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Psalms 7

Meditation 1—Psalm 7.¹⁻⁵

¹YHWH, my God! It is to you that I look for protection.
Help me against all those who pursue me.
Rescue me ²lest he, as a lion, tear me to pieces;
mutilate me with no chance of recovery.
³YHWH, if I have done this,
if I bear responsibility for this wrong—
⁴that is, if I have done intentional harm to one who befriended me,
or if I have deemed one an enemy without cause—
⁵let the enemy pursue me,
catch me, and stomp my life into the underworld;
establish my abode in death (author's translation).

We have interpreted Psalms 3-7 as if they all addressed the same or a similar circumstance. In them, we understand the Psalmist to be under attack by those seeking to defame his character by falsely accusing him of wrongdoing (4.², 5.⁶, 7.³⁻⁴). These accusers are numerous (3.¹). Their attack is unrelenting and vicious, threatening death (5.⁹, 6.⁵, 7.^{2,5,12-13}). The accusers are skeptical of God's involvement in human affairs (4.⁶) and especially of His involvement with the Psalmist (3.²).

Because of the attacks and in spite of the claims of God's disregard for him, the Psalmist continues to plead expectantly for God's intercession. We understand these pleas to have taken place overnight during a possible incubation ritual (3.⁵, 4.⁸, 5.³, 6.⁶). The Psalmist's hopeful expectation that God will intervene and defend him against the accusations rests on two facts. First, it rests on God's own character and His unwavering devotion to him and to all those who put their trust in God (5.⁷). Second, the Psalmist's hope rests in the fact that he is innocent of the specific charges (4.², 5.³⁻⁷), something he reasserts in this psalm (vs. 3-5).

The Psalmist's trial reached its lowest point in Psalm 6. Earlier the Psalmist had wondered at "how numerous are those that rise against me"! In wonder and pain, he asked those who attacked him,

"How long will you men of repute smear my reputation?
How long will you love falsehood
and seek after deception?"¹

In his lowest moments, the Psalmist wondered about and directly questioned even God.

"And I ask you, YHWH,
'How long will this go on?'"²

We can understand this bold and questioning query when, next, the Psalmist intimates that his conflict is a matter of life and death.

"For in death there is no thought of you.
Who praises you in šē'ôl?"

¹ Psalm 4.²

² Psalm 6.³

If, the Psalmist confesses, he is found to be guilty of the false charges, then

“let the enemy pursue me,
catch me, and stomp my life into the underworld;
establish my abode in death.”

The Psalmist knows that his enemies intend to show him no mercy. His death will be unsparing and brutal. To illustrate the violence and brutality of his accusers, the Psalmist resorts to powerful and disturbing imagery.

“Rescue me lest he, as a lion, tear me to pieces;
mutilate me with no chance of recovery.”

As the Psalmists contemplate their own and others’ enemies, the Psalmists return to the imagery of lions several times in the course of the Book of Psalms.

“Like a lion, he lies in wait from a concealed place in the brush.
He lies in ambush to seize the poor—
He seizes the poor, dragging him into his lair.
He crouches low, he hunches down
and falls upon the bones of the vulnerable.”³

“They are just like a lion that craves to rend asunder.”⁴

“They open their mouths against me,
lions, rending and roaring.”⁵

“My life exists among lions.
I lay down among those who feast on human beings—
their teeth a spear and arrows,
their tongue a sharp sword.”⁶

In Psalm 7, we marvel at the Psalmist’s poetic skills and ability to communicate his thoughts and feelings. He invites us to consider the hunting lion. He invites us to visualize the lion setting upon its prey, slashing its prey with razor sharp claws, and tearing its flesh with sharp pointed teeth. He invites us to visualize the slaughtered victim, pieces of it scattered about the kill zone: torn flesh thrown here and there, bones chewed, mangled and broken, scattered haphazardly. If the enemy has its way with the Psalmist, there will be no coming back.

