



edition: May 14, 2024

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## Psalm 24.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Lift up, O gates, your head.

Rise up, O ancient doors

so the King, The Incomparable may enter.

<sup>10</sup>Who is he, this King, The Incomparable?

YHWH Š<sup>ē</sup>bā'ōt,

He is King, The Incomparable (author's translation).

## Meditation

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The eighth chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings tells how King Solomon removed the Ark of the Covenant—representing Jehovah's throne, and symbolic of His presence in Israel—from the temporary tabernacle David had built for it, and, in procession with much fanfare and many sacrifices, brought the Ark to his newly constructed temple.

“And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims.... When the priests were come out of the holy place, the cloud filled the house [and] the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD” (See 1 Kgs. 8.<sup>1-11</sup>).

It is thought that each year, perhaps during the sacred feast of Tabernacles, Israel would reenact this important event. First, they would remove the Ark from the temple, housing it in a temporary tabernacle. Over the following days and weeks, they would clean, renew, renovate, and purify the temple. Upon finishing, the children of Israel would re-enact Solomon's processional, and escort the Ark back to the temple. As the Ark approached the temple, the people—priest and commoner alike—might have raised their voices and addressed the temple doors.

“Lift up, O gates, your head.

Rise up, O ancient doors

so the King, The Incomparable may enter.

Who is he, this King, The Incomparable?

YHWH Š<sup>ē</sup>bā'ōt,

He is King, The Incomparable.

Others consider another possible context for these words. According to some texts, the ark accompanied Israel's armies in battle.<sup>1</sup> After the battle, of course, the ark would need to return to the tabernacle/ temple. This practice might explain these words found in this psalm.

“Who is this King, The Incomparable?

YHWH, powerful and heroic,

YHWH, heroic in battle” (Ps. 24.<sup>8</sup>).

What does Israel's potential ancient processions and the words spoken in this psalm have to do with us today? What might they have to do with our temple experience? The temple serves as a symbol to each of us. As we come and go to and from the temple, we do not address the temple doors, inviting them to open themselves in order to receive their King. But if we listen carefully to what we learn in the temple of the Lord, we might hear the temple doors address us. We might hear them invite us to open the gates of our heart and let the King of glory enter in.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Joshua 6.<sup>1-13</sup> and 1 Samuel 4.<sup>3-11</sup>. Leviticus 14.<sup>44</sup> credits a military defeat suffered by Israel to be the result of the ark's absence.

Today, the Lord ardently desires to pass through the gate of our heart and abide in our daily lives. “Know ye not,” asks the apostle Paul, “that ye are temple of the God” (1 Cor. 3.<sup>16</sup>). In the temple doors’ invitation, we might hear the very voice of the great Jehovah, even the Lord Jesus,

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3.<sup>20</sup>).

Today, as we face life’s challenges and battles, we might want to call out to our hearts to open their doors and invite the King Incomparable, the mighty Hero to join in our battles bringing us success and victory. May we hear and accept the Lord’s invitation, so powerfully extended in the temple, to lift up our gates in order to joyfully, trustingly, and confidently receive the King of glory.

Who is this King, so incomparable?

“YHWH, powerful and heroic,  
YHWH, heroic in battle....  
YHWH Š<sup>ē</sup>ḅā’ôṭ,  
He is King, The Incomparable.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

**Psalm 27.**<sup>4, 7-8, 13-14</sup>

<sup>4</sup>One thing have I desired of the LORD,  
that will I seek after;  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
and to enquire in his temple.

<sup>7</sup>Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice:  
have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

<sup>8</sup>When thou saidst, "Seek ye my face;"  
my heart said unto thee, "Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

<sup>13</sup>I had fainted,  
unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.

<sup>14</sup>Wait on the LORD:  
be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart:  
wait, I say, on the LORD.

**m**editation 1

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I don't know about you, but when I read and study the scriptures I do more than look for doctrines, principles, truths, etc. I also look for how they impact the writers; how they impact the writers' feelings and actions. I pay attention to how the writers respond to their encounters with truths. I pay special attention to how they respond to their encounters with God. So, when I read the Psalmist's confession, "One thing have I desired of the LORD," I pay attention. And, in this instance, I pay attention to that "one thing," that one "desire" that trumps all others; that one desire that makes all other desires fade into the background.

And what is that "one thing" that the Psalmist has desired? "To behold the beauty of the LORD." But we just have to say, this holy desire did not arise because the Psalmist pulled himself up by his own spiritual bootstraps or drew it out of the depth of his own enlightened soul. No, this desire was borne outside himself. It was suggested to him by another. And that other was none other than God, Himself.

"Seek ye my face."

We just have to say, "WOW!" Can you believe it? Can you believe the invitation that God, "the greatest of all" (DC 19.<sup>18</sup>). extends, not only to the Psalmist but to little ole' us?

"Seek ye my face."  
"Behold the beauty of the LORD."  
"See the goodness of the LORD."

The Psalmist's response to this grand and glorious invitation was not so very different than Alma's response to the message of the Redeemer's coming. In his own way, Alma saw the "beauty of the LORD." And with both the Psalmist's, "One thing have I desired," and Alma's "There is one thing which is of more importance than" anything else in human history (Al. 7.<sup>7</sup>), the two men show themselves to be faithful evangelists. Far from hording the invitation to seek the face of God and behold his beauty, they invite all to come and accept the invitation in their own lives.

“Wait on the LORD:  
be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart:  
wait, I say, on the LORD.”

And what is it worth, this beholding of the beauty, the goodness, and, yes, the face of God? It is worth whatever wait there might be. It is worthy of being the “one thing” that fills our desire; the “one thing” after which we seek. What else could possibly compare? We do not wonder that the Psalmist felt faint when he contemplated missing out on such a grand and glorious vision.

As grand as it all seems, we believe in the sincerity, the seriousness, and the purpose of the Divine invitation, for the Lord God has spoken it. We will accept the invitation. We will seek until we behold. We will not faint until we have beheld “the beauty of the Lord,” a “beauty,” Nephi testifies, is “far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty” (1 Ne. 11.<sup>8</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **m**editation 2

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While there is much to learn, as usual, from this passage, today I am struck by two truths. First, our desires and priorities say much about who we are and what we achieve in life and beyond. In this reading, the Psalmist tells us much about himself and where he will end up as he confesses that there is just one thing he asks of God. There is just one, single, solitary thing after which he seeks. It is that thing above all else that moves him and gives him purpose. He wishes to see God’s beauty—his goodness, loveliness, attractiveness, friendliness—and to fix his mind always on its unparalleled magnificence.

This might seem rather ambitious. Maybe even presumptuous. The Psalmist, perhaps, is getting a little ahead of himself. Trying to fly too close to the sun. And maybe all this would be true but for one important fact. The Psalmist’s desire did not originate inside himself. It did not flow out of personal hubris, or a sense of self-importance or an attempt at personal superiority. No, its origin came from outside the Psalmists. It flowed from the grandeur of another. It came to be imagined through the generosity of God, Himself. It came by divine invitation: “Seek ye my face.”

And so, this is the second truth that strikes us today. God is generous and inviting. And He wants to be known. This divine desire to be known is not a matter of egotism on His part. He knows how weak and vulnerable we are. He knows our inclination to sin continually.

“Like as a father pitieth his children,  
so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.  
For he knoweth our frame;  
he remembereth that we are dust” (Ps. 103.<sup>13-14</sup>).

And He knows that our best chance of survival and progression is to be attached to Him. To be one with Him and He with us. Hence, His invitation: “Seek me.”

Perhaps the Psalmist had heard this invitation come directly to him from God. Or, perhaps, the Psalmist took to himself an invitation that had been extended to his ancestors centuries earlier through the greatest of the Hebrew prophets.

“And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the



kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and *sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God...*" (DC 84.<sup>19-23</sup>).

However the invitation came, it moved the Psalmist. He set his sights on this one thing above all others. No other interest would get between him and this inquiry after God. Would we be so committed if the invitation came to us? The fact is, the invitation has come to us. Over and over again. Certainly, in scripture. And perhaps more directly and intimately.

"I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen" (Eth. 12.<sup>41</sup>).

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden..." (Mt. 11.<sup>28</sup>).

"Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith..."

"Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely... (Al. 5.<sup>33-34</sup>).

"And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things. Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will. Remember the great and last promise which I have made unto you..." (DC 88.<sup>67-69</sup>).

Yes, Psalm 27, properly and thoughtfully read, invites us to closely examine our lives and ask ourselves sometimes difficult questions about our priorities, and what we want out of our short lives. It invites us to do this in light of God's generous and earnest invitation to put Him first. To prioritize knowing Him, seeing Him, becoming intimate with Him until we see, not as "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13.<sup>12</sup>) but clearly, the unparalleled beauty of the Lord.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## Psalm 32.<sup>1-2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Truly happy is the one whose rebellion is borne away  
and whose sin is buried.

<sup>2</sup>Truly happy is the one whose guilt YHWH does not consider  
and there is no intention to obfuscate.

### meditation 1

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Luther called this psalm a “Pauline Psalm.” It is easy to see why. These first two verses were central to Paul’s understanding of doctrine of justification—justification being a right standing with God achieved through the forgiveness of sin.

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying,

‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin’” (Rom. 4.<sup>5-8</sup>).

Paul believes that no human effort can achieve a right standing with God or acquire forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness is the work and prerogative of God only. The ineffectuality of human effort in acquiring right standing with God through forgiveness is the consequence of several factors, but, as Paul sees it, the main factor is that human sin is continual and constant. Thus, in order to acquire right standing with God through forgiveness, one must trust Jesus’ promise of forgiveness and believe that he was serious and earnest when he announced God willingness and ability to forgive.

We appreciate Paul’s witness. He is on to something deep and profound about human nature. That said, we find that Paul, like so many before and after who have utilized scripture to make a legitimate and narrow point, played a little fast and loose with the first two verses of this Psalm.<sup>1</sup> What do we mean? The reader will notice that these first two verses are composed of four lines of poetry. However, Paul only quotes the first three lines, leaving out the fourth and last.

“And there is no intention to obfuscate.”

Or, as the KJV has it, “and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Now, we are not accusing Paul of dishonesty. He had a point to make and the three lines make the point well. When it comes to forgiveness, God does all the heavy lifting. Perhaps Paul feared that adding the last line would produce uncertainty and misunderstanding—uncertainty and misunderstanding that would force him to explain the final line and thus divert him from his main thesis. What sort of uncertainty might he have feared? I can’t say for sure, but I can imagine that it went something like this:

God forgives those who possess no guile. Guile is sin. To be without guile requires personal thought and effort. So, if those who are forgiven are those who have achieved life without guile, doesn’t this suggest that human effort does play a role in having a right standing with God through repentance?

Paul, of course, knew such thinking to be nonsensical and that the line could not and should not be

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<sup>1</sup> A parade example of this is to be found in Ezra Taft Benson’s fast and loose use of DC 84.<sup>56-57</sup> to focus more attention on the Book of Mormon—a worthy effort that ignored the larger point of the verses to make a more narrow point.

utilized in any such fashion. At the same time, the line does introduce an element of human agency in the forgiveness of sin. And it can be quite difficult to act upon, as we will see in the lines of verse that follow these four lines. But discussion of this difficult act must await a future homily associated, especially, with verse 3. For now, we wish to return to the line Paul chose not to quote.

“And there is no intention to obfuscate.”

The word that we translate here as “obfuscate” (obfuscation) and that the KJV translates as “guile” is *r'mîyâ*. This word means “deception,” “deceit.” The verb can mean to “dissemble,” “pretend,” “deceive.” The word group most often “refers to a situation in which reality differs from appearance. Such situations involve interpersonal transactions in which someone acts or speaks consciously and deliberately to conceal or cover up certain facts.”<sup>2</sup>

The question becomes, what is the nature of the forbidden obfuscation. What is being hidden through pretense and deceit? As the context will make clear, that which is being hidden is sinful rebellion. There is an unwillingness on the part of the sinner to face up to the reality of his or her life. Further, and worse, there is an unwillingness to acknowledge to God the reality of sinful rebellion in his or her life. This unwillingness is a sign of distrust in God.

This line, then, suggests that while only God can forgive sin unto salvation, the human plays a small role through the exercise of personal agency. Individuals must avoid the temptation to deny their sin—to self, certainly, but especially to God. For forgiveness to come, the sinner must give more credence to God’s faithfulness than to their own unfaithfulness by confessing his or her sin openly, without deception.

