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# Psalm 1

## meditation 1— Introductory

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Psalms 1 and 2 have long been viewed by many exegetes as intimately connected. It has even been suggested that they were at one time a single psalm. Too much water has passed under the bridge for us to be certain about the second contention, but a close reading today does persuade the careful reader that the two Psalms do, at the very least, play off and complement one another. Many have pointed out that Psalm 2 ends on the same note with which Psalm 1 began: *'ašrê*, which we translated as “truly fulfilled” in Psalm 1 and “enduring” in Psalm 2. Both psalms, then, have an acute interest in establishing of what the truly “happy,” “fulfilled,” “enduring,” and “progressive” life consists.

Psalm 1 teaches that a life of advancement and fulfillment consists of rooting oneself deeply in the guidance and values that God provides in scripture, and in striving to live according to that guidance (1.<sup>2</sup>). At the same time, the life of advancement and fulfillment consists of rejecting the guidance of the malevolently immoral, whose guilty behavior is antithetical to a healthy and enduring society (1.<sup>1</sup>), and in rejecting their often boisterous demands for influence and power in society (1.<sup>5-6</sup>). Through metaphor, it recapitulates the state of those who do and do not follow God’s guidance as found in his word (1.<sup>3-4</sup>).

Psalm 2 speaks to the proliferating and dominating nature of this world’s rebellion against God. Here, the counsel of Psalm 1 has gone unheeded. The rebellious have been given a place in governance, “in a place of decision making.” They have become kings and rulers. And these world leaders are in open rebellion against God and him whom God calls as His servant/ son: Messiah (2.<sup>1-3</sup>). In its original context, this Messiah was Judah’s monarch. For Christianity, Messiah became Jesus of Nazareth—the one who truly took God’s guidance to heart and lived it throughout his too-short life.

As Messiah and those who follow him abide in the word of God, they live a fulfilling and enduring life in which they overcome the destructive influences and power of those who rebel against God (2.<sup>8-9</sup>). Those who rebel against God know no such joy. They are defeated in their rebellion against God and, if they do not repent, find their advancement stymied and their lives cut short (2.<sup>10-12</sup>).

It would be hard to overestimate, then, the importance and pertinence of these two psalms in today’s world. Here, both individuals and nations can find much to guide them in their attitudes and behaviors. The two paths, advancement and endurance, or damnation and annihilation, are clearly set forth. All are free to choose their path, but not the consequences of their choice. Each path contains within its course, its own inevitable destination.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 2— Introductory

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There is extraordinarily wide agreement that the Book of Psalms represents ancient Israel's hymnbook and that many, perhaps most of the psalms were used in Israel's ancient temple—some perhaps written specifically for various temple uses and others only adopted second-handedly for use in the temple. Prayers directed to God dominate the Book.

Yet, we note that the very first two Psalms are not prayers. As mentioned in the previous meditation, many think of these first two Psalms almost as one and feel that they represent an appropriate introduction to the Book of Psalms as a whole. If we think of these two psalms as introductory, then we are not surprised that they do not adopt the form of prayer. Have a look at any modern hymnal, often called "Prayer Book," and one will find an introduction that does not take the form of prayer but serves as introduction to the hymns/ prayers found in the collection.

Still, if these two psalms can be thought of as introductory, they still strike me as having an odd starting point. What do I find odd? Let me explain.

A religious book of hymns and prayers, it seems, has God as its principal focus. I am struck, then, by the fact that in Psalm 1 God is not mentioned first. He is not found in the first verse. We meet Him in the second verse, but only obliquely, through the direction He provides in Tôrâ. O.K. maybe I am making a mountain out of a mole hill.

Still.

After this rather oblique mention of God in verse 2, He gets no more press until the final verse, where we learn that He is a sustaining influence in the lives of those who strive to do right as He identifies "right" in Tôrâ.

Still.

If we slide right on into Psalm 2, we are made to wait until verse four before anything of consequence is said about God directly. Yes, we are informed that God has those who oppose Him, but that hardly constitutes a saying about God Himself. With verse four and then to the end of the Psalm, God finally is a or the prime actor.

Maybe such observations are meaningless.

And yet.

I can't help myself. I can't help but note that those who are "malevolently immoral," those who are "wrongdoers," those who are "contemptuously antisocial" get first billing in Psalm 1, being mentioned before God. These individuals stand in opposition to God and offer life directions that oppose His Tôrâ teachings. Then again, I can't help noticing that the Psalm concludes with the "malevolently immoral" and the ruin they bring to themselves by their life choices.

Maybe it's nothing.

Or, maybe it's something.

When we slide on over to Psalm 2, we are greeted, again, by national leaders who oppose God. God's

opposers get top billing here, just as they did in Psalm 1, being mentioned before God.

And it makes me wonder. Is there a message in this strange and unexpected pattern?

Maybe.

I remember how many years ago I was startled by Genesis' introductory story about mortal human beings. Genesis introduced us to the post-garden-of-Eden version of humanity with a murder. A murder, of all things! Why start the story of humankind on earth with a violent story of homicide, fratricide, even? Did it mean something, this way of introducing humankind? Was it trying to tell us something? Something about ourselves?