But the Psalmist’s resort to lion imagery is, perhaps, more than metaphor. Its use reminds us that humans can act like animals. Too often, especially when lust fills them with animus toward others, they act according to nature and let loose the violence that is deep within human DNA in ways that drown the good that lies within. This is especially prevalent when individuals act as part of a group.

Throughout this and the preceding four psalms, the Psalmist has spoken of his enemies in mostly general and metaphorical ways. He has informed us of their intentions, but has said little about what informs their

³ Psalm 10.⁹⁻¹⁰

⁴ Psalm 17.¹²

⁵ Psalm 22.¹³

⁶ Psalm 57.⁴

intentions. He will become much more specific about the character of his enemies and what drives them in Psalm 10.

We may not want to follow the Psalmist invitation to imagine the devouring lion. We may not want to visualize. We may not want to think our fellow beings capable of such brutality. But, we must. We must do so out of respect for the inspired poet. But, more importantly, history has taught us that we must. Our present moment teaches that we must. We must understand the intentions of the enemy, the ungodly. It will not do to bury our head in the sand and pretend that evil and brutality do not exist. Such delusion leaves others easy prey and only postpones the time when, sooner or later, the ungodly enemy comes for us.

The Psalmist remains sure of this, however. God sees. And he will not forget.

“Sing praises to YHWH, who sits enthroned in Şîyôn!
Proclaim his deeds among the nations:
that, finding acts of violence, he remembers them;
he never forgets the wail of the downtrodden.”⁷

We must believe this and follow the Psalmist’s example of bold, sometimes uncomfortable, truth recognition and truth telling. And, yes, sometimes this truth telling includes truthful imprecation.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 14, 2024)

⁷ Psalm 9.¹¹⁻¹²

¹YHWH, my God! It is to you that I look for protection.
Help me against all those who pursue me.
Rescue me ²lest he, as a lion, tear me to pieces;
mutilate me with no chance of recovery.
³YHWH, if I have done this,
if I bear responsibility for this wrong—
⁴that is, if I have done intentional harm to one who befriended me,
or if I have deemed one an enemy without cause—
⁵let the enemy pursue me,
catch me, and stomp my life into the underworld;
establish my abode in death (author's translation).

We have interpreted Psalms 3-7 as if they all addressed the same or a similar circumstance. In them, we understand the Psalmist to be under attack by those seeking to defame his character by falsely accusing him of wrongdoing. He pleads expectantly for God to come to his aid and defend him against the charges. His expectation for God's intervention rests on two facts. First, it rests in the character of God, whom, the Psalmist believes, is unwaveringly devoted to him and to all those who put their trust in God. Second, the Psalmist's hope rests in the fact that he is innocent of the charges. The Psalmist has repeatedly maintained his innocence.

However, to this point the Psalmist has not informed us concerning the exact nature of the any charges or any alleged wrongdoing. In this Psalm, however, while maintaining his innocence, the Psalmist finally gives us insight into the nature of an alleged crime.

“YHWH, if I have done this,
if I bear responsibility for this wrong—
that is, if I have done intentional harm to one who befriended me,
or if I have deemed one an enemy without cause...”

While the exact nature of the betrayal is still unclear, the Psalmist here reveals that he stands accused of being untrue to and betraying one who had trusted him and with whom he had previously been at peace. Still, the Psalmist maintains his innocence in relation to these charges.

We wish to repeat that last bit: “the Psalmist maintains his innocence *in relation to these charges.*”

This reflects my narrow reading of the Psalmist's profession of innocence. Why do I mention this?

Throughout the Book of Psalms, the Psalmists frequently profess, as he does here, their innocence. From the very beginning, and particularly since the Protestant reformation, Christian exegetes of the Psalms have often experienced some heartburn at and struggled with the professions of innocence found in the Psalter. They have at times engaged in all sorts of gymnastics to explain it.

