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Psalm 14

meditation 1— Introductory

the psalmist's assessment of the state of affairs

¹The antisocial tells himself,
“‘ēlohîm is not present.”
They pervert. They do abhorrent things,
not a one of them acting beneficially.

Yahweh's assessment of the state of affairs

²YHWH looked down from the heavens upon humankind
to determine, if there were any possessing knowledge;
any consulting 'ēlohîm.
³The whole lot of them had rebelled;
as one, they had become morally tainted,
not a one of them acting beneficially.
None! Not even one!

Yahweh's response to the state of affairs

⁴Do they not understand, those who act so cruelly;
those who devour My people as if they at meat,
refusing to acknowledge YHWH?
⁵Then, they experience great alarm
because YHWH is among the innocent.
⁶You may work to frustrate the hopes of the downtrodden,
but YHWH is their shelter.

final plea and assurance

⁷Oh that out of Zion He might grant Yîsrā'ēl deliverance!
In YHWH's restoring His people to better times,
Ya' aqōb will be exuberant;
Yîsrā'ēl will shout for joy.

I divide Psalm 14 into four sections. In the first, the Psalmist himself assesses the moral state of his own time and place (vs. 1). In the second section, rather than reporting his own assessment, the Psalmist reports God's assessment of the moral state of humanity at all times and in all places (vss. 2-3). In the third section, the Psalmist reports God's response to the moral state (vss. 4-6). The Psalm ends with a plea for relief and a statement of assurance (vs. 7). This is not, of course, the only way of structuring the Psalm. However, it makes for a nice symmetry in form (4 lines/ 7 lines/ 7 lines/ 4 lines) as well as assisting in understanding the Psalmist's sentiments and meaning.

Like the eleven preceding psalms, Psalm 14 should not be read in isolation, but in light of what has preceded. We have understood Psalms 3-7 and then 9-13 to reflect the same or a similar situation. In them, the Psalmist trusts God and looks to Him, sometimes in full confidence and at other times with some doubt, for relief as enemies defame his character. In a kind of apotheosis, the Psalmist comes to understand and reflect upon the global nature of God and His influence (Ps. 8). In Psalms 9 and 10, which were originally a single psalm, the Psalmist reflects upon God's past history of deliverance and prays that

it will be repeated in his own experience. He also comes to understand that, like God, his enemies are global and that they prey upon the vulnerable, the impoverished, and the downtrodden wherever they may be found.

While the Psalmist's enemies go unnamed in 3-7, in Psalms 9-10 he names them: "the malevolently immoral." Psalm 10 is a long meditation on the destructive character of the malevolently immoral, even as it continues to express faith in God's power over such characters. In Psalm 11, the Psalmist rejects others' suggestions that his trust in God is unwarranted. In Psalm 12, perhaps in light of the challenge issued to the Psalmist in the previous psalm, the Psalmist offers what might be his strongest statement yet of trust in God as he seems to hear the very words of God promising help for him and all those similarly afflicted. Startlingly, the powerful expression of trust in God found in Psalm 12 is followed up in Psalm 13 with perhaps the strongest expression yet of the Psalmist's concern and doubt, as God seems slow in responding to his needs.

With the opening of Psalm 14, we understand the same sort of malevolently immoral who attacked the Psalmist in Psalms 3-7 and 9-13 to be in the author's mind. In verse 1, the Psalmist names them, "the antisocial." In verses 2-3, God sees that they are worldwide. In verses 4-6, God checks the power of the malevolently immoral/ antisocial, thus bringing the joys of deliverance to Israel (vs. 7).

The same sorry moral state of affairs that existed in the Psalmist's society and that God witnesses exists everywhere and everywhen, exists on our place and our time. The sorry moral state in which we find ourselves today can often cause us to become discouraged, even hopeless. But, as so often, the Psalmist stands as a firm witness of God's awareness of our struggles and His ability and willing engagement to bring relief from the oppression and chaos that the malevolently immoral and antisocial bring into our lives and with which they threaten our society.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 16, 2024)

meditation 2— psalm 14.¹

the psalmist's assessment of the state of affairs

¹The antisocial tells himself,
“‘ēlohîm is not present.”
They pervert. They do abhorrent things,
not a one of them acting beneficially.