We can liken this line’s truth of human agency in relation to forgiveness with something Nephi taught toward the end of his writings. Nephi was aware of the Holy Spirit’s role in cleansing sinners from sin and in guiding them in their successful navigation of a dark and misty world filled with temptation. Thus, Nephi taught them the role they played in receiving the Spirit with its cleaning and directing influence. The would-be-forgiven must “follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, *acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God* but with real intent...”<sup>3</sup>

The avoidance of deception and the truthful confession of sin does not earn the sinner God’s forgiveness. God’s forgiveness continues to be bound up in the very nature of His divine disposition. Confession of sin is an act of faith, of trust in the reality of God’s forgiving disposition and the sincerity of His invitation and promise.

As will become apparent in the following verse, there was a time when the Psalmist engaged in refusal to confess and in attempting to deceive God. Only after much mental and spiritual anguish did he exercise his agency and do what had appeared to him before to be a humiliation: acknowledge, confess, and lay bare his sins. Upon doing so, he found, as we all can, that God is faithful; that He is, indeed, “slow to anger, and long suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression and sin.”<sup>4</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>2</sup> Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament

<sup>3</sup> 2 Nephi 31.<sup>13</sup>. You see how I did it too... focused on the point, avoiding other items that would require explanation and thus divert me from my object?

<sup>4</sup> See *Lectures on Faith*, “Lecture 3.”

## Meditation 2

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In our first meditation on these two verses, we focused on the promise that God will gladden individuals through forgiving rebellion, sin, and guilt. This forgiveness is, first and foremost a consequence of God's generous divine character. However, an individual's exercise of personal agency in acknowledging and confessing sin plays a role. This confession of sin is not so much a command obeyed or disobeyed as it is a reflection of individual character. An individual unable or unwilling to confess will not possess the capacity to feel a sense of emotional or spiritual release that forgiveness brings.

We have spoken of "forgiveness" repeatedly. Yet, the word nowhere appears in the author's translation above. The word does appear in the King James, but, really, does not capture the meaning and imagery of the Hebrew word it tries to signify. English, "forgive," from *for-giefan*, literally means something like, "completely give," or "completely give up." This could almost make it seem that the sinner is the subject of the verb, suggesting that the sinner is responsible for the absence of sin because he or she has, themselves, "completely given up" their sin. While we believe very much in God's interest in our character development and in the importance of our own efforts in character development, it is not only true that "all *have* sinned" (Rom. 3.<sup>23</sup>). it is also true that we are "evil continually"<sup>5</sup> and "liable to sin continually" (Eth. 3.<sup>2</sup>). There can be no thought, then, or our "giving up" sin before "happiness" is found or bestowed. If we think happiness can only come to us when we, ourselves, have accomplished this impossible task, we will never know happiness.

We should note, then, that the Hebrew word that the KJV translates as "forgive" literally means "to lift," "carry," "take." "The main emphasis... resides in the notion of carrying or bearing." Further, "the fundamental meaning 'to carry a burden' manifests itself frequently."<sup>6</sup> We carry sin as a burden, it is true. But we cannot carry the burden off and away. We cannot lift it up and off our shoulders. As the Psalmist reminds us elsewhere, only God can perform this herculean task. Only He can put distance between us and our sins.

"As distant as east is from west  
so far does he remove our offenses from us" (Ps. 103.<sup>12</sup>).

Therefore, the Hebrew's choice of, essentially, making us the object rather than the subject of the verb is significant. God is the weightlifter. Not us.

In the second line, the Psalter shifts metaphors from "carrying off" to "burying." The Hebrew word is *kāsā*. "The primary meaning... is 'cover,' either to render invisible what is covered or to protect it or keep it..." In the present instance, it is certain that the idea is to render sin invisible rather than to protect it. Such hiding away, however, does not annihilate sin. It simply removes it from view. While there can be no thought of God hiding sin from Himself, we might, perhaps, think of God hiding the sin away from us. This is a powerful psychological act. For we humans have pretty good memories—not as good as God's perfect memory, but pretty good, nonetheless—especially when it comes to personal disappointment, failure, and error and the feelings that accompany them. We have a dickens of a time letting go and forgetting. We fear cutting ourselves the least bit of slack.

Yet, it was just this sort of "covering," "hiding," or "disappearing" that Alma the younger experienced through God's mercy.

"And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed

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<sup>5</sup> *Lectures on Faith*, Lecture 3, questions

<sup>6</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*.

up by the memory of my sins no more” (Al. 36.<sup>19</sup>).

Note that it wasn't the memory of *sin* that disappeared, but the memory and continued experience of the *pain of sinning*. Truth is what really was, what really is, and what really will be. Thus, the fact of sin's presence in our lives, even when it is no longer harrowing, or even no longer present, is not annihilated. It will always be part of the truth of us.

So, the truth of our sin always remains. God does not forget or loose his capacity to observe. But, the Psalmist testifies, He does make a conscious choice to disregard. He makes a choice to disregard sin when considering how to relate to us. Though He, if He wishes, can see our ever-present sin if he chooses to, He does not choose to. He can relate to us as if it were not there, though it is. Again, the Psalmist of Psalm 103 speaks to this truth.

Devoted and generous is YHWH;  
slow to become angry and abounding in fidelity.  
He is not always condemning.  
He is not always annoyed.  
He does not relate to us as our sins deserve  
or deal with us as our iniquities might suggest” (Verses 8-10).

So, taking the first three lines of this Psalms together, we find that God carries our sins far away, barriers them far off, and then chooses to ignore their existence.

As we see in the final line, and as we discussed in the first meditation on these verses, our willingness to acknowledge our sin or, better, our sinful state, plays some role in the carrying away, burial, and disregard of our sin. It may be a tiny role, a very minor supporting acting role, in the carrying off, burial, and disregarding of sin, but it is a role, nonetheless. Still, we must acknowledge, the leading role belongs to God. He is the muscular hero who, alone, can bear the load away and bury it deep enough for it to never be seen or considered again. He knows it's there. He can't forget. But He will not be controlled by it. He will not allow it to control His relationship with those who also know it is there and trust His generosity enough to acknowledge it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## **P**salm 32.<sup>3-5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>When I kept silence,  
my bones waxed old  
through my roaring all the day long.

<sup>4</sup>For day and night  
thy hand was heavy upon me:  
my moisture is turned  
into the drought of summer.

<sup>5</sup>I acknowledged my sin unto thee,  
and mine iniquity have I not hid.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions unto the LORD;"  
and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

## **m**editation

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I don't know about you, but I can relate to the Psalmist's stubborn refusal to acknowledge his sins—both to self and to God. There might be many reasons for such refusal, but I have recognized three in myself. First, I have at times refused to acknowledge sin and error out of self-pride. I simply couldn't admit that I had erred. My ego was too wrapped up in the error. It was vitally important to me and my sense of worth that I be right in whatever it was I erred. At times, it was important to me that some other be blamed so that I could maintain my imagined superiority.

I have also refused to acknowledge sin and error out of a different sort of self-pride. Although I realized an error, in this pride I disliked and shunned the idea of being dependent upon another for forgiveness. This hatred of dependence, it seems to me, is at the very heart of Korihor's rejection of Christ. "There could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength..." (Al. 30.<sup>17</sup>). To accept Christ is to acknowledge that we are not sufficient in ourselves, but have needs that require our dependence upon another. Refusal to confess due to the distaste for dependence upon another is a doctrine of anti-Christ.

But, perhaps, the number one reason for my occasional refusal to acknowledge sin, I think, is a lack of faith or trust in God. I don't trust Him with my sin. I don't trust what He might do with it. I do not believe God is as merciful as scripture claims—which is immense, by the way. I do not believe He is as merciful as Jesus portrayed Him with his every mortal breath. I fall prey to one of the great sins, itself a form of idolatry and described by Zenock" "...this people... will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son" (Al. 33.<sup>16</sup>).

This distrust of God is, in my reading of it, the error Adam and Eve made in the garden. Satan put it into their hearts to distrust God; distrust that He was committed to them above all else. He was committed to them even if it meant pain to Himself. They yielded to and acted upon this distrust thus creating the fallen man—the man who distrusts God and thinks of God as an enemy.

Maybe I, maybe all of us can use this lent and Easter Season to revisit God's commitment to us, more faithfully confess our sins, and thus receive a remission of sins and become more like God's Son and more like God, Himself.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: February 15, 2024)*

# Psalm 46

## meditation 1 — introductory

Like any psalm, there are undoubtedly any number of ways to structure Psalm 46. It will not do to be dogmatic about such things. Here, we present one way to structure the Psalm. We can divide Psalm 46 into four sections. In the first ( vss. 1-3), the Psalmist reflects on a world in disorder and our ability to trust God even in the face of that disorder. In the second section (vss. 4-5), the Psalmist reflects on an ordered world that God creates in His city, Zion. The third section (Vss. 6-9) reflect once more on a disordered world and invites us to consider God’s response to and power over it. In the final section (vss. 10-11), the Psalmist reflects once more on the ordered world of God’s making.

Disorder/ Order/ Disorder/ Order

The Psalmist first reflects on a disordered world. He envisions a sea, its raging waters surging beyond their boundaries causing the earth to tremble and mountains to collapse. Here, the Psalmist would seem to draw our minds to the “uninhabitably disordered and desolate” world ruled by “chaotic waters of the abyss” that existed before God imposed order during creation (See Gen. 1.<sup>2</sup>).

In his first reflection on an ordered world, the Psalmist contrasts the world in disorder with the order that God brings to the city in which He dwells, i.e., Zion. Unlike the earth and mountains of the first section, God’s city cannot be shaken. In contrast to the threatening and surging waters of the first section, God’s city enjoys the benefits of a gentle and non-threatening river.

Next, the Psalmist reflects again on a disordered world. This time, however, his reflection rests not on the disorder of nature but the disorder of the human mind and the world it creates. Human disorder is seen in the plotting in which nations engage. They plot against each other. They plot against Zion. They plot against and revolt from God, Himself. Said plotting and rebellion is seen most clearly in their taking up of bow and spear and shield to engage in worldwide, near universal warfare.

The Psalmist ends with a reflection once more on an ordered world. Just as God ordered chaos during creation, God will order the world created by the disordered mind of humankind. God is a fortress against which no disorder can stand.

As we will see, each of these four sections sheds light upon the other three. The disorder of the natural world informs our understanding of the disorder of the human mind, the first being a sort of analogy to the second. The order found in the city of God is to be contrasted to the disorder found in the disordered world of the human mind. Order, rather in nature or in the human mind is the work of God. Just as He ordered nature, He will, in the end order the human mind. However difficult it can be to see, God rules. He can be trusted and relied upon, whether in ordered times and places or in disordered times and places. He will have the final say and the final victory.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: january 19, 2024)*

## meditation 2— psalm 46.<sup>1-3</sup>

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trusting god in the face of instability

<sup>1</sup>E<sup>l</sup>ōhîm is our strong refuge,

He has proven to be an incredible source of protection in distress.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore, we will not fear because earth trembles,

or the mountains tumble into the sea;

<sup>3</sup>its waters roar and roil,

mountain ranges quaking from its surge.

In these verses, the Psalmist reflects on an unstable and disordered world. He envisions a sea, its raging waters surging beyond their boundaries causing the earth to tremble and mountains to slide into the sea. As mentioned in our introductory meditation on this Psalm, the Psalmist seems to allude to the earth's pre-creation chaos and the possibility of it sliding back into that same chaos. Such reverse creation is not an abstraction.

In much of ancient Near Eastern mythology, creation is the result of conflict between a god and personified disorder and chaos—Tiamat, for example, being a Mesopotamian personification of disorder and chaos. While the mythological elements are mostly removed from the Hebrew Bible's accounts of creation, some of the imagery remains.

Genesis begins with the creator God, Elohim, finding the earth “uninhabitably disordered [*tōhû*] and desolate” with “darkness spread over the surface of the chaotic waters of the abyss [*t<sup>e</sup>hôm*]” (Gen. 1.<sup>2</sup>). God imposed order on this chaos, not through conflict or battle but through the power of His word. He gave order to the chaos, restrained the tumultuous abyss, and infused light into a darkened world. At the end of His labors, all was at rest. Peace and calm prevailed. Stability and order reigned. The ultimate manifestation of chaos, violence, conflict, and death—especially violent death—were nowhere to be found. Therefore, God was able to call the product of His efforts, “good.”

This state of affairs, however, was short lived. Through human misdeed, represented by that of Adam and Eve, disorder re-entered in the form of death, the ultimate chaos. The human mind increasingly gave way to disorder. This disorder manifested itself in the form of cruelty and violence. Human cruelty and violence, not God, brought about the first human death—the *violent* death of Abel (See Gen. 4.<sup>8</sup>). Having gotten a foothold, the disorder of human cruelty and violence grew like a cancer—or spread like a flood, to use Biblical language and imagery.