The difficulty has arisen, in part, from Paul's doctrine of justification (righteousness, innocence) and the deep impact it has had on Protestant reformers. Without going to a long description of Paul's doctrine, we can say that Paul was adamant that no one could think of themselves as innocent or be thought of by God as innocent through their own works and efforts. Only the unearned grace of God could bring about lasting and saving innocence, righteousness, or justification—this through divine forgiveness. Indeed, “justification” can be seen as a fancy word for “forgiven.” But that is for another time.

Still, comparing the Psalmists' confessions of innocence to Paul's understanding of innocence is like comparing apples and oranges. They are two utterly different things. The Psalmists' confessions of innocence are narrow and circumstantial. Paul's understanding of innocence is broad and general. An example may be in order.

Let's say I am accused of murder. Let's also say that I am innocent of the charge. It is no challenge to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith without works to maintain my innocence of the charge of murder. I can declare myself innocent of having committed murder without maintaining that God has found me innocent in the way that Paul means it. Indeed, knowing that I am innocent of the charge of murder legitimately gives me increased faith that God will come to my defense in relation to those charges.

Even as I have this confidence, I might be anxious about my overall state and standing with God. Has he forgiven me (declared me innocent) of all offenses that I might have committed against him? Maybe yes. Maybe no. But whether He has or not has no bearing on whether I am innocent or not of the charge of murder brought against me.

Even the most cursory of readings in the Psalms, demonstrates that the Psalmists know that they sin and displease God on a regular and ongoing basis. They confesses this reality over and over again. They also know, as Paul and his readers know, that they need God's forgiveness, and that God is forgiving beyond all human expectation and understanding. The Psalmists know that they cannot "earn" God's forgiveness and thus His verdict of "not guilty," "innocent."

Thus, when the Psalmist here claims innocence, we should understand him doing so on the basis of the fact that he is not guilty of the narrow charges made against him. There is, then, no real disagreement between Paul and the Psalmists.

We are under covenant to be the best we can be. We often do well. At such times, if others level a charge against us that is false, we can make confident appeal to our own behavior without hypocrisy and without doing harm to God's immeasurable and unearned grace. We can find joy in doing the right things. Even as we make such claims of innocence, we might remain fully and painfully aware that in many other regards we do not measure up to God's expectations of us—or is it our own expectations of self that we project onto God? With this awareness of inadequacy and guilt, we also make appeal to God's undeserved grace.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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Meditation 3— psalm 7.¹⁻⁵

¹YHWH, my God! It is to you that I look for protection.

Help me against all those who pursue me.

Rescue me ²lest he, as a lion, tear me to pieces;

mutilate me with no chance of recovery.

³YHWH, if I have done this,

if I bear responsibility for this wrong—

⁴**that is, if I have done intentional harm to one who befriended me,**

or if I have deemed one an enemy without cause—

⁵let the enemy pursue me,

catch me, and stomp my life into the underworld;

establish my abode in death (author's translation).

As we have discussed several times previously, the enemy—individual and national—is pervasive throughout the Psalms. When it comes to individual enemies⁷, the most common weapon is accusation. The Psalmists are repeatedly accused of wrongdoing. Accusation of wrongdoing on the part of the Psalmist and the assassination of his character are unifying features of the five laments found in Psalms 3-7 (3.²⁻³, 4.², 5.⁸⁻⁹, 7.³⁻⁴)—psalms that we have treated as if they addressed the same or a similar situation. While the specific nature of the alleged wrongdoing went unspecified in the previous psalms, in Psalm 7 we are finally given a specific charge: the Psalmist is accused of having unjustifiably acted with hostile and harmful intent against one who had treated the Psalmist as a friend. While we remain in the dark about exactly *how* the Psalmist is alleged to have been unfaithful in his relationship, we do know, finally, that the Psalmist's wrongdoing involved a relationship with another.