After many years of studying and examining not only this introduction of post-garden humans but the structure of Genesis as a whole, I concluded that there was genius to Genesis' mad introduction of humankind. The introduction's message is repeated over and over again in the course of Genesis' fifty chapters. The writers and editors of Genesis concluded pretty quickly that human beings are a violent breed of creature. Violence and violent killing is in their DNA. It is as good a summary of human disposition and character as any. And, indeed, it didn't take God long to figure it out either. "The earth," He lamented, "is filled with violence through them."<sup>1</sup> Speaking to Enoch, God lamented further,

"And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood."<sup>2</sup>

But, back to Psalms. What, if anything, am I supposed to make of the fact that in both introductory Psalms, Psalms 1 and 2, those who oppose God—the malevolently immoral, wrongdoers, the contemptuously antisocial, and national leaders who dominate human affairs—these all get first and top billing? What am I to think as I proceed to read the remaining 148 Psalms over and over again and find these same individuals and classes everywhere? Over. And. Over. Again.

Well, I don't know about you, but I conclude that I need to be aware that there are many who oppose God. They are dominant. Yes, God will, eventually, have the upper hand on them. This hope keeps me from falling into the abyss. But in the meantime, the many who oppose God are going to pollute the planet with their noxious and poisonous brew of violence, hatred, rape, pillage, and violent death. Billions upon billions have and will die a violent death. Billions upon billions have and will violently oppose God and tempt me to do likewise—upon threat of death myself if I remain stubbornly noncompliant to their warped and twisted principles. Billions of billions have and will be cowed into complicit silence or outright collaboration.

Yes, the Psalmists seem to say to me, "It's a mad, mad world you live in."

"...The heart of the sons of men  
is full of evil,  
and madness is in their heart  
while they live..."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Moses 7.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes. 9.<sup>3</sup>

“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord...”<sup>4</sup>

But God be praised. For “by thy word is thy servant warned.”<sup>5</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 27.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 19.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,

does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!

<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

The Book of Psalms begins with a macarism, or statement of happiness, fulfillment, and advancement. The statement begins with a warning about those attitudes, behaviors, and individuals that are to be avoided, as they are detrimental to happiness. Just as in the verse's structure—one progresses from walking to standing (more permanent) to sitting (more permanent still)—these attitudes, behaviors, and individuals have a way of devolving and metastasizing. One begins by only listening and hearing with interest. This degenerates to agreeing, following, and adopting as one's own the immoral values of people of questionably character. This devolves into joining and engaging in full-scale collaboration with characters of immoral values to undermine the welfare of other individuals and society in general. Before one knows what is happening, the transformation is complete so that one becomes, themselves, malevolently immoral, guilty of wrongdoing, and contemptuously antisocial. This is the path of unhappiness.

Opposed to this is the way of happiness. This way rejects the ways of the malevolently immoral, the wrongdoer, and the contemptuously antisocial, and centers its attention and interest on God and the wise direction He provides. This direction cannot be understood, appreciated, and internalized through casual observation. This quest for understanding, appreciation, and internalization requires full-time attention. It must become life's first priority. The barrage of this world's impiety is unrelenting. Our quest to understand and live by God's directions must be equally unrelenting. Only then can we hope to be translated, rescued from the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 4— psalm 1.<sup>1-2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!  
<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

The Book of Psalms begins with a macarism, or statement of happiness, fulfillment, and advancement. Those who wrote and edited the Book of Psalms were not modest in their intentions. They had big hopes for their work. They hoped and intended that it should, could, and would provide clear signs and signals leading to the godly happiness, fulfillment, and advancement of its readers.

The Hebrew word, *'ašrê*, translated here as “fulfilled,” is variously translated, most often as “happy” or “blessed.” I am persuaded by proposals that the Hebrew word likely comes from the root, *'šr*, meaning, “to go straight,” or “to advance.” To be *'ašrê* is to be advancing toward one's intended destination. The happy or blessed or fulfilled individual is the one who is advancing. The advance may be slow and halting. It is certainly flawed and imperfect. But the important thing is to be moving forward. There is joy in progress and advancement: in moving forward, however meager the advancement may be.

If one thinks about it, the English word, “blessed,” implies advancement and progress. We speak, for example, of “giving or receiving a blessing” to one who is sick or in some way debilitated or weakened. What we really seek in such blessings is “improvement” of health and functionality. As another example, we “ask a blessing” upon our food. In this, we ask that our food be somehow impacted so that we are bettered by having partaken of it. And we ask God to “bless” sacramental bread and water so that it become something more than what meets the eye and imbue us with spiritual improvement and capacity beyond our natural abilities.

So, everything points to the idea of Hebrew, *'ašrê*, and English “blessedness” being bound up with advancement, progress, improvement, betterment, etc. The first word of the Book of Psalms informs the reader of the Book's principal aim. The Book of Psalms aims to direct and propel one's forward movement and progress. It is meant to improve and better the lives and character of individuals and the nature and character of societies. The Book is, then, inspired by the same aim as the Being who inspired it: “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”<sup>1</sup>

As one reads the Psalms, one is presented with signs. These signs direct the sojourner forward, advancing them toward their destination: the city of God, where they not only find “his image in [their] countenances,”<sup>2</sup> and where they mingle with others so imaged, but where they see the very face of God and behold “the beauty of the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Moses 1.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Alma 7.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 27.<sup>4</sup>

## meditation 5— psalm 1.<sup>1-2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!  
<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

The Book of Psalms telegraphs its aims by beginning with a macarism, or statement of happiness, fulfillment, and advancement. It aims to provide direction and motivation for moving forward. It aims to aid in the advancement of the individual and society. The final destination is godliness and, indeed, God, Himself.