We were warned about the dangers that the malevolently immoral pose in Psalm 1. While the Psalmist's enemies went unnamed in Psalms 3-7, we understand them to be malevolently immoral. From these five Psalms, we learn much about the character of the malevolently immoral. The malevolently immoral were further characterized in Psalm 9/10 (remember this was once a single psalm). They continued to be a named threat in Psalm 11-12, where additional characterization was provided. Though they were not mentioned in Psalm 13, it is not unreasonable to assume that they are present there as well.

As we indicated in our introductory meditation to this psalm, we equate the “antisocial” of this first verse with the “malevolently immoral” so prominent in the previous psalms. In meditation 6 on Psalm 1, we provided reasons for translating the Hebrew word, *rāšā'*, as “malevolently immoral.” As we translate Psalm 1.¹, the warning about the malevolently immoral is followed two lines later with a warning about the “antisocial.”

“How truly fulfilled is one who
does not walk by the direction of the malevolently immoral,
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!”

The “malevolently immoral,” “wrongdoers,” and “antisocial” of Psalm 1 should not be thought of as different classes. Rather, each characterization represents but one of many aspects of the same class of individuals.

Now, to be clear, the two Hebrew words that we translation as “antisocial” are not the same, being *lyš* in 1.¹ and *nbl* in 14.¹. We should take a moment to examine these two Hebrew words.

In Psalm 1.¹, the KJV translated, *lyš*, as “scornful.” This translation might have worked in the 17th century, but because of our common usage of this word today, it will not do. We think of scorn, first, in terms of derogatory speech, most often directed at another individual. We sometimes extend it to derogatory action or behavior, aim at both individuals and things, such as ideas, institutions, etc.

We can say with a great deal of confidence that the Hebrew word takes in more than speech. Its focus is, in fact, entirely on action and behavior, particularly action and behavior that negatively impact others' lives and harm society. We get a sense of this when we consider the LXX translation of *lyš*. While Hebrew *lyš* is translated with different Greek words, none denote “any kind of speaking, but refers mostly to some negative attitude or conduct...”¹ Furthermore, in Psalm 1.¹, the LXX translates *lyš* with *loimós*, “plague,” “pestilence,” “public menace,” “an individual dangerous to others.”

In the end, the word seems to contain within it a general cynicism (in the modern sense); a kind of nihilism that is not only aimed at individuals, but more broadly at societal values and norms that hold

¹ See, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. VII, p. x.

society together. Individuals who come under the spell of this word have contempt for societal norms and act in ways that undermine those norms and thus harm individuals and society. Hence our “contemptuously antisocial,” which brings together: 1) contempt for what is good and healthy; and 2) the idea of societal harm, danger, plague, and sickness.

Frankly, we were tempted to translate *lyš* as “sociopath.” But we tend to think of sociopathy in only clinical terms. Sociopathy, however, exists along a spectrum. A sociopath is, among other things, one who is contemptuous of societal norms and who thinks and acts in ways, big or small, contrary to the welfare of other individuals and society at large. There is an abundance of sociopathy evident in our society today that is “undiagnosed.” Or so it seems to me. Still, “contemptuously antisocial” seems less loaded and controversial than “sociopath.”

As for *nbl*, present in 14.¹, the traditional translation, “fool,” will not do any better than “scornful” does for *lyš*. In common usage, we think of the ‘fool,’ as one who is mentally or intellectually deficient in some way. When we use it derisively, we often mean that someone is “stupid.” More carefully, we might consider the fool as someone who has poor judgment, whatever their intellectual capabilities.

Against this understanding, *nāḅal* “and its cognates in the OT refer to one who acts foolishly in a moral or religious sense, breaking social orders or behaving treacherously towards God.”² Jeremiah’s use of the word is instructive. He identifies those who “getteth riches, and not by right” as a *nāḅal*.³ It should be obvious that those who “getteth riches” are rarely intellectually deficient. In fact, they are often quite ingenious, even if their ingenuity is of dubious character. In this example, the criticism of the *nāḅal* revolves around their wrong and harmful conduct as they ignore laws and mores associated with business practices.

Then too, we think of the very successful and wealthy man, Nabal, who defied societal norms and acted so callously and ungratefully toward David.⁴ He too was *nbl*. What Jeremiah’s businessmen and Nabal have in common is a questionable individualism such that that they feel no obligation to anyone but themselves and will not be bound by societal norms. It is this flouting of obligation to others and of societal norms that makes one a *nbl*. Again, “antisocial,” even “sociopath,” seem justified translations of this word. Further, “antisocial” seems a justified translation for both Hebrew, *lyš* and *nbl*.

