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# Psalm 9–10

## Meditation 1—Introductory

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Psalms 9 and 10 were once a single psalm that, for whatever reason, was broken in two. As the broken acrostic pattern demonstrates, the text has been corrupted in a number of ways and locations with a central portion seemingly missing. This meditation, as well as those that follow, will be based on the unity of the two psalms.

The first two psalms, which many consider introductory to the entire Book of Psalms, were followed up with five psalms (3-7) often called laments or complaints. They are, however, more than complaint, for in them the Psalmist expresses a great deal of trust in God. Unlike the first two psalms, these five psalms are, according to our expectations of the Book, prayers offered to God.

As I understand them, these five psalms address the same or a similar situation in which the Psalmist is attacked by those who accuse him of being guilty of wrongdoing and thus being forsaken by God. In these psalms, the Psalmist resists the charges, maintains his innocence, steadfastly trusts that God will defend him against the charges, and continues to look forward to entering the temple where he expects to find a God who accepts him. The Psalmist's trust and expectations are based upon his own innocence and upon the character of God, who is unwaveringly devoted to him.

Psalm 8 is of an utterly different character. Here, there is no lament or complaint. No clue of any struggles or dangers. No mention of enemies. We understand this psalm to be a sort of apotheosis in which the Psalmist marvels, notwithstanding all expressions of trust in God found in Psalms 3-7, at the committed attention that God, who is unimaginably great, gives to lowly human beings.

The apotheosis, however, is short-lived. With Psalms 9-10, the enemy is back with a vengeance. Here, the enemy is characterized as being “guilty of hostility,” and “malevolently immoral.” Such individuals not only attack the Psalmist. They are seen as enemies to all who are oppressed, downtrodden, and destitute. In this psalm, the malevolently immoral, to whom we were introduced in the very first verse of the Book of Psalms, multiply on a global scale, so far as to give malevolent and immoral character to entire nations.

The enemy possesses relentless motivation—heretofore somewhat vague but outlined in detail in Psalm 10—and energy. While the Psalmist might be accused of being somewhat parochial in focusing exclusively on himself and his woes in the five laments of 3-7, after the apotheosis of Psalm 8, the Psalmist's vision seems to expand. While he still expresses private need in the face of personal attacks, he realizes that he is not alone in being attacked. The Psalmist—oppressed, downtrodden, disadvantaged, mistreated, and vexed—is joined by a world-wide congress of the oppressed, downtrodden, disadvantaged, mistreated, and vexed for whom he speaks. God will come to the aid of the oppressed, downtrodden, disadvantaged, mistreated, and vexed wherever they may be found.

Notwithstanding the expanded and ramped up hostilities that he and his fellow oppressed experience, in Psalm 9 and 10 the Psalmist expresses his continued trust in God, providing additional reasons to those he has already recounted for his confidence in God and His help. First, the Psalmist appeals to history. God had delivered those who trust Him in the past and so one can believe that God will act similarly in the present. Second, God's decision making is always correct. He is a just ruler. As part of his rule, he judges justly.

Psalms 9 and 10 are good news indeed not only in the life of the Psalmist but in the life of all those the world over who experience the oppression and mistreatment at the hands of those who are willfully and morally degenerate and malevolent. In these two psalms, once one, the malevolently immoral have their

secret motivations clearly exposed.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

## m editation 2— psalm 9.<sup>1-6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I will praise You, YHWH, with my entire being.  
I will certainly recount Your unparalleled wonders,  
<sup>2</sup>joyously shout about and boast in You,  
and sing of Your power, ‘elyôn,  
<sup>3</sup>when my enemies fall back in retreat,  
stagger and flee from You  
<sup>4</sup>because You took up my case and my defense;  
because You sat on Your throne, a just judge.

<sup>5</sup>You rebuked entire nations; You brought an end to those guilty of hostility;  
You wiped them from existence, always and forever.  
<sup>6</sup>The enemy still lies in complete and perpetual ruin.  
You tore down their cities,  
their influence obliterated (author’s translation).

As in Psalms 3-7, the Psalmist is in trouble. Concern over his enemies has returned after the brief hiatus of Psalm 8’s apotheosis. He is, again, in need of God’s defense as he is attacked and abused in some undisclosed manner. He continues to trust God. He is committed to worshipping God.

“I will praise You, YHWH, with my entire being.  
I will certainly recount Your unparalleled wonders,  
joyously shout about and boast in You,  
and sing of Your power, ‘elyôn...”

The Psalmist’s trust in God and his commitment to praise Him flow from the Psalmist’s anticipation that God will indeed come to his defense. This defense is imagined, first, in militaristic imagery, the Psalmist seeing with an eye of faith his enemies in retreat and staggering away in humiliating defeat.

“My enemies fall back in retreat,  
stagger and flee from You.”

