosity between these groups—fostered and called forth by God in this case—how can it be surprising if some of the peoples originally composing the conspiracy dropped out before the actual assault began?
- 6) Another factor in support of this identification with Ps. 83 is the fact that Assyria is mentioned but had not yet become a significant world player. Assyria became “an arm to the children of Lot” (v. 8).

We may note that the enemy nations mentioned have almost completely surrounded Israel—especially on the East, South, and West, and Assyria may be considered to the North (vv. 6-8). They were “settling like swarms of locusts on the skirts of the land” (P. p. 110). Even Tyre had become hostile—“forgetting her ancient friendship.” The nations are “on the march, all, like hunters, are hemming in the lion who holds them at bay.

- I. THE PLEA FOR HELP (vv. 1-5)
 - A. God seems quiet and inactive (1)
 - B. The enemy is anything but quiet and they exalt themselves (2).
 - They are really God’s enemies—those who hate His people (vv. 3-4) also hate Him.
 - C. The enemy makes shrewd plans/counsels and conspire/consult together (3, 5)
 1. Against “your people”, against Your “treasured/hidden ones.”
 2. But they are really “against You”—against God (v. 5).
 3. Unification of evil enemies—“in heart together” (v. 5)
 4. They “make a covenant”—a mutual agreement with binding terms (v. 5)
 - D. The enemy’s intent is nothing short of absolute annihilation of the Nation of Israel/Judah (4).
 1. They want to leave nothing.
 2. They don’t even want the memory of Israel to continue.
 3. They want to possess for themselves what is now Israel’s land (12).
 - The term “houses” has the main idea of “pasturage”—where Israel as God’s sheep live.
 - Note that it is **God’s** pasture that they want to take away.
- II. THE DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES (5-8)
 - A. Those on the East: Moab, the Hagrites, Ammon
 - B. Those on the South: Edom, Gebal, Amalek, Ishmaelites
 - C. Those on the West: Philistines, inhabitants of Tyre
 - D. Those on the North(east): Assyria (v. 8)
 - E. All these have become an arm/help/support for the “sons of Lot”—Moab and Ammon (8).
- III. THE DELIVERANCES OF THE PAST (9-12)
 - A. Deliverance from Sisera and Jabin, Hazor in Naphtali, but ruled by “Canaanites” (Jud. 4-5; cf. Josh. 11).
 1. Jabin the king, Sisera the commander of the army

2. Battle near the torrent/wady Kishon (9)
 3. Extended to Endor—14 miles northeast, 4 miles s. of Mount Tabor (10).
 4. Became as dung on the ground.
- B. Deliverance from Midian under Gideon (Judges 7-8)
1. Zebah and Zalmunna—the kings (Jud. 8:5)
 2. Oreb and Zeeb—commanders (7:25)
 3. Note the similarities with the incident under Jehoshaphat:
 - They were outnumbered and helpless—Gideon’s 300 with torches and trumpets.
 - The enemy turned against each other.
 - The slaughter must have been great—mentioned in Isaiah 10:26 with Egypt and Assyria.
- IV. THE DEVASTATING JUDGMENT NEEDED (13-16a, 17)
- A. Like whirling dust/tumbleweed etc. (13)
 - B. Like chaff before the wind (13)
 - C. Like fire burning the forest, and flame the mountains—pursue them with Your tempest, and terrify them with your storm (14-15).
 - D. Bring dishonor to their faces (16a), shame and dismay (17a), humiliation and perishing (17b).
- V. THE DRAMATIC RESULT (16b, 18).
- A. “That they may seek your name, O LORD” (16b).
 - B. “That they may know that **YOU**, Your name is Yahweh, **You alone** are the Most High over all the earth! (18).

CONCLUSION

How was this prayer answered? Let us return to II Chr. 20:20-29.

1. Rose early in the morning after the prophecy of Jahaziel and went to meet the enemy armies; Joshua said, “Believe in/trust in Yahweh your God, so shall you be established; believe in His prophets, so shall you prosper.”
2. Appointed singers to praise and worship and went before the army (21).
3. When the singing began, the Lord caused the armies of the enemies to fight against each other (22-23).
4. When Judah came to the lookout they saw dead corpses lying on the ground (24).
5. The people gathered much spoil from the armies; it took three days to gather it all (25).
6. They gathered in the valley of Berachah—blessing—and then returned to Jerusalem “with joy, for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies.” They played musical instruments and sang.
7. The fear of God came on all the surrounding kingdoms.

Not your typical battle, was it? Not the typical human response to problems?

God’s people responded to problems with praise and God gave the victory!

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