So, what does this opening verse to Psalm 14 teach us about the antisocial/ malevolently immoral and how does it relate to and enhance what we have learned about them in Psalms 3-13?

First, by naming them, “antisocial,” the Psalmist reminds us that their private/individual character has direct impact on the individuals who surround them and the society of which they are part. With our modern, western-style individualism, we often think of immorality principally as a private intrinsic matter—a personal and individual choice to flaunt societal, and even worse, divine norms. In such a view, whether one is moral or immoral is often thought to be, first and foremost, a matter of individual intrinsic character. If and when we think of one’s morality in terms of one’s eternal state—whether one goes to heaven or hell; or which degree of glory one inhabits—we again tend to think of it in terms of whether the individual is intrinsically good or bad.

But it is possible that such tendencies reveal our modern individualistic worldview—a world view that is relatively speaking quite recent—and miss the insights of the ancient writer. The ancient world thought less in terms of individualism and more in terms of societal status and responsibility. The concern over whether an individual was good or bad, moral or immoral, had less to do with their intrinsic character and

² New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, Vol. x, p.x.

³ See Jeremiah 17.¹¹

⁴ See 1 Samuel 25

more to do with the impact, good or bad, that they had on those around them and on society at large. So too, with God. If the antisocial/ malevolently immoral is kept from entering heaven, it is less about punishment of the immoral for their intrinsic flaws and more about the protection of the moral society. It is less because of an intrinsic badness and more because the influence of the malevolently immoral/ antisocial would pervert and pollute the eternal society just as they do our earthly societies. With them present, it would not be long before heaven became hell.

Psalm 14 begins with a complaint about antisocial individuals that plague the Psalmist's society. This complaint will lead to some characterization of the antisocial. That characterization is not unlike that of the malevolently immoral so pervasive in the previous psalms. We take the Psalmist's antisocial to be the same as his malevolently immoral. The two were associated at the very beginning of the Book of Psalms in Psalm 1.¹ There, we were warned to avoid and reject their ideas and values. We were warned to avoid association with them. We were warned about engaging in their despicable, antisocial behavior. This is all as good advice today as it was then.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 16, 2024)

meditation 3— psalm 14.¹

the psalmist's assessment of the state of affairs

¹The antisocial tells himself,
“’ēlohîm is not present.”
They pervert. They do abhorrent things,
not a one of them acting beneficially.

In our first two meditations on this psalm, we have asserted that this Psalm's “antisocial” is to be associated with the “malevolently immoral,” both of which Psalm 1.¹ introduced together in parallel. The malevolently immoral were characterized in Psalm 10 about as well as anywhere. We have also asserted that the enemies found in Psalms 3-7 and 9-13 are of the very same malevolently immoral and antisocial character. This first verse of Psalm 14 provides us with further reason to associate the malevolently immoral with the antisocial.

“The antisocial tells himself,
“’ēlohîm is not present.””

The traditional and literal reading, “There is no God,” might be thought of as a statement of real, principled atheism. This, it seems to me, is unlikely. It is difficult to imagine ancient individuals living in a thoroughly sacred society denying the existence of God. However, it is easy to imagine a substantive or functional atheism in which God is ignored and/or denied a role in the individual life or in the functioning of society. We take it to be this type of functional atheism of which the Psalmist accuses the “antisocial.” There are many aspects to this type of functional atheism. But, before considering them, we should point out that the Psalmist has previously ascribed nearly identical sentiments to the malevolently immoral.

“They say to themselves, ‘God pays no attention.
He’s absent. He sees nothing, ever.’”¹

This, the malevolently immoral assert as they attack, abuse, and oppress the innocent, vulnerable, and downtrodden. Then again,

“The malevolently immoral, consistent with their stubborn arrogance, are unreflective.
’ēlohîm is not considered in any of their plans.”²

This they do as they abuse the disadvantaged in order to fulfill their own insatiable lusts. In this same Psalm, the Psalmist expresses concern that should God not come to the aid of the downtrodden when the malevolently immoral oppress them, then the functional atheism of the malevolently immoral will be justified and strengthened.

