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Psalm 46

meditation 1— introductory

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

Disorder/ Order/ Disorder/ Order

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

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

¹ See Genesis 1.²

city enjoys the benefits of a gentle and non-threatening river.

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

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

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

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 14, 2024)

meditation 2— psalm 46.¹⁻³

trusting god in the face of instability

¹Elohîm is our strong refuge,

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

²Therefore, we will not fear because earth trembles,

or the mountains tumble into the sea;

³its waters roar and roil,

mountain ranges quaking from its surge (author's translation).

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

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

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

This state of affairs, however, was short lived. Through human misdeed, represented by that of Adam and Eve, disorder re-entered in the form of death, the ultimate chaos. The human mind increasingly gave way to disorder. This disorder manifested itself in the form of cruelty and violence. Human cruelty and violence, not God, brought about the first human death—the *violent* death of Abel.² Having gotten a foothold, the disorder of human cruelty and violence grew like a cancer—or spread like a flood, to use Biblical language and imagery.

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”³

Finally, through human cruelty and violence chaos returned. The churning and tumultuous waters of chaos, whose power God had checked, broke free of their restraints. The world was flooded, becoming once more a churning tumultuous abyss.⁴ No doubt, the book's authors and readers took this flood literally. Many still do. For some it is an article of faith. So be it. But we see the universal flood waters of

¹ Genesis 1.²

² See Genesis 4.⁸

³ Genesis 6.^{5, 11-12}

⁴ See Genesis 6.^{11-12, 19-20}

assertion that God can and will reorder the world as He did in the first instance during his creative labors. He intends to reorder the disordered human mind.

Elsewhere, the psalmist wonders,

“When the foundations are being torn down,
what can the just do?”⁶

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

“’Elohîm is our strong refuge,
He has proven to be an incredible source of protection in distress.
Therefore, we will not fear...

“YHWH Š^eḅā’ôṭ is with us.
Ya’^aqōb’s God is our impregnable fortress.”

“Be calm and acknowledge that I am ’Elohîm.
I rule over the nations.
I rule over the world.
YHWH Š^eḅā’ôṭ is with us.
Ya’^aqōb’s God is our impregnable fortress.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 14, 2024, 2024)

⁶ Psalm 11.³

meditation 3— psalm 46.⁴⁻⁵

God's stabilizing effect on zion

⁴There's a river, its channels gladden 'Elohîm's city,
'Elyôn's unrivaled dwelling place.

⁵'Elohîm is in it.

It cannot be shaken.

'Elohîm provides it immediate aid (author's translation).

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

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

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

We note, first, the river with its channels that gladden God's city. This river is symbolic of stability and order. We are surely meant to see the river as calm and gently flowing. It is to be contrasted with the previous lines in which roaring and roiling seas cause disorder and destabilize mountains and mountain ranges so that they quake and slide into the sea. Far from creating fear or anxiety as the unstable and disordered roaring and roiling seas threaten to do, the river that runs through God's city brings stability, order, and security to those who live there.

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

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

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

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

“And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him.”¹

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

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

“All nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him... and so great was the fear of the enemies of the people of God, that they fled and stood afar off.”²

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

“And it shall be said among the wicked: ‘Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible; wherefore we cannot stand.’”³

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

“Among the wicked... every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety. And there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven; and *it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another.*”⁴

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

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. *Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace,* and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children...”⁵

If Zion’s citizenry can exercise such faith as to reject violence themselves and thereby extend effective

¹ Moses 7.¹³

² Moses 7.¹³⁻¹⁴

³ DC 45.⁶⁸

⁴ DC 45.⁶⁹⁻⁷⁰

⁵ DC 98.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

invitations of nonviolence to others as well, they can change the world.

“All nations will come streaming to it;
many peoples will come, saying:
Come! Let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain;
to the temple of the God of Ya‘qōb̄.
He will teach us his ways,
and we shall walk in his paths.
For Torah will come out of Šiyôn,
and the word of Yahweh from Y^erûšālāyim.
⁴Then will He mediate between nations;
He will reconcile many peoples,
so that they will retool their swords into plow blades
and their spears into pruning instruments.
One nation will no longer lift the sword against another,
nor will they any longer train for warfare.”⁶

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

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

No doubt, Zion’s citizenry was “of one heart and one mind” about a whole host of things. Their “righteousness,” or proper conduct in behavior encompassed many aspects of life. But chief among the areas of agreement and unity among Zion’s citizenry had to do with matters of economics. Wealth should be distributed in such a way as to do away with poverty and create economic equality.⁸

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

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

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

⁶ Isaiah 2.²⁻⁴

⁷ Moses 7.¹⁸

⁸ We have discussed this passage and the ideas of redistribution of wealth found in the Doctrine and Covenants many times in meditation and homily.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 14, 2024)

meditation 4— psalm 46.⁶⁻⁹

God's destabilizing effect on the world

⁶Nations have plotted. Kingdoms have collapsed.