The poet's choice for his place of departure might seem odd. Rather than signaling what to do, he begins with warning signs about what not to do. There are dangers along the way. There are forces that stand in opposition to God and those who love and seek to follow Him. In order to advance, one must avoid these dangers and resist these forces. One must avoid attitudes, behaviors, and individuals that are detrimental to progress and the happiness that infuses such advancement. There is a course that leads to God. But there are many courses that lead away from him. These courses have their own logic and perverse versions of "progress."

In the structure of the second, third, and fourth lines of the Book's first verse, we are presented with one perverse version of "progress." In these lines, one "progresses" from walking to the less advancing "standing" to the even less advancing "sitting." By the third line, advancement is stalled. But, what, exactly is it that stalled progress?

Our journey along the path begins to stall when we listen with interest to individuals of questionable character, "the malevolently immoral," who are all too happy to walk along with us and provide directions for our journey. Soon enough, we find ourselves on their path.

Our advancement stalls further when we stop walking altogether and stand still with them on the path. We give them a hearing. Begin to agree, follow, and adopt the malevolent and immoral values of people of questionably character who do wrong. Soon their values become our values.

Before we know it, our progress degenerates further as we actually sit down with them. We join them. We engage in full-scale collaboration with individuals, those who are "contemptuously antisocial," whose values undermine not only our journey but the welfare of others and of society as a whole. Before we know it, our transformation is complete. We devolve, metastasize into one who is malevolently immoral, guilty of wrongdoing, and contemptuously antisocial. Our life is one of disruption. We are on the path of unhappiness: our progress and advancement toward God halted.

Before it begins its extensive directions for advancing along the path of happiness, the Book of Psalms warns us about the dangers present along the path that would thwart our advance. It warns us—as it will do many, many times in the course of its 150 Psalms—of those who are "malevolently immoral," "wrongdoers," and "contemptuously antisocial." These individuals and their twisted values are all too real. All too dangerous. And all too damning. And all too common. They thwart advancement and destroy happiness, not only of individuals but of societies.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 6— psalm 1.<sup>1-2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!  
<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

As its first word telegraphs, the Book of Psalms aims to direct the individual and society in their path in and to happiness, fulfillment, and advancement. Before the Book begins to raise its many signs leading the way, the first psalm warns that there will be some who will seek to lead us off the path and stop our advancement. These are the “malevolently immoral,” those who do wrong,” and the “contemptuously antisocial.” We should consider each of these in turn.

God is the principal figure in Psalms. The Book is mostly about Him—what kind of Being He is, and how He impacts our lives. We are the next most important figure in Psalms—who we are, what we are without God, what we can do and be with God in our lives, and how we draw a willing God into our lives? Perhaps the next most important figure in Psalms is the enemy. They appear in about two-thirds of the Psalms. The enemies found in the Psalms go by many names. One of their common names is, “the malevolently immoral.” This is my translation of Hebrew, *rāšā'*.

As this is the first time that we meet this word and the important, if infamous group it represents, we should take a moment to provide reasons for our choice to translate the Hebrew word, *rāšā'*, as “malevolently immoral. A wide variety of translators and translation committees have traditionally and most often translated *rāšā'* as “wicked.” “Ungodly” is a distant second. The word seems to reflect attitudes and behaviors that are wrong and bring a sentence of guilt. Such individuals' attitudes and behaviors are contrary to both divine and societal norms. These attitudes and behaviors are not simply indicative of an intrinsic character flaw in the individuals called *rāšā'*. Just as importantly, such individuals are *rāšā'* because they are hostile to societal norms and mores and flaunt those norms and mores. In addition, they engage in willful and purposeful public attitudes and behaviors that they fully recognize as likely being harmful to others and to society as a whole. Their hostility, then, is not only directed at norms, but other individuals as well. In the end, it is this willingness, eagerness even, to harm others for one's own benefit that is the intrinsic evil that resides within the malevolently immoral.

As we will observe about the word, *hesed*—our, “unwavering devotion”—Hebrew, *rāšā'*, feels too big for a single English word translation. Our “malevolently immoral” attempts to get at this multifaceted word. “Malevolence,” is no accident. It suggests that which is intentional and purposeful. It also reflects a willingness and desire to harm others. “Immoral” gets at the idea of going against norms—divine and societal. All but the antisocial would agree that the “malevolently immoral” are guilty and subject to the threat of sanction.

One might wonder, why not simply “immoral.” Two reasons. First, Hebrew, *rāšā'*, is always intentional and, more importantly, harmful to others. The second reason has to do with my own sense of what “immoral” has come to mean in my LDS culture. Immorality is almost exclusively seen in terms of sexuality. Behavior identified as *rāšā'*, goes well outside of and beyond sex. It includes all types of human interaction, but is especially suited to economic matters and how we treat one another in relation to economic class.