“Do not abandon the downtrodden,
on which basis the malevolently immoral could hold ’ēlohîm in contempt,
saying to themselves, ‘God doesn’t care.’”³

¹ Psalm 10.¹¹

² Psalm 10.⁴

³ Psalm 10.¹²⁻¹³

Each of these passages can be seen as assertions of functional atheism. It asserts that God and the principles by which He lives is not active or applicable in the mundane affairs of humankind. As Psalm 10 makes clear, the malevolently immoral and antisocial are particularly anxious to remove God from the socio-economic and socio-ethical stage. God's alleged absence from this stage allows the malevolently immoral and antisocial to act with impunity against the interests of others while, at the same time, resisting all attempts to hold them responsibility and accountability for their actions and the suffering their actions cause others.

The malevolently immoral, consistent with their stubborn arrogance, are unreflective.

'ēlōhîm is not considered in any of their plans.

They twist 'ēlōhîm's principles.

'ēlōhîm's elevated judgement opposes them.

Anything that would restraint them they blow off.

They say to themselves, "I cannot be toppled."⁴

We may read something like this and consider the malevolently immoral as simply arrogant. But such statements also reflect rejection of the very notion that they can or should be held accountable for their harmful deeds and represent functional atheism at work.

After identifying the functional atheism of the antisocial, the Psalmist identifies the antisocial/malevolently immoral as perverts. But they are more than perverts themselves. More specifically, they pervert everything around them. They pervert everyone around them. They pervert the society to which they belong and that tolerates their behavior. They create a perverted society.

All of this is the Psalmist's estimation of the antisocial/ malevolently immoral and of the general character of his own society. He concludes his estimation with this assessment, which we will explore further in the next meditation.

"Not a one of them acting beneficially.."

As if to confirm and punctuate this finally assessment, God, Himself, will repeat it and apply it to the whole world!

"YHWH looked down from the heavens upon humankind
to determine, if there were any possessing knowledge;
any consulting 'ēlōhîm.

The whole lot of them had rebelled;

as one, they had become morally tainted,

not a one of them acting beneficially.

None! Not even one!"⁵

As God affirms, the Psalmist's estimation of his own society is all too universal. We must observe, here, that present American capitalism is a perfect example of this type of functional atheism, with its proponents being malevolently immoral and antisocial. God is nowhere to be found when it comes to discussions, decisions, or policies of modern business, capital, or the near godlike "economy"—unless, of course, it is the unholy rolling prosperity gospellers spouting off their false claims that god brings wealth to his favorites. There is, it seems, plenty of room for God in the bedroom. He is, we are told, enormously

⁴ Psalm 10.⁴⁻⁶

⁵ Psalm 14.²⁻³

interested and engaged in matters having to do with sex and gender and pregnancy and birth. Hell, he's even interested in guns! But god forbid that he should be introduced into the marketplace.

Such functional atheism leads to all sorts of abhorrent, perverted, and cruel behavior, both individual and societal. People, souls, children of God get bitten off, chewed up, and spit out. God help us all as we live amidst such perversion!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 24, 2024)

meditation 4— psalm 14.¹

the psalmist's assessment of the state of affairs

¹The antisocial tells himself,
“‘ēlohîm is not present.”
They pervert. They do abhorrent things,
not a one of them acting beneficially.

The Psalmist describes the “antisocial,” whom we associate with the malevolently immoral, as functional atheists. Whether we think of them as denying God's very existence or not, they deny God a place in human affairs, especially in the realm of ethics and mores. This allows them to do all manner of cruel and abhorrent things without accepting responsibility or being accountable. Their attitudes and behaviors spread like cancer. Just as they pervert the individual in Psalm 1.¹, here they pervert society at large.

The Psalmist concludes this section with his uncompromising assessment that “they do nothing beneficial.” My translations deviates from the traditional translation, “there is none that doeth good.” Most translations are a variation on this. One must ask, though, what does doing good mean?

One way to read this is that the antisocial do not act appropriately, correctly, rightly. It is clearly true that they do not. Hebrew *tôb*, “good,” is sufficiently broad in meaning as to allow us to understand it here in terms of the intrinsic character of the antisocial.

At the same time, as we have pointed out on many occasions, the ancient world's focus on the individual was much less pronounced than it is today with our high, sometimes gross individualism. In the ancient world, an individual's “goodness” was assessed much more in terms of their impact upon other individuals, groups, and society. One's “goodness” was measured not only by one's own intrinsic character and private actions but upon the extrinsic effect one's actions and character had others and on society as a whole.