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen. 6.<sup>5, 11-12</sup>).

Finally, through human cruelty and violence chaos returned. The churning and tumultuous waters of chaos, whose power God had checked, broke free of their restraints. The world was flooded, becoming once more a churning tumultuous abyss (See Gen 6.<sup>11-12, 19-20</sup>). No doubt, the book's authors and readers took this flood literally. Many still do. For some it is an article of faith. So be it. But we see the universal flood waters of the abyss as a representation of the disordered mind of human beings giving itself to the disorder that cruelty and violence produce. The world was flooded, all right; flooded with human cruelty and violence. God did not flood the world, humans did. The chaos of death was everywhere. Human corpses littered the planet. Human society collapsed.

Genesis' story of societal collapse and destruction due to the flood of human cruelty and violence reminds



us that nature's disorder is related to human disorder, the first often serving as metaphor for the latter. This is true of the Babylonian creation myths involving Tiamat, where societal order is as much at stake as nature's order. We easily perceive the use of natural disorder to envision human/ societal disorder in Jeremiah 4. Here, Jeremiah describes societal collapse using language and imagery reminiscent of nature's disorder before creation. The collapse of Judah's society is portrayed as a kind of anti or reverse creation.

“I saw the earth—and, consider this—it was uninhabitably disordered and desolate!  
I looked to the heavens, but there was no light.  
<sup>24</sup>I saw mountain ranges—and, consider this—they quaked,  
and every hill shook!  
<sup>25</sup>I looked—and, consider this—there were no people!  
And every bird of flight had flown off.  
<sup>26</sup>I looked—and, consider this—cultivated land was desert,  
and all its cities lie demolished before YHWH;  
before His intense anger!” (Jer. 4.<sup>23-26</sup>, author's translation).

Here, Jeremiah is not really talking about nature's demise through disorder, but of human society's demise through disorder. The same is true of the reflection on disorder with which the Psalmist begins Psalm 46. The Psalmist uses the image of creation's disorder to reflect upon the disorder of the human mind; to reflect on human cruelty, violence, and warfare that is so disordering to society; and to reflect on God's ordering alternative. The analogy between nature's disorder and the disorder of the human mind can be discerned in the Psalmist transition from the former to the latter in verses 6-9.

“Nations have plotted. Kingdoms have collapsed.  
He speaks. Earth reels.  
YHWH Š<sup>e</sup>bā'ôṭ is with us.  
Ya'āqōb's God is our impregnable fortress.  
Come! Contemplate YHWH's deeds!  
How He disconcerts the world—  
putting an end to worldwide war,  
He will break bow and chop up spear,  
and burn round shield with fire!”

Here, disorder is represented by the collapse of kingdoms due to their incessant plotting—plotting against Israel, plotting against each other, and plotting against God. The plotting is active and violent. Bow, spear, and shield are used in almost continuous and worldwide war.

We live in troubled times. The world is as dangerous, unstable, and disordered as at any time in my seven decades. Yes, nature seems to be in revolt against order. But even more threatening, and more pertinent to Psalm 46 is humankind's revolt against order, manifest most clearly in the disorder brought by human cruelty, violence, and warfare. In Psalm 46, the Psalmist acknowledges that the earth is indeed a danger place and that it is not only nature's disorder that threatens, but the disorder of the human mind. But every ounce of such sure acknowledgement is accompanied by an equal and countervailing and confident assertion that God can and will reorder the world as He did in the first instance during his creative labors. He intends to reorder the disordered human mind.

Elsewhere, the psalmist wonders,

“When the foundations are being torn down,  
what can the just do?” (Ps. 11.<sup>3</sup>)

In Psalm 46, the Psalmist reminds us—and that, repeatedly—what it is that we can do when disorder threatens. We need not fear the disorder of either nature or the cruelty, violence, and warfare of the human mind. For,

“<sup>E</sup>lōhîm is our strong refuge,  
He has proven to be an incredible source of protection in distress.  
Therefore, we will not fear...

“YHWH Š<sup>e</sup>bā’ôṭ is with us.  
Ya’<sup>a</sup>qōb’s God is our impregnable fortress” (vs. 7).

“Be calm and acknowledge that I am <sup>E</sup>lōhîm.  
I rule over the nations.  
I rule over the world.  
YHWH Š<sup>e</sup>bā’ôṭ is with us.  
Ya’<sup>a</sup>qōb’s God is our impregnable fortress” (vss. 10-11).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: january 22, 2024)*

### meditation 3— psalm 46.<sup>4-5</sup>

God’s stabilizing effect on zion

<sup>4</sup>There’s a river, its channels gladden <sup>E</sup>lōhîm’s city,  
‘Elyôn’s unrivaled dwelling place.  
<sup>5</sup><sup>E</sup>lōhîm is in it.  
It cannot be shaken.  
<sup>E</sup>lōhîm provides it immediate aid.

Though the Psalmist does not fear the disorder, verses 1-3 addressed the instability and disorder that humans face in this world. That disorder was represented by a sea, its raging waters surging beyond their boundaries causing the earth to quake and mountains to slide into the sea. Though depicted in terms of natural catastrophe, this instability and disorder should not be read solely, or even primarily, in terms of the potential instability and disorder of nature. It is also reflective of human disorder and the instability and disorder that the human mind brings to human society. The association of nature’s instability and disorder with that of the human mind is made clearer in verses 6-9.

But before more clearly addressing human instability and disorder brought on by the unstable and disordered human mind, the Psalmist draws a contrast and presents a picture of stability and order in verses 4-5. In these verses, the Psalmist presents the stability and order that are found in the city of God, Zion.

We look first at the literary images and allusions of stability and order that the Psalmist uses to highlight the contrast between the nations of this world and Zion. We can then look at the meaning of the allusions and imagery.

We note, first, the river with its channels that gladden God’s city. This river is symbolic of stability and order. We are surely meant to see the river as calm and gently flowing. It is to be contrasted with the previous lines in which roaring and roiling seas cause disorder and destabilize mountains and mountain

ranges so that they quake and slide into the sea. Far from creating fear or anxiety as the unstable and disordered roaring and roiling seas threaten to do, the river that runs through God's city brings stability, order, and security to those who live there.

Second, we note the city's stability in that it "cannot be shaken." This should be seen as an allusion to and a direct contrast with the earth that quakes, and the mountains and mountain ranges that slide into the sea. Zion is not like other places. What ails other places does not ail Zion. Zion's stability and its uniqueness in resisting disorder is the result of God's presence in the city. His presence there includes His governance and His dispensation of laws that produce stability and order.

As we have noted, the natural disorder of verses 1-3 is to be read alongside the human disorder to which verses 6-9 allude. The first can be read as symbol for the second. In verses 6-9, the disordered human mind yields and commits itself to cruelty, violence, and near universal warfare. Such human disorder brings disorder to the nations just as the roaring and roiling waters of chaos bring disorder to earth, mountains, and mountain ranges. We will have more to say about this in upcoming meditations.

The city of God, however, does not practice this disordering human occupation of cruelty, violence, and incessant warfare in either its domestic affairs or in its foreign affairs. We can offer a few examples of how this absence of cruelty, violence, and warmongering is manifest both *visa via* Zion's relations with other nations and its own citizenry. We can consider, for example, the city's relation to violent warfare.

Enoch built a city. It too was called Zion. God dwelt and ruled from there. The stability that existed inside the city could not always keep its enemies from acting upon the worldly fetish for war. "Their enemies," we are informed, "came to battle against them." But Zion was not under the necessity of engaging in traditional cruel and violent warfare in return.

"And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him" (Moses 7.<sup>13</sup>).

We wonder, here, if we hear an echo of this in this psalm's verses 6-9, where God speaks and earth reels, bringing about the collapse of nations and, finally, the end of worldwide war.

Anyway, in the example of Enoch's Zion, we are presented with bloodless battles. Such bloodless battles are more likely to deter than instigate additional warfare—at least those that involve Zion.

"All nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him... and so great was the fear of the enemies of the people of God, that they fled and stood afar off" (Moses 7.<sup>13-14</sup>).

God's power, found in Zion, removed the necessity of cruel and violent warfare on the part of Zion. Inspired by Enoch and the city he established, Joseph Smith was invited to attempt to build a latter day Zion patterned after Enoch's. The character and power of this city, like Enoch's, would serve to discourage enemies from warring against it.

"And it shall be said among the wicked: 'Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible; wherefore we cannot stand'" (DC 45.<sup>68</sup>)

The consequence would be a community that breaks the disorder of cruelty, violence, and warfare.

“Among the wicked... every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety. And there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven; and *it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another*” (DC 45.<sup>69-70</sup>).

It is a test of the faith of Zion’s citizenry to believe and live nonviolent lives themselves and to send emissaries out into the nations of this world to extend the invitation of nonviolence to them as well.

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. *Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace*, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children...” (DC 98.<sup>14-16</sup>).

If Zion’s citizenry can exercise such faith as to reject violence themselves and thereby extend effective invitations of nonviolence to others as well, they can change the world.

“All nations will come streaming to it;  
many peoples will come, saying:  
Come! Let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain;  
to the temple of the God of Ya‘qōb̄.  
He will teach us his ways,  
and we shall walk in his paths.  
For Torah will come out of Šîyôn,  
and the word of Yahweh from Y<sup>e</sup>rûšālāyim.  
<sup>4</sup>Then will He mediate between nations;  
He will reconcile many peoples,  
so that they will retool their swords into plow blades  
and their spears into pruning instruments.  
One nation will no longer lift the sword against another,  
nor will they any longer train for warfare” (Is. 2.<sup>2-4</sup>).

Zion is the place where the spirit of cruelty, violence, and warfare go to die.

Zion also breaks the instability and disorder of cruelty, violence, and war through its ordered domestic principles. For example, we are informed that “the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7.<sup>18</sup>).

No doubt, Zion’s citizenry was “of one heart and one mind” about a whole host of things. Their “righteousness,” or proper conduct in behavior encompassed many aspects of life. But chief among the areas of agreement and unity among Zion’s citizenry had to do with matters of economics. Wealth should be distributed in such a way as to do away with poverty and create economic equality.<sup>1</sup>

Now, there can be no doubt that economic inequality is a major cause for disunity and the instability and disorder it brings. This is true at the domestic level, as in the “natural order of things” individual citizens engage in a sort of battle over resources. Envy, prideful and winner take all competition, cruelty, and conflict flourishes in such environments. Unity dies. It is also true at the international level of foreign affairs. Most often, the instability and disorder of violence and warfare ensues among the nations due to the battle for resources.

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<sup>1</sup> We have discussed this passage and the ideas of redistribution of wealth found in the Doctrine and Covenants many times in meditation and homily.

God knows how the natural, disordered mind of humans works. He knows it leads to the instability and disorder of cruelty, conflict, violence, and, ultimately, war. These are as destabilizing to the existence of a healthy and enduring society as the raging and roiling sea are to land, mountains, and mountain ranges. God has an antidote for the instability and disorder of the disordered human mind. That antidote is found in Zion and the principles upon which it is based. Psalm 46 compares and contrasts the disorder of this world, its kingdoms, and their near universal surrender to the disorder of cruelty, violence, and warfare with Zion and the stability, order, and peace that flow like a river. The stability, order, and peace that fill and encompass Zion is the consequence of its unrivaled ruler and the impact he has on the life of those who accept His rule, not only in the city, but, more importantly, in their hearts,

Oh that the world would give heed to and act upon the Psalmist's inspired witness.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: january 27, 2024)*

## Meditation 4— psalm 46.<sup>6-9</sup>

God's destabilizing effect on the world

<sup>6</sup>Nations have plotted. Kingdoms have collapsed.

He speaks. Earth reels.

<sup>7</sup>YHWH Š<sup>ʿ</sup>bā'ôṭ is with us.

Ya'āqōb's God is our impregnable fortress.

<sup>8</sup>Come! Contemplate YHWH's deeds!

How He disconcerts the world—

<sup>9</sup>putting an end to worldwide war,

He will break bow and chop up spear,  
and burn round shield with fire!

As we have seen in our previous meditations on Psalm 46, though the Psalmist does not fear it (vs. 2) and knows that God frees Zion of and from it (vss. 4-5), he nonetheless knows that the world can be and mostly is an unstable and disordered place. He imagined this instability and disorder in verses 2-3.

“Therefore, we will not fear because earth quakes,  
or the mountains tumble into the sea;  
its waters roar and roil,  
mountain ranges quaking from its surge.”