Perhaps this accusation, even if true, may not sound like much to us. Perhaps we might view the accusers' intensity and vehemence as an overreaction to such a minor infraction—whether real or imagined. Perhaps we might find the Psalmist's intense language in appealing to God to defend him overwrought. Perhaps we might think that surely there are worse sins than this.

If so, perhaps we have misunderstood or forgotten what sin really is. Perhaps we have misunderstood God expectations of us as expressed in commandments. Consider, for example, the most basic of commandments, those called, "The Ten Commandments."¹ The first three dictate our relationship with God—we are to worship only the true God (#1), resist using images to represent Him or any other supposed deity in our worship (#2), and refrain from lightly or falsely or wrongly invoking his name—or power (#3).² The final seven commandments all dictate our relationships with our fellow beings.³

¹ See Exodus 20.³⁻⁷

² God's "name" often stands as a metonym for God's "power." So, we might read this command as, "You are not to invoke the power of YHWH, your God, for any false purpose." Whether one decides it should read "name" or "power," God is often invoked in relation to others. We can, for example, invoke his name falsely if we bear false witness against another or in our own behalf—this "taking of the name of God in vain" happens every day in American courtrooms both on the part of the prosecution and the defense. We can unjustifiably invoke his power against our enemy—this takes place in nearly every nation on earth (and, as of this writing, is taking place with a vengeance between Israel and Hamas as each ridiculously claims God as their own). This commandment can, then, be seen to bridge the two types of commandments—the two that clearly dictate our relationship with God and the seven that just as clearly dictate our relationship with others.

³ I have discussed elsewhere how the commandment to keep the sabbath can be seen as a matter of social

Commandments, then, lean heavily in the direction of safeguarding and fortifying human relationships.

In his understanding of commandments, Jesus famously finds but two.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.’
This is the first and great commandment.
And the second is like unto it, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”⁴

Commandments are about love. They teach us how to love and what love looks like—whether it is directed at God or humans.⁵ “The first and great commandment” may be the love of God, but the second can hardly be separated from it. Indeed, there are times when the second takes priority.

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”⁶

This reminds us that supposed love for God and the worship of Him is but a sham if human relationships are in shambles. Jesus wasn’t reinventing the wheel here. He was tapping into and championing age old Israelite belief.

“How should I approach YHWH?
How should I bow to my exalted God?
Should I approach him with a fully burnt offering?
How about with new-born calves?
Will YHWH be satisfied with thousands of rams?
How about with countless channels of olive oil?
Should I offer my firstborn for my willful defiance?
How about my offspring for less serious private infractions?
He has already told you, man, what is good.
What does YHWH want from you
but to do justice,
and love compassion,
and be willing to live like your God?⁷

God is perfectly aware and infinitely interested in human relationships and how we treat one another. Indeed, how we treat one another serves as revelation about our love for and relationship with God, as Jesus expressed in parable. How we treat one another also serves as the principal criteria for our own judgement before God.

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right

justice. While enslaved in Egypt, Israel was worked to the bone, never allowed to rest. Israel, either individually or collectively, was not to act the same when they/it became the dominate power. Though this is not the emphasis in Exodus’ stipulation for the sabbath, it is the emphasis in Deut. 5.¹²⁻¹⁵).

⁴ Matthew 22.³⁷⁻⁴⁰

⁵ This is only one reason among many that I prefer “instruction” to “commandment.”

⁶ Matthew 5.²³⁻²⁴

⁷ Micah 6.⁶⁻⁸, author’s translation

hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.'

"Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?'

And the King shall answer and say unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"⁸

The adverse, Jesus reminds us, is also true.

"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."⁹

These latter, Jesus warns "shall go away into everlasting punishment."¹⁰

The Psalmist, then, has a right to be concerned about the accusation leveled against him that he has brought a fissure into a previously cherished relationship. This accusation is no trifle. If, as Paul observed, "the intent of the commandment is love,"¹¹ then, if guilty, the Psalmist is guilty of having broken a commandment that is central to God's evaluation of human character and their ability to abide in a place of lasting and harmonious relationships. Little wonder that the Psalmist energetically resists the accusation and calls upon God to be his defense, is jury, and his judge.