Anyway, the "malevolently immoral" will make many appearances in the Book of Psalms. There may, in fact, be nowhere in scripture where we find better and more detailed descriptions of what it means to be malevolently immoral, wicked, or ungodly. In this first psalm, we learn that the malevolently immoral purposefully live a life contrary to the directions of Tôrâ. This means that they not only live contrary to God's expectations of humanity, but contrary to the very nature of God.

The Book of Psalms will portray and identify the malevolently immoral in a thousand ways. But, as here, that identification is not intended merely to judge or condemn them. Rather, the Psalms identifies them so that we might know how to avoid them, their suggestions, and the sort of life that makes a fulfilled, secure, happy, and advancing life impossible. There is no fulfillment, no security, no happiness, no advancement in the life identified as "malevolently immoral."

It was fashionable for a time to ask, "What would Jesus do?" WWJD. This is the same as, "What would God do," WWGD, because, according to the Gospel witness, Jesus of Nazareth was, first and foremost, sent by God to reveal the true nature of God.

Now, we cannot always think and speak and do as Jesus. We are imperfect. The Psalmists were imperfect, as they so often and boldly confess. But we can STDWJD, "Strive to do what Jesus did." We can announce it as our goal and make it clear that we are working toward accomplishing it more consistently. The "malevolently immoral" are those who do not do what Jesus would do. Worse, they do not *strive* to do what Jesus would do. They very purposefully do those things that Jesus would never do.

For those who do as this first psalm encourages—consult the word of God at all times and in all things—the malevolently immoral are as easy to discern as a murderer standing in a line-up covered in the victim's blood. We can "associate" with the malevolently immoral only enough to invite them to repentance. In word and deed, we can serve as a warning to them. But they are not to be listened to. They are not to be agreed with. They are not to be collaborated with. By such avoidance, we go far toward experiencing true fulfillment, and continuing our advancement toward God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 7— psalm 1.<sup>1-2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!  
<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

Hebrew poetry is best known for its parallel line structure. Sometimes that parallelism is synthetic in which ideas from one line are repeated, or, perhaps more accurately, expanded or amplified in the next. The example I always use is:

1<sup>st</sup> line: "I went to the store."  
2<sup>nd</sup> line: "I went to Costco."

Both say, essentially, the same thing, and yet, not quite the same thing. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> lines of Psalm 1.<sup>1</sup> are synthetically parallel, each relaying a similar idea, yet not quite the same idea. "How truly fulfilled is one who

"does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!"

In our previous meditation, we considered the nature of the "malevolently immoral." They are individuals whose thoughts, words, and deeds are contrary to both divine and societal norms. Their attitudes and behaviors are not only indicative of deep, private character flaws, but of purposeful intent to wrong and harm others and society as a whole. They are distinctly ungodlike.

With the next line's "wrongdoers"—parallel to "malevolently immoral"—the Psalmist offers another way of viewing the malevolently immoral. The malevolently immoral and wrongdoers are not to be thought of as separate entities or classes or people. They are the same. The malevolently immoral is one who does wrong. Malevolent immorality is not simply an existential state. The malevolently immoral put their inner thoughts and desires into action. The word we translate as "wrongdoer" (Hebrew, *ḥaṭṭā*'), deals with concrete and habitual behavior in relation to those with whom we have relationship. It is reflective of disloyalty within and an abuse of those personal relationships. Wrongdoers violate the rights and dignity of others.

The traditional translation of *ḥaṭṭā*' is "sin." I find this translation unsatisfactory. In today's world, we view "sin" in strictly religious terms. We do not use it in relation to what we think of as secular. Yet, Hebrew *ḥaṭṭā*' includes behaviors that we think of as secular today. For example, if a lawmaker is found to be corrupt in some way, or if they help in the passing of hurtful legislation, we do not speak of them as having committed "sin." Yet, such behavior would come under the rubric of *ḥaṭṭā*' in Hebrew.

As you can see, there is a good degree of overlap between "the malevolently immoral" and the "wrongdoer."

For those who do as this first psalm encourages—consult the word of God at all times and in all things—malevolently immoral wrongdoers are as easy to discern as a murderer standing in a line-up covered in

the victim's blood. We can "associate" with malevolently immoral wrongdoers only so far as inviting them to repentance. In word and deed, we can serve as a warning to them. But their counsel is not to be listened to or agreed with. Their behavior is not to be imitated. They are not to be collaborated with. By such avoidance, we experience true fulfillment, and continue our advancement toward God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!  
<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

This fourth line of Psalm 1 is in synthetic parallelism with the two previous lines. It warns us against collaboration with the “contemptuously antisocial.” It does more than suggest a relationship between the “malevolently immoral” and “wrongdoers” of the previous two lines. It expands on the very nature of the class of people called “malevolently immoral” and “wrongdoers.” For a number of reasons, we find the traditional translation of Hebrew, *lys*, as “scornful” wanting, at least here. It seems that the Septuagint translators might agree with me as they translate Hebrew, *lys*, with *loimós*, “plague,” “pestilence,” “an individual dangerous to others.”