This harkens back to the disorder of earth's primordial times when the earth was “uninhabitably disordered and desolate,” and the “chaotic waters of the abyss” dominated (See Gen. 1.<sup>2</sup>). Though God ordered the earth and made it not only livable but “very good,” chaos and disorder re-exerted themselves in the time of Noah.

The disorder that the Psalmist's imagines—modeled on that of earth's primordial times and of Noah's time—is symbolic. As we will see, the disorder has less to do with nature's upheavals than with the upheaval of the human mind and the cruelty, violence, and warfare it produces. We see the disordering power of human cruelty and violence in Genesis 6.

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (see vss. 5, 11-12).

As the result of this flood of human cruelty and violence, society collapsed. The land was left without inhabitant. Societal collapse and mass death as the result of human cruelty, violence, and warfare is a repeated refrain in human history. Following is but one scriptural example. Though there are no “floodwaters,” this narrative should be understood as telling essentially the same story of human cruelty and violence, with their consequent societal collapse, as that of Genesis’ famous “flood” narrative.

In the Book of Ether, two great armies face off in extended warfare: one is the army of the more established king, Coriantumr. The other is that of the upstart, Shiz. “And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage,” we are told, “that the whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead” (14.<sup>21</sup>). At one point, in a moment of rare lucidity, Coriantumr reflects upon the fact that “there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children” (15.<sup>2</sup>).

Year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day the two armies, enraged and bent on cruelty, violence, and warfare, face off. Reminiscent of Genesis Gen. 6.<sup>11-12</sup>, the chronicler, Ether, informs us that “the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed; wherefore they went again to battle” (15.<sup>19</sup>).

After each day’s long hard battles, “when the night came they were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine; and they slept again upon their swords” (15.<sup>22</sup>). Nevertheless “on the morrow they fought again” (15.<sup>23</sup>). So powerful was the flood of cruelty, violence, and warfare that they fought until their millions became 121, then 59, and then 2. And then, finally, there was but 1. Just one. One survivor (See 15.<sup>23-32</sup>)!

Tell me that is not “biblical,” worthy of equal press with Genesis’ flood narrative; the death and destruction flowing from a flood of human cruelty, violence, hatred, anger, and warfare. Both narratives bear witness to the disorder of the human mind and the disorder it brings to the world through cruelty, violence, and warfare. This human disorder, or course, was not limited to or unique to the time of either Noah or Coriantumr. Even with the post-flood reordering, God lamented, “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8.<sup>21</sup>).

This is reminiscent of the preacher’s tragic observation.

“...The heart of the sons of men  
is full of evil,  
and madness is in their heart  
while they live...” (Ecc. 9.<sup>3</sup>)

In one of his tragedies, Seneca, the Roman writer, philosopher, and politician had one of his characters lament as follows.

“This is the world,  
brutal and cruel, that Troy tried to withstand.  
Cruelty wins in the end.

Our little clearings of civilization may seem real,  
but mindless wilderness always lurks,  
may take its time,  
but in the end overwhelms all our pretensions to decency.  
We revert to beastliness.”<sup>2</sup>

This, indeed, is the world that human disorder has created. The disorder of human cruelty, violence, and, above all, warfare, is very much on the Psalmist mind in Psalm 46, and is especially highlighted in today’s reading.

Here, in verse 6, the Psalmist acknowledges and laments that “nations plot. He would be most concerned with the fact that they plot against Israel. But he is also aware and saddened by the fact that they plot against each other. With bow and spear and shield humans engage in “worldwide war” (vs. 9). As a result, kingdoms collapse, and earth reels just as it did in verses 1-3. Human cruelty, violence, and warfare are like the raging and roiling waters of the first three verses.

The human occupation and preoccupation with war does not bring order and stability. It brings only disorder and instability. It brings death. As Edwin Starr asked, then answered in song some fifty years ago,

“War... good God, y'all  
what is it good for?  
Absolutely nothing.”

But this reality has not stopped humankind from devoting much of its resources and energies to the pursuit of war. Anyone coming from outside this globe—like God, for instance—might, first and foremost, characterize the planet as one of warmongering. If we doubt this, we should probably take our heads out of the sand. The fact is, scripture often characterizes planet earth as a stage for human cruelty, violence, and war.

In learning of his father, Lehi’s, dream, commonly known as the tree of life vision, Nephi wished to understand the meaning of the dream and its many elements. In answer to his inquiries, Nephi saw a series of fourteen visions. He learned much from these visions. In these visions, Nephi’s angelic guide repeatedly characterized Nephite, Lamanite, and, indeed, human history as one of “wars and rumors of wars,” “great slaughters,” and “contentions.” These went on for “many generations” not only among Book of Mormon peoples but “among all the nations and kindreds of the earth.” (See, for example, 1 Ne. 12.<sup>2-3, 21</sup>; 14.<sup>15-16</sup>).

As if to prove the angelic insight, Mormon described his generation as “thirst[ing] after blood and revenge continually; of being “without order and without mercy;” of being “brutal, sparing none;” of being “without principle, and past feeling,” seeking for blood and revenge” (See, Moroni 9.<sup>5, 18-20, 23</sup>). There was, he charged, “blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land... and it was one complete revolution” (Mormon 2.<sup>8</sup>). Indeed, he lamented, it was just such “wickedness and abomination [that] has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man” (Mormon 2.<sup>18</sup>).

Again, one hears echoes of pre-flood society and of what Noah might have said had he left behind a record. All the human disorder that Mormon described ended, as it always must, as it did in Noah’s and Coriantumr’s time, with the complete collapse and disappearance of society.

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<sup>2</sup> Seneca, *The Tragedies*, Vol. 1, “Trojan Women,” Lines 985-990, David R. Slavitt and Palmer Bovie

We of what some call the latter days or end times have perpetuated the disorder. In 1832 it looked like the American south might attempt to leave the United States. While southern rebellion was postponed for a generation, the conflict worked on the mind of Joseph Smith. He saw that, sooner or later, “the rebellion of South Carolina [would] eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls” (DC 87.<sup>1</sup>). But this, the American Civil War, was but the tip of the iceberg. Joseph’s discernment went far beyond this tragedy. “The time will come,” he saw, “that *war will be poured out upon all nations*, beginning at this place” (DC 87.<sup>2</sup>). Joseph discerned that the latter-days were to be an era of war and rumor of war. Time has vindicated his insight.

“And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations” (DC 87.<sup>6</sup>).

We note, here, the same mix of natural and human disorder that we see in Psalm 46, with the psalm moving from the disorder of nature in verses 1-3 to the disorder of the human mind in verses 6-9. Sadly, we must also note the Doctrine and Covenants’ implication that “the sword” and “bloodshed” are the consequence of a divine decree, making God responsible for and motivating human violence and warfare. This notion is even more strongly asserted in DC 63.

“I have sworn in my wrath, and decreed wars upon the face of the earth, and the wicked shall slay the wicked, and fear shall come upon every man” (Vs. 33).

Such ideas about God are simply absurd and must be rejected. God does not stir up anger and hate, cruelty, violence, and warfare, as we have discussed on several other occasions. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Ne. 11.<sup>29-30</sup>).

The idea that humans need outside, much less divine encouragement to hate one another and engage in warfare flies in the face of thousands of years of human history. Far from encouraging such a hateful, warmongering history, God mourns it. And, as we see in this Psalm, far from encouraging it, He intends to put a stop to it, however much the end of warmongering vexes the nations of this world.

“How He disconcerts the world—  
putting an end to worldwide war..”

How very irritating peace is to a disordered world addicted to war!

Still, our observation of the world throughout history and today leads us to accept the characterization of human society as being dominated by cruelty, violence, war preparations, rumors of war, and outright warfare. This human psychosis brings disorder and desolation to the world.

Earlier, we mentioned Lehi and his dream. In his dream, he saw “a dark and dreary wilderness.” With time, Lehi realized that he, himself, was traveling through this same “dark and dreary waste.” He eventually found relief from the darkness and the dreariness, but not before he had traveled “for the space of many hours in darkness” (see 1 Ne. 8.<sup>4-8</sup>). He sadly realized that “numberless concourses of people” were also engulfed in the same “great mist of darkness” as he had been” (See 1 Ne. 8.<sup>21-23</sup>). Lehi’s son, Nephi, was taught that this wilderness waste with its mist of darkness was a representation of this world



with its Satanically inspired temptations. No doubt, the temptations took in a plethora of invitations to bad behavior. But chief among them has to be the temptation to cruelty, violence, and war, just as Lucifer promises in the LDS temple endowment: “I will buy up armies and navies and reign with blood and horror on the earth.”

Little wonder that that same endowment speaks of the world into which Adam and Even were cast as a “lone and dreary world.”

Jesus was “cast” into this same world. God, John taught, sent Jesus, the “Light of the world,” to earth as a light that “shineth in darkness.” But, “the darkness comprehended it not... He was in the world... and the world knew him not” (See Jn. 1.<sup>4-10</sup>).

In each of these examples, scripture describes the world in which we live. It is a world as humankind has made it. It may be that “men are, that they might have joy” (See 2 Ne. 2.<sup>25</sup>), but we must find that joy as we slog our way through a “dark,” “dreary,” “lonely,” cruel, violent, and war-ravaged world.

In this 46<sup>th</sup> psalm, the Psalmist too recognizes the darkness, the dreariness, and the loneliness of a disordered man-made world filled with the cruelty and violence of human warfare. The inclination is to become fearful in the face of such profound and enduring human disorder. But the Psalmist rejects fear of disorder, whatever its origin. He keeps his sight firmly fixed upon God. This will be the topic over our next meditation.

God will put an end to war, however contrary that end may be to the world order of a disordered world. Those who follow him come out of peaceful Zion and renounce war. Like their King, Zion’s residents serve as ambassadors of peace, becoming princes and princesses of peace. They must not get sucked into the instability and disorder of human cruelty, violence, and warfare lest the earth be left without the savor of salt and all get trampled under foot.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: january 30, 2023)*

## **m**editation 5— psalm 46.<sup>10-11</sup>

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**G**od’s stabilizing effect on zion

<sup>10</sup>Be calm and acknowledge that I am <sup>’E</sup>lōhîm.

I rule over the nations.

I rule over the world.

<sup>11</sup>YHWH Š<sup>’</sup>bā’ôṭ̄ is with us.

Ya’<sup>a</sup>qōb’s God is our impregnable fortress.

As we understand it, Psalm 46 is a reflection on and contrast of order/ stability and disorder/ instability. God creates order, as He did at creation and as He does in Zion. Mankind creates disorder over every square inch of planet earth—and, it appears, it will do if and when it ventures out into the cosmos.

In reflecting on disorder, the Psalmist imagines the disorder of nature. He thinks of the earth quaking, of mountains sliding into the sea, and of the havoc ocean waters cause as they roar and roil over their boundaries (2-3). From this disorder, the Psalmist’s mind turns to the order God establishes in Zion (4-5) and then, quickly, to the disorder of the human mind. The Psalmist is not under necessity of using his imagination when he turns to human disorder. The disorder is obvious. It is reflected in the plotting of

nation against nation (vs. 6), in their dependence on and use of bow, spear, and shield (vs. 9)—in their buying up armies and navies and reigning with blood and horror on the earth”—and in their engagement in “worldwide war” (vs. 9). We are to associate the disorder and consequent desolation of nature and the disorder and consequent desolation of the human mind with each other, the former a type or shadow of the latter.

In light of the unstable nature of this world, one might feel intimidated and yield to the spirit of fear. But not the Psalmist. God has spoken peace to his mind.

“Be calm and acknowledge that I am <sup>’E</sup>lōhîm.  
I rule over the nations.  
I rule over the world.”

Even when forces of disorder are overwhelming, he refuses to fear and stays focused on God.

“I’ll not be intimidated though a force of ten thousand  
surround and array themselves against me” (Ps. 3.<sup>6</sup>).

Even when others offer strong reasons for fear, the Psalmist stays fixed on God and His word of comfort.

“It is to YHWH that I look for safety.  
How, then, can you say to me:  
‘Flee to the hills, a helpless bird’?” (Ps. 11.<sup>1</sup>).

But the Psalmist is not helpless. He has God as a protection against instability and disorder. This psalm begins with this refrain.

“<sup>’E</sup>lōhîm is our strong refuge,  
He has proven to be an incredible source of protection in distress.  
Therefore, we will not fear...”

He returns to this theme and witness in the middle of the psalm.

“YHWH <sup>Ṣ</sup>ēbā’ōt̄ is with us.  
Ya<sup>’a</sup>qōb’s God is our impregnable fortress” (7).

And he concludes with it to end the psalm.