Then the Psalmist resorts to forensic language, imaging God as a just judge sitting on his throne defending the Psalmist against accusations.

“You took up my case and my defense;  
You sat on Your throne, a just judge.”

That, at least, is what I hear in this Psalm’s first four verses. It is all very familiar territory. We heard much the same in Psalms 3-7. However, with verses 5-6, we enter new territory, at least as far as the Psalter has gone to this point.

In Psalms 3-7, the Psalmist has already confessed some of the reasons for his trust in God and his expectation of God’s help. First, the Psalmist knows something of God’s inner character. He knows God to be an unwaveringly devoted God.

“But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,  
I can enter Your house.

I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;  
bow in reverence to You.”<sup>1</sup>

God’s long, at times tortured, history with the rebellious nation of Israel is a powerful demonstration of God’s devotion. But what adds to the Psalmist’s trust in God and his expectation of divine help, is his belief that God is uniquely devoted to those who are, themselves, devoted to Him. And, notwithstanding personal flaws, the Psalmist is nothing if not devoted to God.

“Know this: YHWH is attentive to those devoted to him;  
it is YHWH that responds when I cry out to Him.”<sup>2</sup>

“For You bless the devout, O YHWH.  
As a full body shield, You surround them with Your acceptance.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the Psalmist’s confidence in God and expectation of His help flows from his knowledge that he is innocent of the charges made against him.

“Because nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven...”<sup>4</sup>

“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...”<sup>5</sup>

This is powerful and inspiring testimony. But, still, some might need additional assurance. The Psalmist finds additional assurance in the past. In my reading of this psalm, this is the import of verses 5-6. The Psalmist looks back in history and sees God act on the world stage.

“You rebuked entire nations. You brought an end to those guilty of hostility.  
You wiped them from existence, always and forever.  
The enemy still lies in complete and perpetual ruin.  
You tore down their cities,  
Their influence obliterated.”

Here, it seems we should think of Israel’s enemies. Great cities, once powerful and consequential in people’s lives, now sit empty, perhaps unrecognizable as cities, having no role or influence in individuals’ lives or in international affairs—this might serve as warning to us, we who carelessly think our society and way of life is inevitable and inalterable.

This looking to the past and finding in it examples of God’s devotion and help is a valuable and common source of faith and hope in God and His willing presence and aid in our lives today. Paul reminds the Corinthian saints that what scripture had recorded of the past was meant to serve as “ensamples” and were “written for our admonition.”<sup>6</sup>

Given the task of securing the plates of Laban, Nephi encouraged his hesitant brothers to carry out their

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 4.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 7.<sup>3-4</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 10.<sup>11</sup>

charge by reminding them of God's past deeds.

“Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians.”<sup>7</sup>

Alma possessed a strong assurance that God would “raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory.” Certainly, this assurance flowed from his own personal experiences with God. However, the sacred histories that reported God's past acts also played a role in his assurance.

“And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for *he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity* from time to time. Yea, and *he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity,* from time to time even down to the present day; and *I have always retained in remembrance their captivity;* yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.”<sup>8</sup>

Then again, we think of Moroni who, like the Psalmist, was aware that the history of God's past deeds could and should serve as a source of faith and hope. In editing and writing the work that would come to be known as the Book of Mormon, he expected, reasonably enough, that many would question the veracity of the work. They would, he knew, be dependent upon God for assurances of its veracity. But how and why should they believe that God would respond to their queries concerning the veracity of the work? Would God be so generous? In anticipation of these uncertainties, Moroni offered the following advice.

“Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.”<sup>9</sup>

Moroni believed that if we immerse ourselves in past acts of divine generosity and help, we will find it more believable that God will act in our lives and provide the assistance that we so desperately need. Psalm 9 is an example of an ancient believer practicing this same sort of immersion in God's past acts of generosity and help. As we continue with Psalm 9/10, we will see where this immersion in the past led and the vision of the present and future that it produced.

So, again, as the Psalmist contemplates his own challenges—and later all those who are the victims of others hostility—the Psalmist adds to the reasons previously enunciated for hoping in God's deliverance: God's past acts of help and deliverance in the experience of victimized individuals and nations.

We would do well to engage ourselves in the same immersion of the past and of God's past acts of generous help and deliverance. There are no clearer waters for such immersion than those found in the Book of Psalms.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Nephi 4.<sup>2-3</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Alma 36.<sup>28-29</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Moroni 10.<sup>3</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

<sup>7</sup>But YHWH sits enthroned forever,  
having established His throne for justice.

<sup>8</sup>He governs rightly the world over.  
He judges nations equitably.

<sup>9</sup>YHWH is an unassailable stronghold for the oppressed;  
an unassailable stronghold in times of oppression.