As we contemplate our own place in eternity, we would do well to examine closely our relationships with those around us. Hopefully, we can confidently call upon God to judge us in light of these relationships and the way we treat others.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁸ Matthew 25.³¹⁻⁴⁰

⁹ Matthew 25.⁴⁵

¹⁰ Matthew 25.⁴⁶

¹¹ See 1 Timothy 1.⁵

meditation 4— psalm 7.⁶⁻¹¹

⁶Arise, YHWH, vigorously.

Rise up in response to my enemy's fury.

Rouse Yourself and demand that I be given a fair hearing.

⁷With the assembly gathered round You,
sit, presiding over it.

⁸It is YHWH who judges people.

Judge me, YHWH, as befits my total innocence.

⁹Please undermine the malice of the unjust,
while supporting the innocent,

by examining character and conscience, O just 'Elohîm.

¹⁰My defense rests with 'Elohîm,

Deliverer of the sincerely upright.

¹¹It is 'Elohîm who arbitrates for the innocent,

whom he never condemns (author's translation).

We have interpreted Psalms 3-7 as if they all addressed the same or a similar circumstance. In them, we understand the Psalmist to be under attack by those seeking to defame his character by falsely accusing him of wrongdoing. He pleads expectantly for God to come to his aid and defend him against the charges. His expectation for God's intervention rests on two facts. First, it rests in the character of God, whom, the Psalmist believes, is unwaveringly devoted to him and to all those who put their trust in God. Second, the Psalmist's hope rests in the fact that he is innocent of the charges. The Psalmist has repeatedly maintained his innocence, but without specifying the exact nature of the accusation. But, in 7.³⁻⁴, the Psalmist specifies the crime he is accused of having committed.

“YHWH, if I have done this,
if I bear responsibility for this wrong—
that is, if I have repaid with evil one who befriended me,
or if I have deemed one an enemy without cause...”

Just as the Psalmist was not clear in the psalms 3-6 about the specific nature of the accusation brought against him, he was not clear about precisely how he hoped God would help him. He had repeatedly pleaded for and expressed hope in God's help, but always in the most general of terms. But in this Psalm, the Psalmist makes his expectations explicit.

The Psalmist calls upon God to convene a hearing and preside as judge over it.

“With the assembly gathered round You,
sit, presiding over it.”

He invites God to examine both his, the accused's character and conscience, as well as that of his accusers. The Psalmist welcomes the scrutiny because he knows that he is innocent and his enemies' malicious accusations. He anticipates that God will defend him while prosecuting his accusers. The Psalmist's hope, then, is that God will serve as judge, defender, and prosecutor.

“It is YHWH who judges people.
Judge me, YHWH, as befits my total innocence.”

Please undermine the malice of the unjust,
while supporting the innocent,
by examining character and conscience, O just 'Elohim."

As if making his opening statement in court, the Psalmist declares,

"My defense rests with 'Elohim,
Deliverer of the sincerely upright.
It is 'Elohim who arbitrates for the innocent,
whom he never condemns."

There are a great many things said about God over the course of the Book of Psalms. His character is examined and reexamined over and over again. Indeed, outside of the New Testament Gospels that explore God's character through Jesus of Nazareth, there is no other book in all of scripture that examines God and His character more than the Psalms. Among the many things the various Psalmists have to say about God is that He judges the actions of humankind; that He is accurate in his estimations; that He is both just and merciful in His judgements; that he defends the innocent; and that he condemns those guilty of planning and executing harm toward others, especially the vulnerable.

Here is but a small sampling of the Psalmist's testimony concerning God in his role as judge.