When we think of scorn, often think only in terms of the attitude and speech of the offending individual. They are in their personal feelings and attitudes contemptuous of people, things, institutions, norms, etc. They make this contempt known in word and action. They actively belittle the people, things, institutions, and norms around them. But the contemptuously antisocial are more than simply personally contemptuous and belittling. As the Septuagint captures with its translation, their attitudes and conduct are positively dangerous to society. They are like a societal plague. They are a sickness in society that is contagious. Their disregard and contempt for people, norms, and institutions cause actual harm to a healthy, functioning, and enduring society.

We might have translated simply, “contemptuous.” We almost did. It might be safer, less controversial, and more “orthodox” than our “contemptuously antisocial.” But “contemptuous” does not bring together all the elements that seem present in *lys*. We were also tempted by “cynics” and “sociopaths.” But, for various reasons we decided against them. Yet, as used today, both contain within them ideas found in Hebrew *lys*: 1) contempt for and mockery of all that is good and healthy; 2) the flaunting of norms; and 3) the idea of societal harm, danger, plague, and sickness.

“Contemptuously antisocial” attitudes and behaviors exists along a spectrum. When we so translation, we are referring to those who think and act in ways, big or small, that are contrary to the welfare of other individuals and the stability of the larger society. There is an abundance of undiagnosed “sociopathy” evident in our society today. Or so it seems to me. It seems to be spreading. It is found from the pool halls to the halls of government. It is a pestilence that is unraveling our society and nation.

The Psalmists write with purpose. They wish to guide their readers in the way of happiness, fulfillment, and advancement. They know that in order to experience true fulfillment and advancement in life, we must reject the direction of malevolently immoral. We must not enter into agreement with wrongdoers. And we must never, ever collaborate with those whose attitudes and actions are, like a plague, detrimental and destructive to the welfare of other individuals and even of entire societies. To walk the path from listening to, to agreeing with, to participating in the life and lifestyle of the malevolently immoral leads, as the final words of this psalm warn, to ruin, for the individual so involved and, ultimately, the society in which they live.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

<sup>1</sup>How truly fulfilled is one who  
does not walk as directed by the malevolently immoral,  
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,  
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!  
<sup>2</sup>Rather, their preference is for YHWH's Tôrâ,  
and they consult his Tôrâ at all times (author's translation).

In his desire to lead the reader to a life of fulfillment and advancement, the Psalmist began with a warning. The world is full of those whose direction leads away from the fulfilled life. There are those whose values one must not accept as their own. There are those with whom collaboration leads to personal and societal ruin. These are the malevolently immoral, wrongdoers, and the contemptuously antisocial.

Into this world of danger—a “lone and dreary world,” according to the LDS temple, and a “dark and dreary waste,” according to the sojourner, Lehi<sup>1</sup>—God, in his mercy, has sent a ray of light to provide travelers with direction and guidance toward a fulfilling and progressive life. But this guidance is not forced upon travelers. They may, if they choose, be guided by the opposing proposals and values of the malevolently immoral. To be guided by God's direction is a conscious choice that demonstrates the traveler's true priorities.

The direction God provides cannot be understood, appreciated, and internalized through casual observation. This quest for understanding, appreciation, and internalization requires concentrated and full-time attention. It must become life's first priority. The barrage of this world's dark depravity is unrelenting. Our quest to understand and live by God's directions must be equally unrelenting. Only then can we find enduring fulfillment and advancement.

For the Psalmist, God's guidance is found in *Tôrâ* which is, first and foremost, the Pentateuch. In its expanded meaning it is the entire Hebrew Bible, including, of course, the Book of Psalms that begins with this admonition. For the Christian, God's guidance is found most easily in the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments combined. For the LDS, God's guidance is found most easily in the four standard works—Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Personal revelation, more difficult to obtain and more susceptible to personal whim, can also serve as guidance in life.

Beyond all of this, really, is Jesus. He is the clearest of God's words.<sup>2</sup> His life represents the best articulated and illustrated divine guidance that God could and can provide humankind. Jesus himself reminds us, “I am the way, the truth, and the life...”<sup>3</sup> If we would live the happy, fulfilled, and progressive life, we must make a point of carefully examining his life as it is recorded in the New Testament Gospels and then seeking to imitate the life that we find there. The importance, then, of the New Testament Gospels in our search for a fulfilled and progressive life can hardly be overstated.

God's word is more than crucial if we would be happy and fulfilled and progressive in our lives. It is absolutely mandatory. The degree to which we find happiness and fulfillment and advancement in life will depend upon the diligence and faithful expectations with which we consult the word of God and the

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Nephi 8.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> see John 1.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John 14.<sup>6</sup>

degree to which we strive to follow the guidance that God so mercifully provides in it. As we strive to live this life, we can do no better than study and imitate the life of God's very own Son, indeed, of God, Himself.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 10— psalm 1.<sup>3-4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>They are like a tree  
that is planted near multiple water sources—  
a tree that produces its fruit at the proper time  
and whose leaves never wither.  
So, they are fruitful in all that they do.

<sup>4</sup>The malevolently immoral are not so,  
but are like chaff that is blown away in the wind (author's translation).

