

Psalms 83:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.

Analysis

Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.

This urgent triple plea opens Psalm 83, a national lament during existential crisis. The Hebrew employs three parallel imperatives, intensifying the petition: al-techerash (אַל-תִּחַרֵּשׁ, "do not be silent"), ve-al-tishqot (וְאַל-תִּשְׁקוֹט, "do not be quiet"), and ve-al-teshket (וְאַל-תִּשְׁכַּת, "and do not be still, O God"). This rhetorical escalation conveys desperate urgency—Israel faces mortal danger and appeals to God to break His apparent silence.

"Keep not thou silence" addresses the terrifying experience of divine absence. When enemies threaten and God seems uninvolved, faith feels abandoned. Yet even this protest is itself an act of faith—the psalmist appeals TO God ABOUT God's silence, trusting that He hears prayer even when He seems not to answer. This paradox runs throughout Scripture: authentic faith can simultaneously cry "Where are you?" while trusting God is present.

The repetition of "O God" (Elohim, אֱלֹהִים) frames the verse, beginning and ending with direct address to the divine. This is covenant language—not appealing to an unknown deity but to Israel's known God who has demonstrated faithfulness throughout history. The appeal rests on God's revealed character and past deliverance. Why should He who rescued Israel from Egypt, defeated Pharaoh's army, and established His people in Canaan now remain silent when enemies conspire again?

This opening verse establishes the psalm's tension: God's apparent inactivity versus enemies' active conspiracy (vv. 2-8). The remainder of the psalm describes the threat, then petitions God for intervention (vv. 9-18). The prayer teaches that lament isn't doubt but desperate faith—bringing our fears, complaints, and urgent needs directly to God.

Historical Context

Historical Crisis and Israel's Enemies

Psalm 83 likely emerged during a specific historical crisis when surrounding nations confederated against Israel, though scholars debate the exact period. Verses 6-8 list ten enemies: Edom, Ishmaelites, Moab, Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, and Assyria—representing a comprehensive coalition of Israel's traditional adversaries. This extensive alliance suggests either the divided kingdom period (when Israel faced multiple enemies simultaneously) or possibly the post-exilic period when Judah's vulnerability invited foreign aggression.

Some interpreters connect this psalm to 2 Chronicles 20, when Moab, Ammon, and Edomites attacked Judah during Jehoshaphat's reign (873-849 BC). Jehoshaphat's prayer (2 Chronicles 20:6-12) shares thematic similarities with Psalm 83: appealing to God's past faithfulness, describing the enemy conspiracy, and confessing "we have no might against this great company... neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." God miraculously delivered Judah when the enemy armies turned on each other.

The psalm reflects the reality of Israel's geopolitical situation throughout biblical history. Surrounded by hostile nations, lacking natural defenses like mountains or seas, Israel's survival depended on divine protection. When enemies confederated, the threat became existential—hence the desperate plea for God to act. This situation typifies the church's experience throughout history: a vulnerable minority surrounded by hostile forces, dependent entirely on God's intervention for survival.

The psalm also anticipates eschatological conflict. Just as ancient enemies conspired to destroy Israel, Revelation depicts nations gathering against God's

people in the last days (Revelation 20:8-9). Yet the outcome is certain: God will arise and judge His enemies, vindicating His covenant people and establishing His kingdom forever.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How should believers respond when God seems silent in the face of urgent threats or crises?
2. What does it reveal about faith that the psalmist can cry "Keep not thou silence" while still praying TO God?
3. How does understanding Israel's historical vulnerability help modern believers appreciate prayers for divine intervention against overwhelming odds?
4. In what situations today might Christians or the church feel surrounded by hostile forces and dependent on God's deliverance?
5. What is the relationship between crying out for God to act (lament) and trusting His timing and wisdom (faith)?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהֵי יִם	אֵל	דָּמִי	לִי	אֵל	תַּחֲבֹשׁ שׁ	וְאֵל
O God	H408	Keep not thou silence	H0	H408	hold not thy peace	H408
H430		H1824			H2790	
וְתִשְׁקָט	אֵל:					
and be not still	O God					
H8252	H410					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 28:1 (Parallel theme): Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.

Psalms 35:22 (Parallel theme): This thou hast seen, O LORD: keep not silence: O Lord, be not far from me.

Psalms 50:3 (References God): Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

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