<sup>10</sup>Those who know Your character, put their trust in You,  
for You never abandon those who seek You, YHWH.

<sup>11</sup>Sing praises to YHWH, who sits enthroned in Şîyôn!  
Proclaim His deeds among the nations:

<sup>12</sup>that, finding acts of violence, He responds to them.  
He never ignores the wail of the downtrodden (author's translation).

Being once more in need of God's defense against those who attack him, the Psalmist sends his mind forward in time to promise praise for God's anticipated intervention and victory in his behalf (vs. 1-4). Then, as further reason for his trust in God's positive intervention in his behalf, the Psalmist casts his mind back in time to rehearse God's past willing intervention in behalf of the oppressed and downtrodden who put their trust in Him (vs. 5-6). This remembrance of God's past actions in behalf of the victimized, the oppressed and downtrodden, can serve to strengthen trust in God for all those who are in present need of God's intervention.

Having briefly rehearsed God's willing help to those who trusted him in the past, the Psalmist draws broad conclusions and lessons. In doing so, the Psalmist's vision expands from being merely personal and parochial to global. This, anyway, is how I understand verses 7-12.

Those who truly know God, know that His interests and concerns are not limited and parochial. He not only governs in Israel, but the world over. This insight is consistent with the insight and proclamation found at the beginning and end of the previous Psalm—what I have called an apotheosis.

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

Over the length of the Book, the Psalmists come back to God's worldwide rule over and over again.

God's governance is not only worldwide. Is always and universally just and equitable. His governance does not apply only to the powerful and influential—the world's “worthies.” Indeed, as first and perhaps ultimate proof of God's just and equitable worldwide governance, the Psalmist offers God's strong defense and support for the world's oppressed and downtrodden, whose suffering and needs He never ignores. This, too, becomes one of the Psalmists' common refrains.

“Because of the ruin brought upon the downtrodden  
and the pain induced cry of the impoverished,  
I will immediately arise,” promises YHWH.  
“I will provide them with protection against those who hold them in contempt.”<sup>1</sup>

Such promises, so oft repeated, are sure.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 12.<sup>5</sup>



“YHWH’s promises are sure promises.  
They are like silver refined in an earthen furnace,  
refined to perfection.”<sup>2</sup>

God’s defense of the oppressed and downtrodden is not only one of, if not the principal evidence of his just governance, it is a cause for celebration and a reason to praise God.

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

Really, to this point in the Psalms, the only oppressed and downtrodden individual we have heard from or about has been the Psalmist, himself. But in this Psalm, we find the Psalmist’s mind turning from himself to all those who suffer grief and oppression as he. Perhaps in reviewing examples of God’s past acts of deliverance, the Psalmist thought once more on the oppression of Israel in Egypt and, periodically, that of Israel’s neighbors.

This turning of the mind from oneself to others is a common response found among those who have experienced God’s help and deliverance after passing through oppressive suffering, whatever form it might take. We think of Enos who, having been redeemed of God, “began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them” (Enos 1.<sup>9</sup>).

As we proceed through Psalm 9/10, we will see that the Psalmist’s mind not only turns to those oppressed as he, but to oppressors such as his. But, before this, the Psalmist will illuminate other lessons and find additional encouragement in the lessons of the past. He will renew his call for help in his present circumstances. He will pray that all, the world over, will learn the lessons of history, trust and rely on God, and submit themselves to God so that He might act in their lives as well.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 12.<sup>6</sup>

## m editation 4— psalm 9.<sup>7-12</sup>

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- <sup>13</sup>Look favorably upon me, YHWH,  
and respond to the mistreatment perpetrated by those who oppose me,  
raising me from death's door
- <sup>14</sup>so that I may innumerate all the reasons to praise You in Şîyōn's gates;  
so that I may publicly rejoice because of the deliverance You provide (author's translation).

Though the enemies are back after the apotheosis of Psalm 8, the Psalmist can already see them in retreat due to God's intervention (1-4). He can anticipate his enemies' demise, in part, because he knows of God's past actions against enemies—actions that left entire nations in ruin (5-6). God's past actions against enemies shows Him to be a just and worldwide ruler who cares for and comes to the defense of the oppressed and downtrodden. For this reason, God is worthy of praise. The good news about Him should be proclaimed the world over (7-12).

Having established for himself these global-sized realities, the Psalmist once more makes his own personal plea known. As but one of those oppressed and downtrodden, the Psalmist asks that God act against his oppressors, whose aim is his complete destruction.

“Look favorably upon me, YHWH,  
and respond to the mistreatment perpetrated by those who oppose me,  
raising me from death's door...”