The Psalmist has already described the sort of individual who can be described as happy, fulfilled, and progressive. They are those who take Yahweh's instructions about what constitutes a fulfilling life as a guide, and live consistent with those principles. They do this in defiance of the direction that this world relentlessly peddles; direction that is malevolent, immoral, wrong, contemptuous, and antisocial; direction that is destructive to a healthy and enduring individual existence, and destructive to a healthy and enduring society.

In hopes of deepening the understanding and impact of his own counsel, the Psalmist leaves the real world behind and enters a world of metaphor. He invites us to consider a tree with an unending supply of water. Those who prioritize learning and living God's teachings are like that tree which is in possession of water sources that never fail. Principles found in God's teachings cover every contingency. Those who give heed to them endure and pass every test of character. As much as acquiring nourishment from God's word, those who prioritize God's word become a source of nourishment to others.

On the other hand, the malevolently immoral—those who ignore and reject God's life-giving teachings for the pestilential teachings of this world—having never grown to anything more or better than a few blades of grass, dry up, shrivel, and, finally, are sent driven by the wind into the air where they disperse into nothingness. Theirs is a pathetic life, not only devoid of happiness or security, but unable to offer happiness or security to anyone else either.

Thankfully, we are free to choose. And we are free to choose because into the desert of this world's false ideals and instructions, God has sent his word, living water in the desolate wilderness, a shaft of light into the darkness. With his beginning to the Book of Psalms, we can see, anew, how vital God's word is to our existence and happiness. We see, anew, our clear priority: inquire of, learn, and apply God's living water to our otherwise parched lives.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 11— psalm 1.<sup>3-4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> They are like a tree  
that is planted near multiple water sources—  
a tree that produces its fruit at the proper time  
and whose leaves never wither.  
So, they are fruitful in all that they do.

<sup>4</sup> The malevolently immoral are not so,  
but are like chaff that is blown away in the wind (author's translation).

“A picture,” they say, “is worth a thousand words.” So, the Psalmist resorts to a picture: a metaphor to represent the individual who rejects *the world's* value system, carefully examines *God's* value system, and diligently strives to follow the directions that God has provided in scripture.

It is almost too trifling to remind the reader that plants, trees need water: that without it they wither and die. But perhaps it is not too trifling to remind the reader that in the land in which the Psalmist lived and wrote, water rarely came from the sky—certainly not enough to keep a tree alive. Even in Israel today, wherever one sees a tree, there is some source of ground water—a spring, a creek, a river, etc. Where such sources of water are absent, so are trees.

Those who choose to explore and attempt to live by the word of God are like trees with a dependable water source. Actually, no, they are like trees with abundant and multiple water sources. This is an incredible testimony of scripture. Scripture never runs dry and never quits giving. Truth and encouragement and power flow endlessly. Though Isaiah's metaphor is slightly different, his testimony of scripture is the same.

“For as the rain cometh down,  
and the snow from heaven,  
and returneth not thither,  
but watereth the earth,  
and maketh it bring forth and bud,  
that it may give seed to the sower,  
and bread to the eater:  
So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:  
it shall not return unto me void,  
but it shall accomplish that which I please,  
and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”<sup>1</sup>

It is simply impossible to exaggerate the divine grace that is manifest in God's gift of scripture, and the ennobling direction and guidance He provides in it.

Even so, come Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 9, 2024)

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 55.<sup>10-11</sup>

## meditation 12— psalm 1.<sup>3-4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> They are like a tree  
that is planted near multiple water sources—  
a tree that produces its fruit at the proper time  
and whose leaves never wither.  
So, they are fruitful in all that they do.

<sup>4</sup> The malevolently immoral are not so,  
but are like chaff that is blown away in the wind (author's translation).

Just as trees with dependable and redundant water sources luxuriate and bear fruit, so too the individual who consults and applies the word of God finds fulfillment and advancement. They are fruitful. Now, when we think of spiritual fulfillment, advancement, and fruitfulness, we often think of our own works and the benefits that accrue to ourselves because of them. But, we would have the reader consider the tree.

While the fruit of a tree does make possible the multiplication of fruit trees, the tree that bears fruit does not, in fact, accrue any of its God-given benefits to itself. It does not enjoy the sight of the fruit, does not partake of the fruit's sweetness, and does not obtain any nourishment from its own fruit. The tree was not made to benefit itself, but others. It was God who so ordained it.

“<sup>3</sup>”<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>lōhīm also said, ‘I give to you all grains that are on the earth as well as all seed bearing fruits of fruit trees. This will be your food.’<sup>1</sup>

This was the “blessing” that God bestowed upon the tree: to provide for others. In like manner, in giving us the nourishment of His word, God did not intend for us to become fruitful for our own benefit. God seems to make this clear when he called Abraham as his servant. God would turn Abraham into “a great nation.” He would “make [his] name great.” Abraham would find a blessing in this, or, rather, he would “be a blessing.” Indeed, his blessedness was to be found in the fact that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”<sup>2</sup>

This attitude toward “blessedness” and “fruitfulness” is consistent with the very nature and character of God Himself. His work, as we all know, is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”<sup>3</sup> It is also his “glory.” We should probably understand that His labors in advancing others is both what brings Him joy—that in which He glories—and is what glorifies and advances Him and allows all creation to see and know His gloriousness. His glory is bound up with the glory of others.