“YHWH <sup>Ṣ</sup>ēbā’ōt̄ is with us.  
Ya<sup>’a</sup>qōb’s God is our impregnable fortress.”

This Psalm reflects upon God’s power over disorder and chaos; that of nature, yes, but more central to the spirit of the psalm, that of the disorder of the frenzied and disordered human mind with its obsession and occupation with cruelty, violence, and incessant and global warfare.

As Israel stood on the shores of the Red Sea, faced the cruelty, violence, and war of the overwhelming Egyptian military might, and felt a deep trepidation and insecurity, Moses spoke God’s truth to Israel.

“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14.<sup>13-14</sup>).

A millennium and half later, Jesus encouraged his disciples who might fear the world's violent persecution.

“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.”

But, at the same time, he did issue a warning” “Rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10.<sup>28</sup>).

The nations and kingdoms of this world present powerful arguments to justify their cruelty, their violence, and their warfare. They are enemies of humankind and a sure threat to its continuance. Most fall prey to their tempting propaganda. Those who fall prey often remain enthralled at the siren's call until they lose their soul to the power of disorder and chaos.

Somewhat unusual, this psalm offers no human petition to God. It restricts itself to the Psalmist's observations about the cruelty, violence, and warfare of this world's nations, the instability and disorder they bring to the world, and his confidence in God's power over it. But we find petitions elsewhere and often. We end this meditation with one of them. We can make it our own.

“Hear, <sup>E</sup>lōhîm, my cry for help.

Be attentive to my prayer.

From the edge of earth, I call out to You, being deeply disheartened.

Guide me into a mountain stronghold high above me.

To be sure, You have been my refuge,

a powerful defense against the enemy.

I wish to always find refuge in Your temple.

May I find shelter under cover of Your wings” (Ps. 61.<sup>1-4</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: february 2, 2024)*

## Psalm 51.<sup>1-6</sup>

- <sup>1</sup>Have mercy upon me, O God,  
according to thy lovingkindness:  
according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies  
blot out my transgressions.
- <sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- <sup>3</sup>For I acknowledge my transgressions:  
and my sin is ever before me.
- <sup>4</sup>Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,  
and done this evil in thy sight:  
that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest,  
and be clear when thou judgest.
- <sup>5</sup>Behold, I was shapen in iniquity;  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- <sup>6</sup>Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:  
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

## m editation

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Words matter. There is no doubt about the Psalmist's principal concern in Psalm 51. His vocabulary gives the game away as he, in just six short verses, confesses his evil, confesses twice of his transgressions, twice of his iniquity, and thrice of his sin. Clearly, he is consumed, even obsessed by a sense of personal failure.

The Psalm's superscript has it that it is King David doing the obsessing and confessing. Some, therefore, unwisely dismiss the Psalm's usefulness under the assumption that David is a sinner of a different order than they. Even if true, which is debatable, we are all just the sort of sinners who often feel much like the Psalmist as we consider our sins. Whatever the nature of our failures and sins, they can become consuming. It can feel as though they define us.

No one cared, for example, how kind or how gentle or how compassionate a leper was. Notwithstanding whatever good qualities the leper might have possessed, he or she remained defined by just one attribute: leprosy. The leper was made to shout, "Unclean, unclean, unclean," not matter how kind he or she was. There was no shouting, "kind, kind, kind." Contrary to such examples, we are not defined by our sins any more than we are defined by our positive traits.

So, no, it doesn't matter if it is David feeling overwhelmed by sin. We can all relate to the feelings of desperation expressed in this Psalm. And all of us can benefit by imitating the Psalmist's example of sincere regret and faithful confession. However aware of and obsessed by his sins, the Psalmist remained aware of and moved by another, greater truth. He could make faithful confession of sin because he knew that God is merciful. He knew that God can be trusted with sin when one feels its soul wound. He knew that God would respond to sin with lovingkindness. He knew what John knew: "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart" (1 Jn. 3.<sup>20</sup>).

None other than Joseph Smith experienced a regret about sin that was every bit as obsessive as that of the Psalmist. He also possessed a trust of God every bit as impressive as that found in the Psalmist. In his earliest account of that grand and redemptive vision now known as the First Vision, Joseph reports

“My mind become exceedingly (sic) distressed for I become convicted of my Sins... and I felt to mourn for my own Sins...”

As a result of this distress, conviction, and mourning, Joseph

“cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and to obtain mercy.”

As a result of his plea for a merciful forgiveness of sins, Joseph testified,

“the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in <sup>the</sup> attitude of calling upon the Lord <sup>in the 16th year of my age</sup> a pillar of ~~fire~~ light above the brightness of the Sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the <sup>Lord</sup> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he Spake unto me Saying *Joseph <sup>my Son</sup> thy Sins are forgiven thee. go thy <sup>way</sup> walk in my Statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified (sic) for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life*” (Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, pp. 5-7).

Several years later, on the night of Moroni’s first visit, Joseph found himself, once more ensnared by sin. On that night, Joseph pondered his “many foolish *errors*,” his “*weakness (twice)*,” his “*foibles* of human nature,” his “*sins* (twice),” his “imperfections,” and his “*follies*.” He was dismayed at the “*temptations*” to which he yielded. Joseph’s acknowledgement of sin is not to be dismissed because it was “nonmalignant.” Certainly, Joseph did not, indeed could not dismiss it. By his own witness, his errors, weakness, foibles, sins, imperfections, and follies caused him to feel “*guilty*,” “*offensive* in the sight of God,” and “*condemned*” (See JSH. 1.<sup>28-29</sup>.)” This language is very revealing and is in keeping with the Psalmist’s witness found in Psalm 51.

But, like the Psalmist, Joseph could see past his spiritual vulnerabilities and frailty. He too could trust in God’s “loving kindness” and “tender mercies.” Because he had encountered God and experienced His merciful forgiveness of sins in his “First Vision,” Joseph tells us that

“I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him...” (JSH. 1.<sup>29</sup>).

Like the Psalmist, Joseph discovered that when one trusts God with sin and makes open confession, amazing, unpredictable, and unexpected things happen. Here’s hoping that all of us have amazing, unpredictable, and unexpected happenings during this Lent and Easter Season through our trust in God and our faithful confession of sin.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: february 27, 2024*)

**Psalm 51.**<sup>7-12, 16-17</sup>

- <sup>7</sup>Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- <sup>8</sup>Make me to hear joy and gladness;  
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup>Hide thy face from my sins,  
and blot out all mine iniquities.
- <sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
and renew a right spirit within me.
- <sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from thy presence;  
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- <sup>12</sup>Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;  
and uphold me with thy free spirit.
- <sup>16</sup>For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:  
thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- <sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:  
a broken and a contrite heart,  
O God, thou wilt not despise.

**m**editation

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We are all probably familiar with a great number of the Law of Moses' stipulations concerning sacrifice. Among them was the stipulation that for a sacrifice to be acceptable to God and accomplish whatever ends was being sought through the sacrificial act, then the sacrifice had to be perfect. It must needs be, according to the priestly language, "without spot" or "blemish" of any kind. Thus, any animal under consideration for sacrifice required a meticulous and expert examination by a priest. If any flaw was found, it was rejected as unsuitable for sacrifice. This priestly mediation not only increased the chances that the sacrifice would be successful in its intent, it also saved the offeror from the humiliation and perhaps even angry retribution of an offended God presented with an inappropriate sacrifice.

I have wondered if an awareness of God's rigid expectations for a perfect sacrifice is part of the reason for the misunderstanding that I believe exists about the meaning of a "broken heart," "broken spirit," and "contrite heart." Because we sure do work hard to formulate these into something good and wholesome. Something unblemished.

Let's think about the "broken heart," the "broken spirit," and the "contrite heart" in relation to the Psalmist's needs and hopes in Psalm 51. In this Psalm the Psalmist pleads for forgiveness. His need is great—and not because or just because he is David. In this very brief psalm, he confesses of an "evil" in him. He mentions his "transgressions" twice and his "iniquity" or "iniquities" four times. He speaks of sin five times. Because of the extensive evil, transgressions, iniquities and sins, the Psalmist fears the very real possibility of being "cast away" from the presence of God (not only in a future life but in this one) and of losing God's "holy spirit." He has already lost any hope of "salvation"—which is, at least in part, victory over evil, transgression, iniquity, and sin.

Clearly, the Psalmist is not unblemished or whole. He is blemished and broken. He is shattered to pieces, pulverized—this is the nuance of Hebrew word translated as, "contrite." The Psalmist is willing to make any sacrifice to be forgiven, to be released from his blemished and broken and shattered self. But he has come to the conclusion that animal sacrifice will not do the trick. Another sacrifice is needed. It is a startling sacrifice. A daring sacrifice. He must place his brokenness, his own broken heart, upon God's holy altar. If he will muster the courage to do so, he has somehow been assured, God will not,

notwithstanding the Law's demand for things unblemished and whole, "despise" his offering.

Now, we know from his language that his heart is blemished and broken—excessively so. So, there can be no thought of his putting anything unblemished and whole upon the altar. The offering is not "humility," or, at least, not our domesticated version of humility, for then there would be no concern about God despising it. Even if one wished to turn the Psalmist's acknowledgement of sin into some kind of "humility," it is (and yes, this is somewhat awkward) humiliating humility. To put my brokenness out there like that? To have everyone see it? To put it on display for *GOD* to see, undisguised? That's no tame version of humility. It is wild. Undomesticated. Humiliating.

Yes, it takes a good bit of trust in God to offer something as blemished and broken as a heart that has been enmeshed in sin. It is most difficult to believe. Hence, I think, our disguising the very real brokenness symbolized by a "broken heart" as some kind of cute and cuddly humility. Our faith is sufficient to put a cute and cuddly humility on display for God to see. But this interpretation of a "broken hearts is just camouflage. An attempt to "cover," like Adam and Eve's fig leaves, "our sins," "gratify our pride, our vain ambitions" (See DC 121.<sup>37</sup>). To save ourselves the humiliation of our evil and transgression and iniquity and sin.

Let provides the opportunity to be real and to put off the camouflage, step into sackcloth, and cover ourselves in ashes—signs, all, that we are uncomfortable with our current state, but that we are willing to trustingly present our uncleanness, our brokenness, our shattered selves to God in the belief that He is not only mightier than our sins, but gentler than our sins deserve. Indeed, as the Psalmist says elsewhere,

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins;  
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103.<sup>10</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 13, 2024)*

## Psalm 51.<sup>13-15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;  
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

<sup>14</sup>Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,  
O God, thou God of my salvation:  
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

<sup>15</sup>O Lord, open thou my lips;  
and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

## Meditation

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We do not know what sins tortured Enos such that they drove him to his knees in prayer that lasted “all the day long... and when the night came [he] did still raise [his] voice” (En. 1.<sup>4</sup>). They could not have seemed insignificant to him. We do know that his “guilt was swept away” as God spoke peace to his soul through sure forgiveness (See En. 1.<sup>5-6</sup>).

We know more about the sins of Alma the younger. They felt, he confesses, like murder. Enos’s day and night prayer was tame compared with Alma’s “three days and... three nights” during which he was “racked, even with the pains of a damned soul” (Al. 36.<sup>16</sup>). Finally, he was redeemed of God, putting an end to his excruciating ordeal. He testified,

“I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Al. 36.<sup>19-20</sup>).

As a result of their personal encounter with the God of mercy, both men committed themselves to praying and laboring among their fellow man so that they too might discover and experience the good news that they had discovered in their heavenly encounter.

“And after I, Enos, had heard these words [“thy sins are forgiven”], my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites” (En. 1.<sup>11</sup>).

“Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Al. 36.<sup>24</sup>).

The reader might wonder why we have spent time on these two men and their experiences in a meditation focused on Psalm 51. Probably, though, he or she has not wondered long. Poetry can seem a little too indirect. Narrative with its rather concrete storytelling is much more direct and accessible. In these two Book of Mormon narratives, we have concrete examples that closely match the poetic voice and sentiments of the Psalmist.

We do not know the exact nature of the “evil,” the “transgressions,” the “iniquities,” or the “sins” that tortured this psalm’s composer (we should not be too quick to assign composition of this Psalm to King David or be so reckless as to imagine its confession of sin to be anything but universal, whether uttered publicly in ancient Israel’s temple or in the dark privacy of a modern-day closet). But we do know that like Enos and Alma the Psalmist was consumed by sins. And we do know that he committed himself to the same post-redemption activity as his two Book of Mormon brethren.

“Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;



and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

All three make a personal choice to function as a light to the world around them. In so choosing, they fulfill the very purpose for which God called Israel. God stated the call like this to Abraham,

“I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee,  
and make thy name great;  
and *thou shalt be a blessing*:  
“And I will bless them that bless thee,  
and curse him that curseth thee:  
and *in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 12.<sup>2-3</sup>).

