

Psalms 83:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.

Analysis

Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. This remarkable verse reveals the ultimate purpose behind the psalm's imprecatory petitions: not merely destruction of enemies but their conversion to worship of Israel's God. The Hebrew male pneihem qalon (מִלֵּא פְּנֵיהֶם קָלוֹן, "fill their faces with shame") requests humiliation that breaks pride and compels recognition of God's supremacy. Shame here isn't vindictive but redemptive—designed to produce repentance.

"That they may seek thy name" (vi-vaqshu shimcha, וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ שִׁמְךָ) expresses the prayer's true goal. The verb baqash (בָּקַשׁ) means "to seek earnestly, to search for, to inquire after"—indicating genuine pursuit of relationship with God, not merely acknowledgment of His power. The enemies' military defeat should lead them to seek the God they opposed, transforming adversaries into worshipers. This anticipates God's ultimate purpose for all nations: that His name be glorified throughout the earth.

"O LORD" (Yahweh, יְהוָה) uses God's covenant name—His personal, revealed identity. The prayer asks that pagan nations who know only their false gods would come to know Yahweh, the true and living God. This missionary impulse runs throughout the Psalms: "Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people" (Psalm 96:3). Even judgment serves evangelical purpose—demonstrating God's reality and inviting submission to His lordship.

This verse transforms the psalm's imprecatory language from mere vengeance-seeking to missional purpose. Military defeat and national humiliation aren't ends but means toward the greater end of bringing all nations to worship the LORD. God's judgments aren't capricious punishments but redemptive discipline aimed at turning hearts toward Him. When human pride is broken, souls become receptive to divine truth.

Historical Context

Gentile Conversion and Israel's Missionary Purpose

Israel's covenant calling included being "a light to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). Through Israel, all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3) and come to know the true God. Yet Israel often failed this mission, becoming isolated and hostile toward Gentiles rather than witnessing to them. Psalm 83:16 captures the proper tension: opposing enemies who threaten God's people while simultaneously desiring their eventual conversion.

Biblical history records several instances of enemy nations coming to faith through Israel's God. Rahab (Joshua 2:8-11) and Ruth (Ruth 1:16) confessed Yahweh after witnessing His mighty acts. Naaman the Syrian worshiped Israel's God after being healed (2 Kings 5:15). Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching (Jonah 3:5-10). Daniel's testimony brought Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge God's sovereignty (Daniel 4:34-37). These conversions resulted from displays of divine power that shamed false confidence in other gods.

The prophets envisioned a day when all nations would stream to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh (Isaiah 2:2-3, Micah 4:1-2, Zechariah 8:20-23). This universalist hope didn't erase particularism—Israel remained God's chosen people—but it expanded God's purposes beyond Israel's ethnic boundaries to encompass all humanity. Even enemies could become worshipers through recognizing God's supremacy.

The New Testament fulfills this vision through Christ. The gospel breaks down barriers between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14-16), creating one new humanity

united in worship of Yahweh revealed in Jesus. The church's mission continues Psalm 83:16's prayer: that all peoples, even those currently hostile to the gospel, would be confronted with God's truth, have their pride humbled, and seek the LORD's name in genuine faith. Persecution of Christians ultimately serves this purpose when it demonstrates faith's authenticity and prompts examination of Christian claims.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does this verse transform the psalm's imprecatory language from vengeance-seeking to evangelistic purpose?
2. What does it mean for God to "fill faces with shame," and how can humiliation serve redemptive purposes?
3. How should Christians pray for enemies—both personal enemies and enemies of the gospel—in light of this verse?
4. What biblical examples demonstrate enemies coming to faith after experiencing defeat or shame that broke their pride?
5. How does the ultimate goal of enemies seeking God's name affect how we engage in spiritual warfare and apologetic confrontation?

Interlinear Text

מִלֵּא	פְּנֵיהֶם	קָלֹן	וַיִּבְקֹשׁוּ	שְׁמֶךָ	יְהוָה:
Fill	their faces	with shame	that they may seek	thy name	O LORD
H4390	H6440	H7036	H1245	H8034	H3068

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 6:10 (Parallel theme): Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.

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