Jesus, being “the express image” of his Father,<sup>4</sup> thought and acted just like Him. As we have often observed, it is unthinkable that as Jesus suffered the final ordeals of his mortal life, he thought anything like, “Wow, this is really going to earn me some major rewards.” Rather, he considered how what he was doing would “be a blessing” to others.

To think and act and labor for the advancement of others, to be nourishing to others, is the nature of God. It is the nature of godliness. It is what it means to be “godly.” To think and act and labor for one's

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1.<sup>29</sup>; author's translation

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 12.<sup>2-3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Moses 1.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew 1.<sup>1</sup>

personal advancement is to be “ungodly.” To become “fruitful” so as to be nourishing to others is the sort of fruitfulness that is to move us and after which we are to seek.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 13— psalm 1.<sup>3-4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>They are like a tree  
that is planted near multiple water sources—  
a tree that produces its fruit at the proper time  
and whose leaves never wither.  
So, they are fruitful in all that they do.

<sup>4</sup>The malevolently immoral are not so,  
but are like chaff that is blown away in the wind (author's translation).

Psalm 1 is one of great contrasts. We are warned against being guided by and acting upon the guidance of individuals and groups of questionable character—guidance that endangers the health and very existence of society. In contrast, we are invited to be guided by and to act upon the guidance that God offers in scripture—guidance that aids in the continuance and progress of individuals and societies.

By way of metaphor, we were invited to consider a fruitful tree with multiple water sources as a representation of those who accept the invitation to consider and act upon God's wise guidance as found in scripture. In today's reading, by contrast, we are invited to consider the husk of wheat as a representation of the malevolently immoral and, in association with them, their guidance and all those who follow their guidance.

We are all familiar with the scenario. It is wheat harvest. The harvested wheat is gathered and then tossed into the air. The light and useless husks, being of no economic interest and bereft of nutritional value, are picked up by the wind and carried off and away from the heavier wheat grain which falls to the ground for collection.

The malevolently immoral, their guidance, and their values, like husks, are of no use or benefit to anyone. Anyone who attempts to live on their fare will die of malnutrition. So, those who seek fulfillment and advancement know to toss them, their direction, and their values aside. By tossing aside the worthless and the deadly, and by accepting the life-giving nourishment of God's word, the godly become fruitful and beneficial in directing a world that that has grown accustomed to empty and even deadly calories away from those worthless calories and toward the nourishing and nurturing word of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 14— psalm 1.<sup>5-6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Therefore, the malevolently immoral should not participate in a place of decision making, or wrongdoers have place in a just assembly.

<sup>6</sup>For, YHWH sustains the actions of those who do right, but the actions of the malevolently immoral bring ruin (author’s translation).

“Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment...”

That’s the King James translation of verse five’s first line.

“Judgment.” For many, the King James Version’s “*the* judgment,” conjures up eschatological visions. It conjures up a demanding judge and final judgment in the end times. It conjures up an ordeal that is imposed upon all. It conjures up dire consequences, also imposed. It conjures up all sorts of speculations based upon the minutest information. But, to my mind, it is uncertain that the Psalmist had a final judgement in mind when he penned the word, *mišpāt* that the King James translators then rendered “judgment,” which was then highjacked for almost exclusively eschatological purposes.

Obviously, my translation understands *mišpāt* differently. At its most basic level this Hebrew root has to do with governing—both human and divine. Today we think of “judges,” “judgement,” and “judging” in strictly a forensic sense. Such English words belong almost exclusively to courtrooms and trials. Israel’s ancient judges (*šōpet*, which comes from the same root as our *mišpāt*) however, clearly did more than preside in legal settings. They led armies in battle. They made economic and legislative decisions within the tribal structure of early Israel. We should, then, think of Hebrew *šāpat* in terms of governance. The noun, *mišpāt*, with its prefixed ma- can refer to the location or setting in which governance takes place.

From its very first word, *’ašrê*, this psalm claims to know and willingly presents the way to happiness and a fulfilling life. It presents this way in two parts. In verse 1 it warns of that which is to be avoided, and in verse 2 it invites into that which is to be embraced. According to verse 1, to achieve a life of fulfillment and advancement we must avoid the directions and values presented by the malevolently immoral who are known by their own unethical behaviors that corrupt individuals and undermine a healthy and functioning society. According to verse 2, to achieve a life of fulfillment and advancement we must accept, embrace, and act upon the values and directions that come from God through the word He so graciously reveals.

Verses 3 and 4, illustrate and expand upon the fulfilled and unfulfilled life through metaphor. With verses 5 and 6, we leave the world of metaphor behind and return to the malevolently immoral with whom the psalm began. There, we were not to listen to (walk), associate (stand) with, or collaborate (sit) with them. Here, in verse 5, our rejection of the malevolently immoral is expanded.