We understand doing “good” in the extrinsic sense. Doing good is about doing what benefits others and society. Jesus evinces a strong focus on extrinsic character and benefit.

“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”¹

One can't really tell whether a tree is good or bad by looking at it. Examining its insides. One must wait for it to bear fruit. A good tree puts something tasty and nutritious and beneficial out into the world. The bad tree produces no tasty, nutritious, or beneficial fruit.

I have told the story of my own gardening experience before, but it is appropriate here. One year our young family planted several tomato plants. We fertilized and watered them religiously. The plants grew lush and green. They were humongous. Seeing them, all our neighbors commented on how impressive they were, and what great gardeners we were. There was just one problem. In the end, they produced no tomatoes!

¹ Matthew 7.¹⁷⁻²⁰

We didn't plant tomato plants for their esthetics, we planted them for their fruit. No matter how they looked, our tomato plants were bad, evil. They existed for one reason and one reason only: to benefit our family with their fruit. They failed, and by failing were not "good." Indeed, we had failed as gardeners. Though we appeared to do what was necessary and "right," we produced nothing. If anyone had been depending upon us for sustenance, they would have died. It doesn't get much more "not good" than that.

Jesus suggested that his disciples are judged in the same way, not so much on what they do but the impact they have, or the fruit they produce. Elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned,

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."²

We are not simply called to develop intrinsic qualities. We are called to have an extrinsic impact upon the world. We will be judged on that impact. In a similar vein, Jesus taught,

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."³

Our intrinsic "goodness" is not a badge of honor we wear proudly before God. It is an extrinsic light intended to lighten the world, bring others to Him, and reveal the greatness of God and His life-affirming counsel and direction.

The "antisocial" who dominated the Psalmist's society were functional atheists. They paid no attention to God in everyday mundane activities and lives. They refused to be held accountable for their conduct, which was abhorrent and cruel. They perverted the society in which they lived. It is clearly true that they behaved badly, were intrinsically bad, not good. But their lack of goodness went far, far beyond the intrinsic. "They do nothing beneficial." "They never act benevolently." "They do nothing kind." The antisocial have no positive impact on society. This is consistent with the previous line's assertion that they pervert everything and everyone around them. And it is this lack of positive, beneficial impact upon society that most clearly marks them as "antisocial" and "malevolently immoral."

The Book of Acts tells the story of Peter's miraculous call to preach to gentiles in the person of Cornelius. Peter traveled to Caesarea, and, finding a large gathering preached the gospel to all present. He summarized Jesus and the good news he brought with these words,

"... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

It seems clear that Peter is not here so much lauding Jesus' character, though Jesus' behavior could and can be lauded above all others' character—but, rather, Peter is lauding the benefit that Jesus brought to all. He might have mentioned any number of the many benefits Jesus brought to those who encountered him—the blind saw, the deaf heard, etc.—but he limited himself to Jesus' "healing all that were oppressed of the devil." That's all of us, and encapsulates Jesus mission in our lives as well as any.

Jesus did what was beneficial to others. This captures the essence of the man. We would all do well to

² Matthew 5.¹³

³ Matthew 5.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

step outside our individualistic bubble in which we focus so intently and intensely on our own intrinsic character and look outside ourselves to see what impact we are having on the world around us. Are we a benefit to those immediately around us and to the larger society of which we are a part? Does our light get outside the bubble of our bushel basket? Do we add flavor to other's lives? Or will we be "good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 17, 2024)

meditation 5— psalm 14.²⁻³

Yahweh's assessment of the state of affairs

²YHWH looked down from the heavens upon humankind
to determine, if there were any possessing knowledge;
any consulting 'ēlohîm.
³The whole lot of them had rebelled;
as one, they had become morally tainted,
not a one of them acting beneficially.
None! Not even one!

Psalm 14 began with the Psalmist's stark assessment concerning his own society. He was surrounded by the antisocial, who, driven by their functional atheism, did cruel and abhorrent things to others and served to perverted society. They did nothing to benefit others or society at large. While the Psalmist observations were accurate, they did not go far enough. So, God broadened and expanded the Psalmist's view. This is not the first time we have witnessed such a divinely inspired expansion of the Psalmist's vision.

In Psalms 3-7, the Psalmist was largely engulfed in his own trials and the enemies that were the cause of his trials. Throughout, in varying degrees of confidence, the Psalmist looked to God to deliver him. In Psalm 8, which we have categorized as a kind of apotheosis, the Psalmist's view was expanded. The Psalmist could surely depend upon God. But God is not parochial. He has and does and will rule the world over. He has and does and will act in the lives of all humanity. He is a global God.