"But YHWH sits enthroned forever,
having established his throne for justice.
He governs rightly the world over.
He judges nations equitably".¹

"YHWH is in his sacred temple.
YHWH is in heaven, where his throne is.
His eyes observe.
His glances evaluate mortals.
YHWH approves of the just,
but for the degenerate, those given to malevolence, he feels aversion.
He rains down encircling sulfurous fire upon the degenerate;
a burning wind is their destiny."²

"He calls out to the heavens above
as well the earth, for the purpose of judging His people:
'Gather to Me those faithful to Me
who have entered into covenant with Me through sacrifice.'
The heavens are to declare His justness;
for it is 'Elohim who is Judge."³

"I know that YHWH holds court for the downtrodden;
brings justice for the impoverished."⁴

The Psalmist fully believes in a merciful God. His testimony concerning the reality of this divine attribute

¹ Psalm 9.⁷⁻⁸

² Psalm 11.⁴⁻⁶

³ Psalm 50.⁴⁻⁶

⁴ Psalm 140.¹²

can be a benefit and needed comforted to those with an overly sensitive conscience, an overly legalistic perspective on God's expectations, and unreasonable personal expectations. God is much more realistic about our capacities than we and does not require perfection. His mercy is indeed great toward those who are trying the best they know how.

But this emphasis on God's mercy does not cause the Psalmist to lose sight of his belief that God does evaluate human conduct, especially as it relates to how we treat others. The Psalmist firmly believes that God accurately perceives acts committed by those with the knowledge that their actions are likely to devalue and harm others. He believes that God serves as protector to the wronged, sometimes to the detriment and suffering of the wrongdoer. The Psalmist might hope that wrongdoers find their way to repentance, but he also hopes and boldly prays that God act to protect the vulnerable even if it means the wrongdoer, in their recalcitrance, pay for their wrongdoing.

This is all part of the Psalmist's testimony about God. But, in light of the horrors we have witnessed human beings perpetrate against each other—from America's large scale and centuries long institution of slavery and racism, or the horror of the holocaust in which unimaginable millions of innocents were murdered, or the violence of the present Russian invasion of Ukraine, or the madness of American mass murderers, or the contagion of evil spread by the 45th president of the United states, or any number of small scale horrors of individual hatred and violence, to name but a few—we might be forgiven for questioning the Psalmist's beliefs and witness about God's role as a check on the wicked and a protector of the innocent. It sometimes seems that God does nothing to correct or stop those who perpetrate such horrors against their fellow beings—I mean, how hard or wrong could it be for a caring and involved God to put an end to just one instigator of human depravity such as a Hitler, a Putin, or a Trump?

I confess that I often find it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the Psalmist's claims with what I observe in the world. I must admit that God at times seems either impotent or indifferent to human suffering, especially that suffered at the hands of others. I find little comfort in the claims that all will be made right—eventually. Indeed, it seems the Psalmist himself was not always quite so sure. Sometimes, when contemplating the continued existence and even success of the wicked, the Psalmist could lose his emotional and spiritual footing and balance.⁵ He could wonder,

“Why, Yahweh, are You now so standoffish?
Why do You remain absent during these distressing times?”⁶

And he could wonder just how long God would endure the private corruption the ungodly perpetrated or the corruption they spawned in others.

“How long will the ungodly, YHWH;
how long will the ungodly dominate?”⁷

In such uncertainty and frustration, I sometimes find that I can follow the Psalmist's advice.

“Rest quietly in YHWH, steel yourself in him.
Don't become enraged over one who is successful;
over one who manages to pull off his schemes.