The malevolently immoral are not to have any influence in decision making bodies—secular or sacred—that establish and maintain societal laws and norms. Their very presence in any such body removes the possibility of that body any longer being considered a “righteous,” or “legitimate/ just” body. The manner of life in which the malevolently immoral engage and the actions they undertake are destructive and lead to ruin—their own and those who come under their influence. Thus, the inclusion of the malevolently immoral in any governing body can only serve to defile that body, bring further harm to individuals, and cause devolution in society at large. Most tragic, their inclusion in governance is destructive to the fulfilling life into which this psalm so earnestly desires to bring its readers.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 15— psalm 1.<sup>5-6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Therefore, the malevolently immoral should not participate in a place of decision making, or wrongdoers have place in a just assembly.

<sup>6</sup>For, YHWH sustains the actions of those who do right, but the actions of the malevolently immoral bring ruin (author's translation).

Psalm 1 offers a clear warning to those who wish to live a fulfilling and progressive life. They must not listen to the suggestions and directions of the malevolently immoral, with their twisted and anti-social attitudes, values, and behaviors. Those who wish to live a fulfilling and progressive life must not adopt the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the malevolently immoral as their own. They must not collaborate with the malevolently immoral.

But the Psalm does not end there. Its warning extends beyond individual and personal relationships. Those who wish to live a fulfilling and progressive life must not do anything that would encourage or permit twisted and malevolently immoral individuals to have part in governing bodies of any sort—governmental, religious, economic, etc. It is one thing to be malevolently immoral and to act in a twisted and anti-social way as individuals. It is a whole other ball game to be placed in a position of influence and governance where one may enact policy and act in such ways as to make immorality and anti-social behavior legal and socially acceptable and prevalent.

Thus, the malevolently immoral are to have no place in bodies that establish and maintain the mores of an organization, institution, group, or nation. If and when they infiltrate such bodies, those bodies cease to be “just” governing bodies. If governing bodies are not cleansed of such anti-social individuals, those bodies and those they were meant to serve have no promise of fulfillment and advancement. Damnation and annihilation are their final ends.

Psalm 1, then, should send a shudder through any believing reader who resides in present day America. It has not been long since the nation's White House was occupied for four years by a man who is a profoundly and demonstratively sociopath. Millions today long for and work toward his return, often adopting criminal and unconstitutional means to reach their ends. Many dozens of seats within the nation's lower house of congress are occupied by likeminded in their malevolent immorality—individuals whose attitudes, values, and activities are profoundly anti-social. The malevolently immoral occupy numerous seats in the upper chamber. Even the judiciary, from top to bottom, has been infiltrated by those of malevolent, immoral, and anti-social attitudes, values, and behavior.

Now, to be clear, we are not talking about individuals who sin and are beset by personal character weakness. All sin. No one is perfect. We must live, and compassionately so, with such human leaders. As we proceed through the Book of Psalms, though, it will become clear that the malevolently immoral of whom the Psalmist speaks are those who do harm to others, especially those vulnerable in any number of ways to them. The malevolently immoral are those who stifle, impede the advancement of the vulnerable, the poor, the powerless, the “righteous.” And, as we have said, when such malevolently immoral individuals are unwisely and wickedly given a seat in governing bodies, it is amen to those bodies and the society that permitted them space to act upon their nefarious values and desires. Yes, America should daily shudder from sea to shining sea.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*

## meditation 16— psalm 1.<sup>5-6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Therefore, the malevolently immoral should not participate in a place of decision making, or wrongdoers have place in a just assembly.

<sup>6</sup>For, YHWH sustains the actions of those who do right, but the actions of the malevolently immoral bring ruin (author's translation).

Psalm 1 began with a warning about following the guidance and the mores and actions of the malevolently immoral, wrongdoers, and the contemptuously antisocial. Following such guidance and living by such mores and actions, and then collaborating with those who hold them leads one to become unprofitable and harmful to society. The Psalm ends on the same note as it began, the note of malevolent immorality. It is God's hope and intention that the norms and actions of the malevolently immoral, if not the individuals themselves, be eliminated from human society.

Perhaps, as most traditional readings understand, it is God, Himself, that brings an apocalyptic end to the malevolently immoral and their perverted values. On the other hand, perhaps God thinks to bring about the end of the malevolently immoral and their twisted ways through the power and working of His word—a word that resists and delegitimizes such twisted ways. Then again, perhaps God thinks to enlist those who live by His word as partners in the long journey away from the ways of the malevolently immoral and toward the community that God wishes to create here on earth in preparation for a more enduring existence. Or, then again, perhaps it is the destructive mores and actions of the malevolently immoral themselves that bring dissolution.

My translation leaves the cause and source of the elimination of the malevolently immoral intentionally uncertain. It is true, however, that while God is depicted in the first line as actively engaged in sustaining those who do right, He is utterly absent in the second line. One is led to believe that the mores and actions of the malevolently immoral carry within themselves the seeds of death and destruction.

But, however and by whomsoever it is ultimately accomplished, God would have each of us eliminate the mores, the values, the activities of wickedness from our lives. Whether or not we will respond to the call He issues through His word is the real uncertainty of life. Those who meet the challenge, take God's word as their guide, adopt God's mores and values, and collaborate with God in the great work of human advancement will find acceptance with God and advancement beyond their imagination.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 9, 2024)*