“YHWH, Our Lord, how preeminent is your fame the world over!”¹

Then, in Psalm 9-10 (originally a single psalm), God continued to expand the Psalmist's vision. There are people like him—downtrodden, destitute, disadvantaged, oppressed, attacked, vulnerable—all over the world. So too, those who cause them distress and keep them in straights, as the Psalmist's enemies do him, exist the world over. Though no match for God, they are, like Him, a global phenomenon, if you will. These are given the designation, “malevolently immoral,” and are to be associated with the “antisocial” in this, the 14th Psalm. Just as the Psalmist can depend upon God to defend him against his enemies, the globe's downtrodden, destitute, disadvantaged, oppressed, attacked, and vulnerable can depend upon God to defend them against the malevolently immoral and antisocial.

“YHWH is king forever and always,
while nations disappear from existence.
The desires of the downtrodden You do indeed hear, YHWH.
You strengthen their inner resolve.
You lend a listening ear.
In Your defending orphan and oppressed
never again will a mere mortal earthling seem intimidating”²

So, in what way does God expand the Psalmist's view in this 14th Psalm? God informs the Psalmist that

¹ Psalm 8.^{1,9}

² Psalm 10.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

having surveyed the entire world,
to determine, if there were any possessing knowledge;
any consulting 'ēlohîm,

God found that

“The whole lot of them had rebelled;
as one, they had become morally tainted,
not a one of them acting beneficially.
None! Not even one!”

The perversions that the Psalmist finds in his society are global and universal! This is certainly consistent with God’s observation of humanity found in Genesis 6.

“YHWH saw that humanity’s depravity was great the world over, and that every dispositional calculation formed was only depraved all the time.”³

“Human beings,” the Psalmist’s declares elsewhere, “are simply worthless;

humankind completely untrustworthy.
On a weight scale, they are, combined, less than air.”⁴

Centuries later, the Apostle Paul used the Psalmist’s assessment of his own society and God’s assessment of human society throughout time and space⁵ as a linchpin for his argument that “both Jews and Gentiles... are all under sin,” and that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”⁶ Thus, “every mouth [is] stopped, and all the world [is] guilty before God.”⁷

Little wonder, then, that the Psalmist should warn,

“Don’t put trust in even the best of human beings,
for there is no deliverance to be found in them.”⁸

Or that the Book of Mormon should charge that none could “merit anything of himself,”⁹ and so wants us “relying *wholly* upon the merits of him who is mighty to save;”¹⁰ “relying *alone* upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.”¹¹

For some, this is all too negative and pessimistic a view of human beings, individually or in conglomerate. Even if one grants that there is the occasional and rare exception, such as Noah at the time of the flood, the assessments of humanity found above are true enough to serve as a reliable guide to life and one’s trust of others.

³ Genesis 6.⁵, author’s translation

⁴ Psalm 62.⁹, author’s translation

⁵ See Romans 3.¹⁰⁻¹²

⁶ See Romans 3.⁹ and 3.²³.

⁷ See Romans 3.¹⁹

⁸ Psalm 146.³, author’s translation

⁹ See Alma 22.¹⁴

¹⁰ 2 Nephi 31.¹⁹

¹¹ Moroni 6.⁴

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 20, 2024)

meditation 6— psalm 14.⁴⁻⁶

Yahweh's response to the state of affairs

⁴Do they not understand, those who act so cruelly;
those who devour My people as if they ate meat,
refusing to acknowledge YHWH?

⁵Then, they experience great alarm
because YHWH is among the innocent.

⁶You may work to frustrate the hopes of the downtrodden,
but YHWH is their shelter.

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inal plea and assurance

⁷Oh that out of Zion He might grant Yisrā'el deliverance!
In YHWH's restoring His people to better times,
Ya'aqōb will be exuberant;
Yisrā'el will shout for joy.

This Psalm began with the Psalmist's assessment of Israelite society in his day (vs. 1). It was overrun with antisocial individuals who did nothing to benefit society and, in fact, perverted it. We find this antisocial class to be the same as the malevolently immoral about which so much has been said in previous psalms. Though the moral laws that God gave Israel demonstrated His intense interest in human society and its healthy functioning, antisocial individuals who perverted society act from a functional atheism that denied God a place in society and in its functioning. In verses 2-3, God confirmed that not only *Israelite* society, but *all* human society are overrun and perverted by antisocial individuals who operate from a perspective of functional atheism and contribute nothing beneficial to society.