⁵ See author's translation of Psalm 73.², ff

⁶ Psalm 10.¹

⁷ Psalm 95.³

Let go of anger and stop becoming riled up.
Don't become enraged as it leads only to additional evil.”⁸

At other times, yielding to anger and frustration and hurt, I let fly psalm-like imprecation,

“יְהוָה! Knock the fangs out from their mouth.
Shatter the jaws of lions, YHWH!
May they vanish away as flowing water.
When he shoots his arrows, let them become flimsy.
May they be like a slug that oozes away as it crawls along.
Like a woman's miscarried fetus, let them not see the light of day.
May they be like a thornbush that, before it grows thorns
and matures, a blazing heat blasts it.”⁹

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁸ Psalm 37.⁷⁻⁸

⁹ Psalm 58.⁶⁻⁹

meditation 5— psalm 7.¹²⁻¹⁷

- ¹²But he, will not relent.
He keeps his sword sharpened.
He bends his bow and arms it.
- ¹³He keeps his deadly weapons ready for use;
his relentless arrows ready.
- ¹⁴Look how he plans cruelty,
brings about misery,
and gives life to falsehood!
- ¹⁵He prepares a pit and digs it out,
but he falls into the very pit that he prepared.
- ¹⁶The misery he intended for another will come back on him;
his own violence will come down upon him.
- ¹⁷I will praise YHWH commensurate with His rectitude,
and most certainly will sing of YHWH ‘Elyôn’s character (author’s translation).

We have interpreted Psalms 3-7 as if they all addressed the same or a similar circumstance. In them, we understand the Psalmist to be under attack by those seeking to defame his character by falsely accusing him of wrongdoing (4.², 5.⁶, 7.³⁻⁴). These accusers are numerous (3.¹). Their attack is unrelenting and vicious, threatening death (5.⁹, 6.⁵, 7.^{2, 5, 12-13}). The accusers are skeptical of God’s involvement in human affairs (4.⁶) and especially of His involvement with the Psalmist (3.²). In this passage, the Psalmist focuses his attention on his attackers.

The Psalmist likens his attackers to hunters preparing for the hunt or, perhaps, warriors preparing for battle. They sharpen their swords. They prepare and arm their bows. This likening of words and accusations (often depicted as teeth, lips, and tongues in a kind of metonymy) to weapons is not uncommon in the Psalter. God is often said to engage sword, bow, and arrow—both literally and metaphorically—against his enemies. But the Psalmist’s enemies, as here, also often wield them.

“My life exists among lions.
I lay down among those who feast on human beings—
their teeth a spear and arrows,
their tongue a sharp sword.”¹

And in a passage that is extremely reminiscent of the language found in Psalm 7, we read,

“Protect me from the plotting of those who are malicious;
from the conspiracy of those who practice aggression,
who sharpen their tongue as if it were a sword.
They draw their arrows, hateful words,
intent on shooting the blameless from ambush.
Suddenly they fire at him, without fear.
They are committed to the malicious affair.
They secretly organize their traps.”²

¹ Psalm 57.⁴

² Psalm 64.²⁻⁵

The attack against, or the hunt of the Psalmist is not haphazard or spur-of-the-moment. It is well thought out, organized, and premeditated. As hunters prepare for the hunt or soldiers for battle by digging pits in which to catch and then shoot their prey/ enemies, the Psalmist enemies have prepared traps for the Psalmist. This, too, is a common theme in the Psalms.

And the Psalmist's enemies are unrelenting.

But the carefully planned and relentless attack will backfire on the Psalmist's enemies. In imagery reminiscent of the Book of Mormon's "Law of restoration,"³ the Psalmist's enemies will find themselves suffering as they intended to make the Psalmist suffer. They will fall into the very pits that they have dug for him.⁴

Having described his enemies and God's response to them, the Psalmist ends on a note of praise. In defending the Psalmist against false accusations, giving him victory over his accusers, and allowing those accusers to be caught in their own snares, God reveals His surpassing character and His commitment to governing and judging rightly and justly.

O that we might see the evidence of this Divine character in the present-day ensnarement of those who would ensnare and willfully harm others. O that we might see evidence of this Divine character in the deliverance and victory of those targeted for deliberate ensnarement and harm!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 14, 2024)

³ See Alma 41.¹³⁻¹⁵

⁴ Also found in 9.¹⁵, 28.¹, 35.⁷⁻⁸, 57.⁶.