As in Psalm 51, the various Psalmists frequently demonstrate their knowledge and acceptance of this mission. Here is another example of the Psalmists’ awareness and acceptance of the mission.

’ēlohîm! May you show us grace, and bless us!  
May you lighten us with your presence  
so that how you conduct yourself might be known throughout the earth;  
made known to all peoples, the victory you can bring.  
That the nations might acknowledge you,  
all peoples yield to you;  
that hosts of people might raise a shout of joy  
when you govern the nations justly,  
when you supply direction to the peoples of the earth.  
That the nations might acknowledge you,  
every people yield to you” (Ps. 67.<sup>1-5</sup>; author’s translation).

Now, this is an “every member a missionary” calling that one can get behind. It is not about the show and tell of an institution or its leadership, both of which have shown themselves, and that, repeatedly, to be flawed like every other institution and their leadership. Rather it is about showing and proclaiming the most glorious Being imaginable—a Being interested in, willing involved with, and compassionate toward all his children even beyond imagining.

We can utilize the Lent and Easter seasons to deepen our appreciation for this compassionate Being, as well as our commitment to becoming faithful emissaries of Him. Perhaps during this season of renewal we can more openly and energetically “sing aloud of [His] righteousness and “open our mouths and “shew forth [His] praise,” knowing that He has no flaws and will never be a source of regret or embarrassment. Now, that’s something to shout about!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 15, 2024)*

## **P**salm 63.<sup>1-8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>O God, thou art my God;  
early will I seek thee:  
my soul thirsteth for thee,  
my flesh longeth for thee  
in a dry and thirsty land,  
where no water is;  
<sup>2</sup>To see thy power and thy glory,  
so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.  
<sup>3</sup>Because thy lovingkindness is better than life,  
my lips shall praise thee.  
<sup>4</sup>Thus will I bless thee while I live:  
I will lift up my hands in thy name.  
<sup>5</sup>My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;  
and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:  
<sup>6</sup>When I remember thee upon my bed,  
and meditate on thee in the night watches.  
<sup>7</sup>Because thou hast been my help,  
therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.  
<sup>8</sup>My soul followeth hard after thee:  
thy right hand upholdeth me.

### **m**editation

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He must be extraordinary. This God of whom the Psalmist speaks. The Psalmist “seeks” this God as if He were food. He “thirsts” for this God as if He were the last drop of water. He “longs” for this God as if His absence occasions the threat of death. He “clings to” and “closely follows” this God, wanting no distance between them.

This God’s commitment to the Psalmist means more to him that life itself. This God’s presence is like partaking of the tastiest of meals. The Psalmist is simply unrelenting in his need and desire to know and experience this God. When the day is past and gone—a day in which this God has dominated his every thought and desire and hope—this God continues to fill his mind. Even sleep cannot separate this God from the Psalmist’s thoughts and hopes.

I don’t know about you, but such testimony as this makes my mouth water. It fills me with an insatiable hunger and thirst. It lights a fire inside of me. Even in those moments of deepest uncertainty and doubt, this witness, like so many others, calls to me. It draws me back into the light of faith and hope and love. It fills me with the strength to trudge on. Endure the darkness. Wait for the dawn.

This God, if He is out there, is worth every discomfort, worth enduring every uncertainty in order to find Him who can at times seem so unsearchable, but who may be nearer than we know.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## Psalm 69.<sup>1-5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rescue me, 'ēlōhîm;  
for the water has risen right up to my neck.  
<sup>2</sup>I am sunk in such deep mud  
that it is impossible to keep my footing.  
I have fallen into unfathomably deep waters  
in which a swift current sweeps over me.  
<sup>3</sup>I am exhausted from screaming for help.  
My throat is raw,  
my eyesight fails  
from waiting for my God.  
<sup>4</sup>More numerous than the hair on my head  
are those who hate me without reason.  
They are intent on my annihilation—  
my enemies without a cause.  
What I had not stolen  
I was forced to return.  
<sup>5</sup>'ēlōhîm, you know my folly,  
and my guilt is not hidden from you (author's translation).

## meditation

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Some years ago while visiting lake Michigan with family, I was enjoying the soothing bob of waves as I floated on one of those small inflatable rafts. Suddenly I heard the roar of an engine. Looking around, I realized that I had floated further from shore than I realized and that I was now in the path of an oncoming motorboat, its bow raised high as the boat sped along the top of the waves. I could not see the driver and realized that if I couldn't see him, he couldn't see me. I managed to paddle myself far enough that I was not struck by the boat, but it was close enough that I was caught up in the boat's wake and struck by the wake's churning waves. I was thrown from the inflatable raft. The raft went flying into the air and came down some distance from me. The boat driver never even knew I was there.

I am not the greatest of swimmers. The lake's natural waves combined with the waves in the wake of the boat made swimming to the inflatable difficult. I gulped a good bit of Lake Michigan's water as I struggled to make my way to the raft. I will never forget the moment when it occurred to me that I might just drown before I reached the safety of the raft. The horror that coursed through my mind and body was almost debilitating. It wasn't so much the thought of dying as the manner of death. I did not and do not want to die by burning or drowning. Obviously, after some difficult swimming and very anxious moments, I made it to the raft and paddled safely back to shore, chastened for my carelessness and grateful to be alive.

It wasn't long afterwards that, by chance, I found myself reading Psalm 69. There was something very, very familiar in the Psalmist's description of his near-death experience. I remembered my horror at the thought of drowning. And I could feel the Psalmist's horror as he faced his own imminent death by drowning.

This was well before I had really discovered the greatness of the Book. But, as I read the Psalm, I began to appreciate the Book's genius. The poetic genius on display in Psalm 69 allowed me to visualize the Psalmist and his suffering. This is what I saw.

The Psalmist was in a deep, dark pit, chin-deep in water. The water tossed unpredictably back and forth. I watched as he struggled to maintain his footing. I could now see that the floor of the pit was slippery and slimy from moss and weeds. I also saw that the Psalmist was sinking deeper in the water as a result

of a thick, slimy muck that seemed to suck him down deeper with his every panicked movement.

With every slip and slide, the water rose higher, sloshed into his face, got in his eyes, went up his nose, and, on occasion, even went over his head. He spit and sputtered as he gasped for a clean, dry breath of air. Just when he thought he had his footing, the water would heave against him from an unexpected angle knocking him off balance and causing the water to splash in his face once more.

It was then that I suddenly became aware of the sounds as well as the sights. The Psalmist was screaming at the top of his lungs. He had been for some time, I realized. He had been screaming... and screaming... and screaming: "Help! I'm down here. Someone... Help! Help me... I'm drowning."

I could see the veins on his throat bulging out as his brain, stimulated by adrenaline, sent the extra blood that his neck muscles and vocal cords needed for the lifesaving screams for help. Even so, I noticed that his voice was growing hoarse as his throat felt on fire and became raw from prolonged and loud screaming. I also noticed that his eyes were bulging from the effort of screaming. They were competing with his throat for blood flow, but they were losing the battle. As the blood flow increased to meet his throat's demands, his eyes were denied the needed supply of blood. I sensed that the Psalmist's vision was blurring.

The Psalmist was in deep, deep trouble. He was probably going to die. I was, I realized, watching a man in the throes of death.

It would get worse yet. And I thought I had it bad in Lake Michigan!

We are surprised, taken back, and confused by the sudden shift that takes place in verse 4. There is something more going on here than we at first thought.

"More numerous than the hair on my head  
are those who hate me without reason.  
They are intent on my annihilation—  
my enemies without a cause.

Where did that come from? We thought the Psalmist was alone and under threat from dark, murky waters. We understood why, alone and in danger of drowning, the Psalmist was utterly absorbed by his clear and present danger and fixated on his urgent cries for help. How, in the face of such danger, has the Psalmist's thoughts and worries suddenly turned to enemies. Surely, he should concentrate on the present danger and worry about his enemies later, assuming he survives. He has no time or energy to spare. But, the Psalmist's enemies are no more imaginary than they are absent. They are present... with him... in the pit.

What is happening? Where is the Psalmist? What is he experiencing? Is he in a pit or under attack by enemies; enemies whose attack takes the form of accusation?

"What I had not stolen  
was I forced to return."

We will explore these questions in future *meditations* that have Psalm 69 as their texts. We will come to understand how the Psalmist can be simultaneously suffering under these two seemingly contradictory threats: 1) he is alone and drowning in a pit and 2) he is surrounded by enemies that accuse him of and prosecute him for wrongdoing and guilt.

As it turns out, and as we will find as we make our way through Psalm 69, in describing his

experience in the pit the poet was being, well, poetic. He was never in an actual pit with actual water, or actual weeds, or actual moss, or actual muck. All of this was a metaphor for a threat posed to something far more enduring than the Psalmist's physical existence. The Psalmist was only appealing to our own experience, our own horror at the thought of drowning, so that we would understand the spiritual horrors he once faced.

But, for now, we wish only to have the reader consider and appreciate the Psalmist's skill in communicating his experiences, his thoughts, and his feelings in such a way as to draw us in; to allow us to see through his eyes and to make us think and feel what he thinks and feels. We wish to suggest and/or remind the reader that they can and will find themselves, their experiences, their thoughts, their feelings, their hopes, their fears, their faith, their doubts and uncertainties, their longing for God, and much, much more reflected in the Psalmist's experiences, thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, faith, doubts, uncertainties, and long for God.

This Psalm, and every single one of the other 149, is, to my way of thinking and according to my experience, literature at its very best. It fires the imagination. It stirs the feelings. It challenges the intellect. It inspires the soul. But, most importantly, it draws the faithful and discerning reader to God and brings God intimately into the reader's orbit, into his or her life.

Today is as good a day as any to discover or rediscover the literary genius and the spiritual inspiration that is the Book of Psalms. Today is as good a time as any to read, ponder, and even pray this incredible book which, like the Book of Mormon, has the potential to bring the reader closer to God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

**Psalm 69.**<sup>29-33</sup>

- <sup>29</sup>But I am poor and sorrowful:  
let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.  
<sup>30</sup>I will praise the name of God with a song,  
and will magnify him with thanksgiving.  
<sup>31</sup>This also shall please the LORD  
better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.  
<sup>32</sup>The humble shall see this, and be glad:  
and your heart shall live that seek God.  
<sup>33</sup>For the LORD heareth the poor,  
and despiseth not his prisoners.

**m**editation

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From the very beginning of Psalm 69, the Psalmist has described the deep trouble, affliction, and humiliation through which he has passed as a consequence of those who stand in opposition to him—whether mortal or immortal foes.

But the Psalmist is not simply venting frustration. He serves as an example to all who experience affliction. He recounts his afflictions in hopes of comforting and encouraging others who experience affliction. He speaks as an evangelist. Are you experiencing humiliation? Are you impoverished? Are you imprisoned? Are you humiliated by your impoverishment? Has your impoverishment resulted in imprisonment, as it too often does? Just as God heard his plea for help and brought him victory over his trials, God will come to the comfort and aid of others suffering affliction.

Here, as so often, the Psalmist seems to anticipate Jesus' ministry—a revelation of God's character—in which he, Jesus, by his own testimony, came to minister to the sick and insecure rather than the "whole" and healthy, the self-possessed and secure. Such good news is indeed worthy of being turned into song that magnifies the Lord, for "his name alone is excellent."<sup>1</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 148.<sup>13</sup>

**P**salm 69.<sup>34-36</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Let the heaven and earth praise him,  
the seas, and everything that moveth therein.

<sup>35</sup>For God will save Zion,  
and will build the cities of Judah:  
that they may dwell there,  
and have it in possession.

<sup>36</sup>The seed also of his servants shall inherit it:  
and they that love his name shall dwell therein.

**m**editation

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When we read the Psalmist's confidence that God "will build the cities of Judah" and secure them such that their inhabitants will "have them in possession," or that "they that love" God will inherit and dwell securely in them, we might simply understand the confidence as "temporal," and limit our understanding to the literal. But we might find allegorical applications that we can apply to ourselves.

As we read, here, of the Psalmist's confidence in a future and secure inheritance, we might think of the promise that Jesus made to his disciples the night before his death: "In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14.<sup>2-3</sup>).

Everywhere we turn, scripture assures us of God's awareness of our needs, his willingness to labor in our behalf, his desire to see us happy and secure, and his real and active participation in our lives. Such divine devotion to such lowly and helpless creatures is, indeed, cause for "everything that moveth" to "praise him." We happily unite our voice with the countless other voices, wherever they may be in the universe.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## Psalm 94.<sup>1-3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Avenging God, YHWH,  
avenging God, reveal yourself.