Now, in verses 4-6, the Psalmist comes to understand God's response to the antisocial. God is puzzled and horrified by the antisocial and malevolently immoral, with their functional atheism, and with the abhorrent attitudes and behaviors that it produces. He is puzzled and horrified that they cannot or will not see and acknowledge their behavior for what it is; abhorrently and inhumanly cruel. Indeed, so obviously aberrant is their behavior that it is likened to cannibalism.

“Do they not understand, those who act so cruelly;
those who devour My people as if they ate meat,
refusing to acknowledge YHWH?”¹

Here, we are reminded of Micah's complaint against the elite of Israelite society in his own day.

“Is it not for you to know judgment?
Who hate the good, and love the evil;
who pluck off their skin from off them,
and their flesh from off their bones;
Who also eat the flesh of my people,
flay their skin from off them,

¹ Psalm 14.⁴

break their bones,
and chop them in pieces, as for the pot,
and as flesh within the caldron.”²

Israel’s antisocial and, indeed, all the world’s antisocial, especially those who so often gain power and influence in society not only pervert society. They nourish, enrich, stuff themselves by destroying lives—lives of those whom God calls, “My people.” Here, we should not think of “My people” in terms of Israel, as if some foreign people attacked the nation. Israel is under attack by its own. As God observes, here, in the end, most nations are consumed by their own. Hence, the eating of people as if they were simply fodder for their benefit; the nourishing of self through the suffering and death of another.

Now, while the antisocial find pleasure in all kinds of flesh, they are particularly partial to a certain type. They find the flesh of society’s vulnerable, innocent, disadvantaged, and downtrodden particularly tasty. This is seen in the promise found in verses 5 and 6.

“Then, they [the devouring antisocial] experience great alarm
because YHWH is among the *innocent*.
You may work to frustrate the hopes of the *downtrodden*,
but YHWH is their shelter.”

The antisocial individual’s predilection for the flesh of the vulnerable is in complete harmony with what the Psalmist has already told us about the malevolently immoral.

“In self-importance, the malevolently immoral vigorously pursues the disadvantaged.
The disadvantaged are ensnared by the plans they conceive.
For the malevolently immoral finds fulfillment only in satisfying their own lust,
and laud one accumulating unjust profits—he who shows disdain for YHWH!

They sit in ambush outside villages.
From concealed places they slay the innocent;
their eyes peer out at the vulnerable.
Like a lion, they lie in wait from a concealed place in the brush.
They lie in ambush to seize the downtrodden.
They seize the downtrodden, dragging him into their lair.
They crouch low, hunch down,
and fall upon the bones of the vulnerable.”³

As ubiquitous and dominant as are the antisocial/ malevolently immoral in society, the Psalmist holds on to his hope that God is more dominant in the lives of victims. God, the Psalmist believes, lives among the innocent and gives shelter to the downtrodden. More than this, the Psalmist looks forward to the day when God delivers society from the malice and cruelty of its own antisocial/ malevolently immoral and the perversion they introduce into society. Moreover, the Psalmist looks forward to the day when God restores a society more true to God’s character and the expectations He has of society. Such deliverance and restoration will be a joy impossible to contain.

Ya‘aqōb will be exuberant;

² Micah 3.2-3

³ Psalm 10.2-3, 8-10

Yisrā'el will shout for joy.

The first half of the Psalm leaves a sour taste in our mouth. Things look and feel bleak. The world is awash in the inhumanity of the antisocial. But the Psalmist has to believe, as we who believe in and trust God must, that God is more powerful than the flood of wickedness that threatens to destroy society. Perhaps when we are tempted to become discouraged, we can remember that “the weakness of God is stronger than men.”⁴ Perhaps we can remember that Jesus, whose every prayer is heard, prays for our deliverance and victory over this world.

“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”⁵

It is not enough, though, for us to avoid the universal darkness that shrouds the world. Jesus sends us out as ambassadors of light to warn of society’s perversions and to point the way to a peaceful and enduring society through God’s counsel; to warn of the death of darkness and the life of light.

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”⁶

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 25, 2024)

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1.²⁵

⁵ John 17.¹⁵

⁶ John 17.¹⁸