

Psalms 83:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind.

Analysis

O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. This verse employs vivid metaphors for the complete defeat the psalmist petitions God to inflict upon Israel's enemies. The image "like a wheel" (ka-galgal, כַּגָּלְגַל) is disputed in translation—some render it "whirling dust" or "tumbleweed," emphasizing the rootless, driven nature of that which the wind scatters. The emphasis is on instability, helplessness before superior force, and inability to resist being driven away.

"As the stubble before the wind" (ke-qash lifnei-ruach, כְּקֶשֶׁשׁ לִפְנֵי-רוּחַ) presents a clearer agricultural image familiar to ancient audiences. Stubble (qash, קֶשֶׁשׁ)—the dry stalks remaining after harvest—is worthless, weightless, and easily scattered. When wind hits stubble, it offers no resistance but is immediately driven wherever the wind blows. Isaiah uses identical imagery for divine judgment: "as fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff" (Isaiah 5:24).

The petition isn't primarily for revenge but for demonstration of God's sovereignty over those who challenge His authority. The enemies don't merely threaten Israel but conspire to "cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (v. 4). They effectively declare war on God's covenant purposes. The psalmist asks God to scatter them as easily as wind scatters stubble, demonstrating that human conspiracy against divine purposes is futile.

This imprecatory language troubles some readers, but must be understood within

covenant theology. God has bound Himself to preserve Israel through whom Messiah will come and all nations be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Enemies conspiring to annihilate Israel aren't merely committing genocide but attempting to thwart God's redemptive plan. The prayer asks God to fulfill His covenant promise to curse those who curse His people.

Historical Context

Imprecatory Psalms and Divine Justice

Imprecatory psalms—those calling for divine judgment on enemies—comprise a significant portion of the Psalter (Psalms 35, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109, 137, 139). These prayers disturb modern sensibilities but reflect biblical theology of divine justice and covenant faithfulness. They aren't expressions of personal vindictiveness but appeals for God to judge evil and vindicate righteousness. They rest on the principle that God will judge the earth (Genesis 18:25), punish wickedness (Nahum 1:2-3), and defend the oppressed (Psalm 82:3-4).

Ancient Near Eastern culture understood that curses and blessings had real power, especially when spoken by those in covenant relationship with deity. Israel's prophets pronounced judgment oracles against nations that opposed God's purposes (Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25-32). These weren't merely predictions but prophetic declarations that invoked divine judgment. Psalm 83's imprecations function similarly—not expressing personal hatred but appealing for covenant justice.

The New Testament doesn't eliminate imprecatory prayers but transforms their application. Jesus commands love for enemies (Matthew 5:44), yet Revelation contains intense judgment language (Revelation 6:10, 18:20). Paul quotes Psalm 69 (an imprecatory psalm) and applies it to those who reject the gospel (Romans 11:9-10). The difference: Christians don't pray for personal enemies' destruction but for God's justice against those who oppose His kingdom and persecute His people. We entrust judgment to God (Romans 12:19) while praying for enemies' repentance (Luke 23:34).

The imagery of wind-scattered stubble appears throughout Scripture as metaphor for divine judgment—both historical (Jeremiah 13:24, Hosea 13:3) and eschatological (Matthew 3:12). Those who oppose God, despite appearing powerful temporarily, will prove as substantial as chaff when God arises to judge. Human pride and rebellion are stubble before the wind of God's sovereign power.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How should Christians understand and use imprecatory psalms that call for judgment on enemies?
2. What does the image of enemies scattered "like stubble before the wind" teach about the futility of opposing God's purposes?
3. How do we distinguish between prayers for justice (which are legitimate) and prayers for personal revenge (which are not)?
4. In what ways do modern enemies of the gospel resemble the confederated nations in Psalm 83, and how should the church respond?
5. What is the relationship between Jesus's command to love enemies and psalms that petition for enemies' defeat?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהֵי י	שִׁית מו	כַּגִּלָּ ל	כְּ ק ש	לִפְנֵי	רוּחַ:
O my God	make	them like a wheel	as the stubble	before	the wind
H430	H7896	H1534	H7179	H6440	H7307

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 35:5 (Parallel theme): Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them.

Job 21:18 (Parallel theme): They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away.

Isaiah 40:24 (Parallel theme): Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

Job 13:25 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt thou pursue the dry stubble?

Jeremiah 13:24 (Parallel theme): Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness.

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