<sup>2</sup>Rise up, Ruler of the world;  
cause to rebound on those of rank what they deserve.

<sup>3</sup>How long will the ungodly, YHWH;  
how long will the ungodly dominate? (Author's translation)

### **m**editation

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A God who avenges can be a difficult concept. To some, avenging seems out of character for Christianity's Jesus, Son of God, who, according to the Gospels' testimony, is the most accurate revelation of God and His character ever seen or heard. Many Christians domesticate this same Jesus into a man not entirely consistent with the one found in the New Testament Gospels. I, myself, have been and often am guilty of such domestication. But a careful and honest reading of the Gospels reveals a Jesus who recognized the necessity of and justification for vengeance.

We should first say a word about the word "avenge." I have chosen this word rather than "revenge" to represent Hebrew, *nāqam* for a reason. My choice has less to do with the connotations of *nāqam* than with those of the two English words: *avenge* and *revenge*. The English word *avenge* "suggests the administration of just punishment for a criminal or immoral act. *Revenge* seems to stress the idea of retaliation a bit more strongly, and implies real hatred as its motivation."<sup>1</sup> Some may argue otherwise, but the difference is important. Revenging is intensely personal and self-serving. It seeks to allay one's personal feelings of having been wronged and harmed. Avenging is not personal or self-serving. It seeks to deliver those who have been wronged rather than satisfy one's personal sense of offense.

We will see this difference throughout this psalm. The powerful and influential who govern arrogantly oppress their "inferiors." This oppression goes so far as the killing of widows, orphans, and refugees (vs. 5-6) through unjust legislation intended to serve the interests of the ruling elite at the expense of common citizens (vs. 20-21). The Psalmist justifiably calls upon God to deliver the oppressed from their oppressors. This is what it means to avenge. It is more focused on the deliverance of justice to the wronged than the harming or punishment of those inflicting the wrong.

In discussing the idea of God's "judgment," we read the following in the Lectures on Faith. "It is through the exercise of this attribute [judgement] that the faithful in Christ Jesus are delivered out of the hands of those who seek their destruction; for if God were not to come out in swift judgment against the workers of iniquity and the powers of darkness, His saints could not be saved; for it is by judgment that the Lord delivers His saints out of the hands of all their enemies... In due time the Lord will come out in swift judgment against their enemies, and they shall be cut off from before Him, and that in His own due time He will bear them off conquerors, and more than conquerors, in all things" (Lecture 4.<sup>14</sup>).

This is consistent with the meaning of vengeance and is consistent with the emphasis found in this psalm. It is not self-serving or wicked to wish to see the oppressed liberated. One hopes this liberation might be accomplished peacefully and without suffering on either the oppressed or oppressor's end. But if the oppressor will not cease and desist voluntarily, then it is appropriate to pray for and rejoice in God vengeance against the impenitent oppressor.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English*, 1993





## **P**salm 102.<sup>17-21</sup>

- <sup>17</sup>He will regard the prayer of the destitute,  
and not despise their prayer.  
<sup>18</sup>This shall be written for the generation to come:  
and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.  
<sup>19</sup>For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;  
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;  
<sup>20</sup>To hear the groaning of the prisoner;  
to loose those that are appointed to death;  
<sup>21</sup>To declare the name of the LORD in Zion,  
and his praise in Jerusalem...

## **m**editation

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In an earlier meditation on another of the Penitential Psalms, we examined a frequently misunderstood part of the Psalmist's testimony concerning the character of God.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:  
a broken and a contrite heart,  
O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51.<sup>17</sup>).

In today's reading, we suggest, the Psalmist returns to bear the exact same testimony:

"He will regard the prayer of the destitute,  
and not despise their prayer."

One might wonder why the Psalmist, and this writer, returns to this theme so often. I won't be so bold as to speak for the Psalmist. But, for myself, I return over and over again to this aspect of the Divine character because my own experience and those of others to whom I have ministered demonstrates how very difficult it is for so many to believe. Perhaps you will agree when we suggest that those who are spiritually destitute, broken, and shattered are likely to feel that they are on their own when it comes to repairing the self-inflicted damage. Because they almost inevitably brought the destitution upon themselves, they fear to report and confess it to God lest He turn away with a callused shrug:

"The man [or woman] has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not... impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just" (See Mos. 4.<sup>17</sup>).

Perhaps you know a little something about how it feels to have others "say all manner of evil against you falsely" (See Mt. 5.<sup>11</sup>). Perhaps, then, you can imagine how God feels when His character is so often maligned; when He is accused of being something other than what the Psalmist claims Him to be in today's reading. It must be particularly galling, hurtful, irritating—whatever—when, in fact, the Psalmist hasn't yet said the half of it and, indeed, never will manage to find the language that begins to characterize God accurately. For it is the Psalmist's testimony that not only does God rescue the destitute and broken, He goes out of his way to find them. He is constantly on the hunt, looking for souls to repair and rescue.

"For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;  
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;  
To hear the groaning of the prisoner;  
to loose those that are appointed to death..."

So, again, just imagine God's disappointment when we resist His efforts; when we "say all manner of evil against" Him by imagining Him to be callused toward our destitution and resistant to helping us. But, it gets worse yet. For when we imagine him to be what He is not, we become impotent to carry out one of our prime missions: to bear witness of Him in such a way that praise is magnified and increased the world over. When we fail in our mission in this way, we not only fail to bring the "generation to come" to Him, but drive them into the arms of all manner of false, impotent gods.

Lent provides a wonderful opportunity for us to explore more deeply God's character, and, where necessary repent of having said "all manner of evil against" Him. The season is a good time to yield to one of His fondest efforts: the rescue to destitute, broken, and shattered people. Then, freshly rescued, we can use Lent to broadcast the truth of God until His praise reverberates the world over.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 17, 2024)*

## Psalm 103.<sup>8-12</sup>

- <sup>8</sup>The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.  
<sup>9</sup>He will not always chide:  
neither will he keep his anger for ever.  
<sup>10</sup>He hath not dealt with us after our sins;  
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.  
<sup>11</sup>For as the heaven is high above the earth,  
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.  
<sup>12</sup>As far as the east is from the west,  
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

### **m**editation

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Sometimes poetry can almost take on an aura of the visual arts. Poetry's use of symbolism, imagery, metaphor, likeness, etc. grant us the freedom to form pictures in our minds. A picture, they say, is often worth a thousand words.

The King James Bible's 79-word translation of today's passage contains unimaginably broad horizons and an expansive universe that boggles the mind. We would need a book of meditations to capture the grandeur found in this one Psalm. We would need more books than the world can hold to capture the grandeur of the God whom the Psalmist discovered and seeks to reveal. What follows is the smallest nibble from the sumptuous feast that is Psalm 103.<sup>8-12</sup>.

“As far as the east is from the west.”

How far is that? However far it is—and it is very, very, very far—that's how far God can and does “remove our transgressions from us.” I can think of a half dozen ways to imagine this. Picture it. I can, for example, see myself standing on a broad flat limitless plain. I look to the eastern horizon, its features tiny, unfocused, and indistinguishable. I then look to the western horizon, its features equally incomprehensible. Then, I physically move myself eastward until I come to that first eastern horizon that I made out earlier. Then I look to the west. I look for that western horizon that I saw before. But I can't see it. It has disappeared from view.

That, the Psalmist testifies, is what God does to and with our sins. He moves them. Moves them very far away. So far that we can no longer make them out. So far that we cannot see them. So far that they have no power to impact and impress themselves upon our senses. This is a way of saying that the impact of our sins upon us is reduced to nothingness. But this unimaginable feat is just the tip of the iceberg. For, God removes sin so far away that even He—He of perfect sight and knowledge and memory—even He can no longer see them.

As they disappear over the far horizon of eternity, we find Him negligent in dealing “with us after or sins” or rewarding (punishing) “us according to our iniquities.” Even if He looked for cause to chide and upbraid and accuse—which He does not—He would come up empty. Sin has fallen off the edge of the universe. It has been disappeared. Annihilated. But this has nothing to do with the size of the universe or the breath of our horizons. Rather, it is about the immensity that is in God. The divine attribute of “mercy” is as high and wide and long and deep and expansive—infinite—as the universe is huge. “Were it possible,” the prophet Enoch declared,

“that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and yet thou art

there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end” (Mos. 7.<sup>30-31</sup>).

Yes, the curtains of His mercy are “stretched out” as expansively as His creations. We have not yet discovered the beginning nor the end of the universe. Neither have we discovered the expansiveness of His mercy. We probably never will. Probably the expansiveness of His mercy would shock our senses. Possibly offend our sensibilities. I believe that it was this, or at least that portion of it that is comprehensible to the human mind, that came rushing in “with great force into every feeling of [Joseph Smith’s] heart” (JSH 1.<sup>12</sup>) when he read James. God was not an upbraider. He did not find cause to accuse. Not because there was no cause, but because God was more righteous and powerful than puny human sin. He obliterated human sin, sending it to the furthest reaches of the unknown universe.

It is all hard to believe. And there’s the rub. But Lent is a good time to scan the universe, scour its every nook and cranny in search of a place where sin can survive God’s hostility toward it. It’s a good time to experience the muscular arms of God seize hold of our sins and hurl them into the furthest abyss of nothingness. Lent is a good time to come under the commanding influence of the Holy Spirit and “shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” (2 Ne. 31.<sup>13</sup>) such that all may hear and join in the grand Hallelujahs of Easter.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 7, 2024)*

## Psalm 106.<sup>1-2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Praise ye the LORD.

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good:  
for his mercy endureth for ever.

<sup>2</sup>Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD?  
who can shew forth all his praise?

### meditation

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My goodness, how enamored we can become of those among us “which [are] of reputation” and “seem to be somewhat” (Gal. 2.<sup>2,6</sup>)! So enamored of Joseph Smith were those who knew him that they boasted that he had “done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (DC 135.<sup>3</sup>). Okay. I guess. But, did they know, do we know what a distant second Joseph Smith is to Jesus of Nazareth? In his first address as an apostle in the LDS Church, Neal A. Maxwell testified of Jesus,

“He is utterly incomparable in what He *is*, what He *knows*, what He has *accomplished*, and what He has *experienced*. . . . We can trust, worship, and even adore Him without any reservation! As the only Perfect Person to sojourn on this planet, there is none like Him!”

“In intelligence and performance, He far surpasses the individual and the composite capacities and achievements of all who have lived, live now, and will yet live!” (CR. Oct. 1981, p. 9).

Let’s just repeat that last bit. “He far surpasses the individual *and the composite* capacities and achievements of all who have lived, live now, or will yet live!”

I like to visualize this in this way. I imagine having all humanity, every individual, stand on each other’s shoulders one on top another. This human tower is incredibly high. We are talking millions of miles high. Then, I imagine Jesus stepping up to stand next to this human tower. His height far surpasses the height of the human tower. He towers over this human tower.

I just can’t bring myself to be impressed by those among us who are “of reputation” and “seem to be somewhat.” I find little to say of or for them. I don’t mean to belittle them. I am sure many of them are fine people. But, really! How, having met Jesus, can one be expected to feel impressed.

Among my many appreciations for the Psalmists, none are greater than this one: the Psalmists’ consistent insistence that there is no one even remotely like the great Yahweh. That “his name alone is excellent” (Ps. 148.<sup>13</sup>). That he “humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!” (Ps. 113.<sup>6</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

## Psalm 115.<sup>4-8</sup>

- <sup>4</sup>Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of men's hands.  
<sup>5</sup>They have mouths, but they speak not:  
eyes have they, but they see not:  
<sup>6</sup>They have ears, but they hear not:  
noses have they, but they smell not:  
<sup>7</sup>They have hands, but they handle not:  
feet have they, but they walk not:  
neither speak they through their throat.  
<sup>8</sup>They that make them are like unto them;  
so is every one that trusteth in them.

## meditation

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Lent is a time for self-denial and the mortification of the flesh. When I think of self-denial and mortification of lust and desire, my mind goes immediately to idolatry. Many picture little wooden, stone, or metal figurines when they think of idolatry. Me? I think of American department stores with row after row of consumptive temptations. I think of our too-big houses with their richly adorned kitchens and baths. I think of our irresponsibly huge vehicles. I think of those economically left behind because of our addictive drive to purchase and possess. I think, then, of wanting and desiring. Desiring and wanting. WANTING AND DESIRING. “Covetousness,” says Paul, “is idolatry” (Col. 3.<sup>5</sup>).