He speaks. Earth reels.

⁷YHWH שׁׁבָּׁׁתִּי is with us.

Ya'qōb's God is our impregnable fortress.

⁸Come! Contemplate YHWH's deeds!

How He disconcerts the world—

⁹putting an end to worldwide war,

He will break bow and chop up spear,

and burn round shield with fire! (author's translation)

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

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

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

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

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”²

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

In the Book of Ether, two great armies face off in extended warfare: one is the army of the more established king, Coriantumr. The other is that of the upstart, Shiz. “And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage,” we are told, “that the whole face of the

¹ See Genesis 1.²

² Genesis 6.^{5, 11-12}

land was covered with the bodies of the dead” (14.²¹). At one point, in a moment of rare lucidity, Coriantumr reflects upon the fact that “there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children” (15.²).

Year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day the two armies, enraged and bent on cruelty, violence, and warfare, face off. Reminiscent of Genesis Gen. 6.¹¹⁻¹², the chronicler, Ether, informs us that “the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed; wherefore they went again to battle” (15.¹⁹).

After each day’s long hard battles, “when the night came they were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine; and they slept again upon their swords” (15.²²). Nevertheless “on the morrow they fought again” (15.²³). So powerful was the flood of cruelty, violence, and warfare that they fought until their millions became 121, then 59, and then 2. And then, finally, there was but 1. Just one. One survivor (See 15.²³⁻³²)!

Tell me that is not “biblical,” worthy of equal press with Genesis’ flood narrative; the death and destruction flowing from a flood of human cruelty, violence, hatred, anger, and warfare. Both narratives bear witness to the disorder of the human mind and the disorder it brings to the world through cruelty, violence, and warfare. This human disorder, of course, was not limited to or unique to the time of either Noah or Coriantumr. Even with the post-flood reordering, God lamented, “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”³

This is reminiscent of the preacher’s tragic observation.

“...The heart of the sons of men
is full of evil,
and madness is in their heart
while they live...”⁴

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

“This is the world,
brutal and cruel, that Troy tried to withstand.
Cruelty wins in the end.
Our little clearings of civilization may seem real,
but mindless wilderness always lurks,
may take its time,
but in the end overwhelms all our pretensions to decency.
We revert to beastliness.”⁵

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

Here, in verse 6, the Psalmist acknowledges and laments that “nations plot. He would be most concerned

³ Genesis 8.²¹

⁴ Ecclesiastes 9.³

⁵ Seneca, *The Tragedies*, Vol. 1, “Trojan Women,” Lines 985-990, David R. Slavitt and Palmer Bovie

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

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

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

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

In learning of his father, Lehi’s, dream, commonly known as the tree of life vision, Nephi wished to understand the meaning of the dream and its many elements. In answer to his inquiries, Nephi saw a series of fourteen visions. He learned much from these visions. In these visions, Nephi’s angelic guide repeatedly characterized Nephite, Lamanite, and, indeed, human history as one of “wars and rumors of wars,” “great slaughters,” and “contentions.” These went on for “many generations” not only among Book of Mormon peoples but “among all the nations and kindreds of the earth.”⁶

As if to prove the angelic insight, Mormon described his generation as “thirst[ing] after blood and revenge continually; of being “without order and without mercy;” of being “brutal, sparing none;” of being “without principle, and past feeling,” seeking for blood and revenge.”⁷ There was, he charged, “blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land... and it was one complete revolution” (Mormon 2.⁸). Indeed, he lamented, it was just such “wickedness and abomination [that] has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man.”⁸

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

We of what some call the latter days or end times have perpetuated the disorder. In 1832 it looked like the American south might attempt to leave the United States. While southern rebellion was postponed for a generation, the conflict worked on the mind of Joseph Smith. He saw that, sooner or later, “the rebellion of South Carolina [would] eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls.”⁹ But this, the American Civil War, was but the tip of the iceberg. Joseph’s discernment went far beyond this tragedy. “The time will come,” he saw, “that *war will be poured out upon all nations*, beginning at this place.”¹⁰ Joseph discerned that the latter-days were to be an era of war and rumor of war. Time has vindicated his insight.