We most often think of “covetousness” in relation to another and what they possess. But “covetousness” does not require “another.” We are very good at wanting all by ourselves. We can easily dismiss the evil of our idolatrous consumption with a “it’s not that bad,” or “there are worse lusts, like sex,” or “it is just how our culture works”—a kind of “everyone else is doing it”—rationalization. This is dangerous on numerous fronts. I often wonder, for example, which is worse: the occasion sexual lust, or the incessant, near constant lusts of materialism. And it isn’t simply the wanting and consumption. It takes time, lots of time, and effort to gather the resources necessary for satisfying our near insatiable consumption. Such time and effort for so little return of real value is exhausting. Who has time for anything else, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? And, having worked so hard for so little, who is really going to want to part with any significant portion of it in order to assist others? The whole thing, the whole idolatrous system is a drag on everything and everyone.

“The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals,  
and fashioneth it with hammers,  
and worketh it with the strength of his arms:  
yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth:  
he drinketh no water, and is faint” (Is. 44.<sup>12</sup>).

It is all truly exhausting and debilitating. And wasteful. In today’s reading, the Psalmist pointedly reveals the impotence of the idol and the idol worshipper. Among the many senseless wonders of the idol is that it has no feet and so cannot walk. Impotent. That’s bad enough. But though the worshipper looks for profit through the idol, the idol’s impotence, ironically, ends up being a drain on the worshipper. Because “they cannot walk,” Jeremiah satirically recounts, “they must needs be borne” (Jer. 10.<sup>5</sup>). “They bear him [the idol] upon the shoulder, they carry him,” observes Isaiah (46.<sup>7</sup>).

“Their idols were upon the beasts,  
and upon the cattle:  
your carriages were heavy loaden;  
they are a burden to the weary beast.

They stoop,  
they bow down together..." (Is. 46.<sup>1-2</sup>).

Loaded down and wearied so, Jesus' conclusion concerning the wealthy—the great majority of us—is of little wonder (though his disciples at the time were “astonished).

“A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle [or to thread a needle with a rope], than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19.<sup>23-24</sup>).

The Lent and Easter season should serve as encouragement for us to evaluate our individual drive for self-gratification and our insatiable wanting and desiring; our covetousness. In addition, they can serve as a time for us to consider our society's flimsy justifications for its consumerism and how it impacts especially those who lack needful life resources. Lent is a good time to plead for help in casting our idols away and freeing ourselves of their domineering lordship—a dominance which can, ironically, make us impotent in spiritual and heavenly things, as Jesus himself testifies.

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matt. 13.<sup>22</sup>).

Hence, Jesus' warning,

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6.<sup>24</sup>).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: february 28, 2024)*



## **P**salm 130.<sup>1-8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

<sup>2</sup>Lord, hear my voice:  
let thine ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications.

<sup>3</sup>If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who shall stand?

<sup>4</sup>But there is forgiveness with thee,  
that thou mayest be feared.

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD,  
my soul doth wait,  
and in his word do I hope.

<sup>6</sup>My soul waiteth for the Lord  
more than they that watch for the morning:  
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup>Let Israel hope in the LORD:  
for with the LORD there is mercy,  
and with him is plenteous redemption.

<sup>8</sup>And he shall redeem Israel  
from all his iniquities.

### **m**editation

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We have utilized Psalm 130 as a reading several times over the course of this site's history. I have written more than one homily based upon it. It is easily in my top-ten favorite Psalms. I read it often. It is one of my favorites for several reasons. But today, I am going to ask you to join me in a thought experiment. I am going to ask you to use your imagination. O.K., here we go. Let's start imagining.

You are an ancient Israelite. You strive to be true to Yahweh's law but know that you are guilty of breaches against it. You fear Yahweh is angry with you. You fear that He might withhold cherished blessings from you, not least among them, His presence in your life. You wish to be relieved of the feelings of guilt and separation from God; feelings that wash over you as deep waters, and leave you with a sense of drowning. What do you do? How do you rid yourself of these thoughts and feelings? How do you regain confidence with God and confidence that He will continue to be present in your life?

As an ancient Israelite, you know that there is but one way to obtain this desired relief and assurance. You must offer animal sacrifice to God. It will mean a bit of a journey, but you commit to traveling to Jerusalem and there offering the animal for the forgiveness of your sins and the return of God into your life.

You have made the journey. You stand in the temple court. You slit the animal's throat, utter a confession of sin on its head, and hand it over to the priest for the sacrificial slaughter and burning. You watch as the priest places your sacrifice on the altar. You smell the roasting meat. You see the fire's smoke rise into the air. You believe that the sweet smell of roasting meat will be carried up to God in the smoke. You believe that your prayer for forgiveness of sin will rise with the smell of roasting meat and the rising smoke up into the presence of God. You pray to God, asking Him to accept your offering and forgive your sins. You assure Him that you will try to do better.

We can't know for sure what the temple setting was for the 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm. We do not know for sure how and when and why it was used in Israel's temple. But there is general agreement that it was used in Israel's temple. And we can easily believe that the sentiments expressed in the Psalm are consistent with

the hopes of an offering made for the forgiveness of sin. It is in line with the hopes of one who looks to God for forgiveness and restitution.

Now, like the writer of the New Testament Book of Hebrews, I sense that millions of animals were sacrificed over the course of a thousand years. However, these multitudes could never bring the sort of forgiveness and peace of conscience that the devotee wished, and that God is actually capable of granting (See, for example, Heb. 10.<sup>1-4</sup>).

I am skeptical that God ever required a sacrifice—animals, human, or His Only Begotten Son—as a prerequisite for satisfying some idea of justice or alleviating His wounded honor before He would agree to grant merciful forgiveness. Jesus' sacrifice, as I have said so often, did not “create” atonement. It does not possess some form of magic by which forgiveness is granted. Among the many revelations of Jesus' life, suffering, and death is the *revelation* of atonement. It revealed the mercy that was already and always will be a central aspect of God's character and has always been and ever will be available to the sincere petitioner. This revelation made it possible for us to experience forgiveness as we come to believe that merciful forgiveness is simply part of the divine disposition.

But neither my imagining a sin offering at the temple as a setting for this Psalm, nor my skepticism about the efficacy of sacrifice in any way lessens my appreciation for the Psalmist's faith in God and His willingness to forgive. The Psalmist is as sure of God's merciful forgiveness as he is of the sun's rise at dawn. He knows, perhaps, that God forgives because he knows that God is not the type of Being who is on the lookout for sin to begin with. He knows that God often does not even take notice of, “mark,” sin. It isn't that God possesses a giant and magical eraser in the sky with which he wipes sin from his giant and eternal sin ledger. It is that he so seldom picks up pen and paper to record the existence of sin in the first place. This is, for many, a difficult doctrine. This merciful response to sin and error is so unlike our response to sin and error—both our own and others—and so unlike the God whom we have created after the image of our own hearts, that it seems simply too good to be true. But, it is true. The Bible tells me so. All scripture tells me so.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: february 2, 2024)*

## **P**salm 143.<sup>1-2</sup>

- <sup>1</sup>Hear my prayer, O LORD,  
give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness  
answer me, and in thy righteousness.
- <sup>2</sup>And enter not into judgment with thy servant:  
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

### **m**editation

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Earlier in the Psalms, the Psalmist reports having gotten himself into quite a pickle. He had for a time “kept silence.” His “silence” represented his stubborn refusal to confess his sins. Whether out of personal arrogance, or a lack of trust in God, or both, his stubborn refusal to confess caused him real heartache. Finally, after some hard knocks, he reported, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee.” This confession of sin brought peace through the forgiveness of “the iniquity of my sin” (See Ps. 32.<sup>3-5</sup>).

In today’s passage, the Psalmist makes no such mistake. He confesses quickly and bluntly, “in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” If, at the time that he entered into judgment with God, he was to be judged only on the basis of his own faithfulness and righteousness, he would not be, could not be “justified”—found innocent and acceptable.

The Psalmist’s plea that God “enter not into judgment” with him reminds us of Zenos’ discovery recorded in the Book of Mormon: “Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son” (Al. 33.<sup>13</sup>). The Psalmist reminds us that the confession of sin, the plea for forgiveness, and the experience of forgiveness is based on God’s “faithfulness,” not ours. It is based on God’s “righteousness” not ours. Zenos reminds us that God’s “faithfulness”—his fidelity to us—and God’s “righteousness”—His commitment to do right by us—is best revealed through His Son.

With this knowledge, we make confession willingly and quickly and often. With this knowledge, we feel assured of God’s mercy and grace. With this knowledge we experience the joys of repentance and forgiveness. And with this knowledge, we have hope and faith and power to act upon His invitation to improve, to advance, and become like Him. We move always forward in our path to sanctification.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

**Psalm 143.**<sup>1-2, 4, 6-9</sup>

- <sup>1</sup>Hear my prayer, O LORD,  
give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness  
answer me, and in thy righteousness.
- <sup>2</sup>And enter not into judgment with thy servant:  
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.
- <sup>4</sup>Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me;  
my heart within me is desolate.
- <sup>6</sup>I stretch forth my hands unto thee:  
my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.
- <sup>7</sup>Hear me speedily, O LORD:  
my spirit faileth:  
hide not thy face from me,  
lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.
- <sup>8</sup>Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;  
for in thee do I trust:  
cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;  
for I lift up my soul unto thee...
- <sup>9</sup>I flee unto thee to hide me.

**m**editation

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I personally find any thoughts or feelings that the Psalms are not pertinent to be utterly mystifying. But, my experiences with students and congregations suggest that passages such as today's reading leaves many LDS readers feeling confused and ambivalent about the Psalms. The confusion and ambivalence about today's reading is at least two-fold. First, the idea that "no man living" "shall be justified" in the eyes of God challenges their view of man's divine heritage and potential—a view more in line enlightenment philosophy than scripture. Second, they conclude, as they do elsewhere in the Psalms, that because David is the author and because David is guilty of a far worse sin (murder) than they, the Psalms, including this one, have little to offer them. David deserves to suffer the pains of hell—"the pit" in today's reading—while they, apparently, do not.

Such misunderstandings are most unfortunate and wrong on numerous fronts. We cannot address them all, but can share a thought or two. Leaving aside David's final eternal state, which is a matter of complete conjecture, we can mention the fact that many, considering the possibility that they might not achieve the highest degree of glory—a consideration which, itself, causes chills to run up and down many a spine—never consider hell as a realistic alternative for or threat to their eternal being. With this dubious conclusion in mind, I have always been intrigued by Lehi and Nephi, and the father and son's thoughts about hell in relation to themselves.

First, we should understand what they meant by "hell." Nephi speaks of "death and *hell*, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit" (2 Ne. 9.<sup>10</sup>). So, in Nephi's mind, "hell" entails more than physical death. It entails "the death of the spirit." Moreover, Nephi speaks of "that awful monster the devil, and death, and *hell*, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment" (2 Ne. 9.<sup>19</sup>). Thus, "hell" entails "endless torment" and lakes of "fire and brimstone"—metaphorical or not. Given, then, the nature of the place and the "righteous" nature of Lehi and Nephi, we might expect that they would have no fear of the place or feel any need for redemption from hell. But we would be wrong. In praising God for his saving influence in his life, Lehi exclaims,

"But behold, *the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell*; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled

about eternally in the arms of his love.”

It seems clear that Lehi would not need to be “redeemed” from something that posed no actual threat. Thus, it seems that Lehi did see hell as a possible threat to his eternal well-being and was extraordinarily grateful for the Lord’s labors in “redeeming” him from that terror and torment. In his much beloved “psalm,” Nephi pleads,

*“May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite!”*

Apparently, Nephi continued to worry that the “gates of hell” still stood wide open, awaiting his arrival and hoping to monstrously engulf and consume his eternal soul. The point is, “hell” is not open for business to murderers such as David only. Even individuals, “good and obedient” individuals such as Nephi and Lehi have felt its awful draw. Without becoming obsessed by the very real threat, we too can and perhaps should feel its awful draw. The danger is as real for us as it was for David or Lehi or Nephi. As we follow the Psalmist’s example and find a hiding place in God, our appreciation of God grows ever stronger. Lent is a good time to “let the solemnities of eternity rest upon [our] minds” (DC 43.<sup>34</sup>). This admonition comes immediately after this warning,

*“And the wicked shall go away into unquenchable fire, and their end no man knoweth on earth, nor ever shall know, until they come before me in judgement” (43.<sup>33</sup>).*

Lent is a good time for us to confess and repent so that as we “let the solemnities of eternity rest upon [our] minds” as David and Lehi and Nephi did, our expectations might be far more pleasant.

*“And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: ‘Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father.’ Amen” (Enos 1.<sup>27</sup>).*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: march 10, 2024)*