⁶ See, for example, 1 Nephi 12.^{2-3, 21}; 14.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

⁷ See, Moroni 9.^{5, 18-20, 23}

⁸ Mormon 2.¹⁸

⁹ DC 87.¹

¹⁰ DC 87.²

“And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations.”¹¹

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

“I have sworn in my wrath, and decreed wars upon the face of the earth, and the wicked shall slay the wicked, and fear shall come upon every man.”¹²

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

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”¹³

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

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

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

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

Earlier, we mentioned Lehi and his dream. In his dream, he saw “a dark and dreary wilderness.” With time, Lehi realized that he, himself, was traveling through this same “dark and dreary waste.” He eventually found relief from the darkness and the dreariness, but not before he had traveled “for the space of many hours in darkness.”¹⁴ He sadly realized that “numberless concourses of people” were also engulfed in the same “great mist of darkness” as he had been.”¹⁵ Lehi’s son, Nephi, was taught that this wilderness waste with its mist of darkness was a representation of this world with its Satanically inspired temptations. No doubt, the temptations took in a plethora of invitations to bad behavior. But chief among them has to be the temptation to cruelty, violence, and war, just as Lucifer promises in the LDS temple endowment: “I will buy up armies and navies and reign with blood and horror on the earth.”

¹¹ DC 87.⁶

¹² DC 63.³³

¹³ 3 Nephi 11.²⁹⁻³⁰

¹⁴ see 1 Nephi 8.⁴⁻⁸

¹⁵ See 1 Nephi 8.²¹⁻²³

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

Jesus was “cast” into this same world. God, John taught, sent Jesus, the “Light of the world,” to earth as a light that “shineth in darkness.” But, “the darkness comprehended it not.... He was in the world... and the world knew him not.”¹⁶

In each of these examples, scripture describes the world in which we live. It is a world as humankind has made it. It may be that “men are, that they might have joy,”¹⁷ but we must find that joy as we slog our way through a “dark,” “dreary,” “lonely,” cruel, violent, and war-ravaged world.

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

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

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹⁶ See John 1.⁴⁻¹⁰

¹⁷ See 2 Nephi 2.²⁵

meditation 5— psalm 46.¹⁰⁻¹¹

God's stabilizing effect on zion

¹⁰Be calm and acknowledge that I am 'Elohîm.

I rule over the nations.

I rule over the world.

¹¹YHWH Š'ĕbā'ôṭî is with us.

Ya'āqōb's God is our impregnable fortress (author's translation).

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

In reflecting on disorder, the Psalmist imagines the disorder of nature. He thinks of the earth quaking, of mountains sliding into the sea, and of the havoc ocean waters cause as they roar and roil over their boundaries (2-3). From this disorder, the Psalmist's mind turns to the order God establishes in Zion (4-5) and then, quickly, to the disorder of the human mind. The Psalmist is not under necessity of using his imagination when he turns to human disorder. The disorder is obvious. It is reflected in the plotting of nation against nation (vs. 6), in their dependence on and use of bow, spear, and shield (vs. 9)—in their buying up armies and navies and reigning with blood and horror on the earth—and in their engagement in “worldwide war” (vs. 9). We are to associate the disorder and consequent desolation of nature and the disorder and consequent desolation of the human mind with each other, the former a type or shadow of the latter.

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

“Be calm and acknowledge that I am 'Elohîm.

I rule over the nations.

I rule over the world.”

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

“I'll not be intimidated though a force of ten thousand surround and array themselves against me.”¹

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

“It is to YHWH that I look for safety.

How, then, can you say to me:

‘Flee to the hills, a helpless bird’?”²

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

¹ Psalm 3.⁶

² Psalm 11.¹

“^Elōhîm is our strong refuge,
He has proven to be an incredible source of protection in distress.
Therefore, we will not fear...”

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

“YHWH Š^ebā’ôṭ is with us.
Ya^aqōb’s God is our impregnable fortress.”

And he concludes with it to end the psalm.

“YHWH Š^ebā’ôṭ is with us.
Ya^aqōb’s God is our impregnable fortress.”

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

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

“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”³

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

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

But, at the same time, he did issue a warning” “Rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁴

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

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

“Hear, ^Elōhîm, my cry for help.
Be attentive to my prayer.
From the edge of earth, I call out to You, being deeply disheartened.

³ Exodus 14.¹³⁻¹⁴

⁴ Matthew 10.²⁸

Guide me into a mountain stronghold high above me.
To be sure, You have been my refuge,
a powerful defense against the enemy.
I wish to always find refuge in Your temple.
May I find shelter under cover of Your wings.”⁵

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 14, 2024)

⁵ Psalm 61.¹⁻⁴