Then, the Psalmist assures God, he can and will praise God for His help. The Psalmist lacks the capacity, of course, to send his praise out into the world to the extent that God deserves. But he can be diligent and effective within his sphere of influence, however small and humble. So, the Psalmist promises that he will speak incessantly of all that God does and can do. He will “innumerate all the reasons to praise You in Şîyōn's gates.” Zion is his sphere of influence, and he will make sure Zion's inhabitants have every reason to praise and honor and trust and follow God.

Here, we think of the counsel given to one, Oliver Cowdery, and think that the Psalmist felt much as Oliver was counseled to feel and act: “He shall not suppose that he can say enough in my cause” (DC 24.<sup>10</sup>). No, one can speak often enough or with sufficiently elevated language to describe the infinite and indescribable Being called “God.”

“Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord?  
Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy,  
and of his long-suffering towards the children of men?  
Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.”<sup>1</sup>

But none of this will keep the Psalmist from trying. And his exuberant praise of God will not be cautious and measured. His praise of God will be loud, and very, very public.

“so that I may publicly rejoice because of the deliverance You provide.

Here, we think of the repeated admonition that in proclaiming the good news about God one should “lift

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 26.<sup>16</sup>

up your voice as with the sound of a trump, both long and loud,”<sup>2</sup> with the “sound of rejoicing,”<sup>3</sup> sparing nothing.<sup>4</sup> Yes, only a very public and loud voice would do as one proclaimed “Hosanna, blessed be the name of the most high God.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, while far below angels, the worshipper “like unto angels of God”<sup>6</sup> proclaims the wonder of God.

Little wonder, then, that Alma expressed, “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth.”<sup>7</sup> But such was not his lot. Neither is it mine or yours. It is enough, as it was with the Psalmist, to stand in the sphere in which we find ourselves, for “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word.”<sup>8</sup> So let us do our part, speaking often and loudly of a God who is too big for our biggest and brightest and loudest exclamations.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>2</sup> See DC 34.<sup>6</sup>; 24.<sup>12</sup>; 30.<sup>9</sup>; 33.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> DC 28.<sup>16</sup>; 29.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> DC 34.<sup>10</sup>; 33.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> DC 36.<sup>3</sup>; 19.<sup>37</sup>; 39.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>6</sup> DC 42.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Alma 29.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Alma Al. 29.<sup>8</sup>

- <sup>15</sup>Nations have sunk in the very pit that they themselves dug;  
their feet ensnared in the trap that they themselves hid.  
<sup>16</sup>YHWH is known for the way he governs—  
in those guilty of malevolence being ensnared by their own devices.  
<sup>17</sup>Those so guilty go to Še'ôl,  
even every nation that disregards 'êlôhîm.  
<sup>18</sup>But truly the destitute are never forgotten,  
or the hope of the disadvantaged ever lost (author's translation)

Surrounded by enemies who leveled accusations of wrongdoing against him in Psalms 3-7, the Psalmist fully expected God's help in defending him against attack. His confidence was based first on God's character, as God was both just in judgement and unwaveringly devoted to him personally. Second, the Psalmist was, in fact, innocent of the accusations made against him.

After the apotheosis of Psalm 8, in which there is no mention of enemies or attackers, enemies are back in Psalm 9. Once more, however, the Psalmist is confident in God, anticipating his enemies in retreat due to God's intervention (1-4). In addition to his previously stated reasons for confidence in God, the Psalmist adds yet another: God has acted in the past against unhallowed enemies. These actions had left entire nations given to hostility in ruin (5-6). God's past actions against enemies shows Him to be a just and worldwide ruler who cares for and comes to the defense of the oppressed and downtrodden, of whom, the Psalmist is one. For this reason, God is worthy of praise. The good news about Him should be proclaimed the world over (7-12).

With these facts in mind, the Psalmist appeals once more for God's help, with the promise that when God has come to his aid he will joyfully and publicly praise God without restraint (13-14). In making this appeal, he returns to the lessons of the past and draws several conclusions.

First, history teaches the Psalmist that once a strong nation embarks on the path of malevolence and hostility toward other nations, it will, sooner or later, become the victim of others' malevolence and hostility. In a sense, one can foretell a nation's future by this rule. A nation's future can be forecast by the way it presently conducts itself on the world stage. The same can be said of individuals. Individuals who engage in malevolence and hostility toward others will find themselves the target of malevolence and hostility. What goes around comes around, as the modern saying goes.

The Psalmist's second insight concerns the reality of God's good judgment, His wisdom. He knows how this world works and has given advice and counsel about it. He has warned against malevolence and hostility at both the individual and global level and has revealed the inalterable consequences of such conduct. Whatever else Še'ôl is, it is the consequence of malevolence and hostility. It is the eruption and disruption of chaos. It is death and destruction, both for individuals and nations.

We come now to the Psalmist's very important third insight gleaned from the history of God's dealings with and among human beings. Earlier in the Psalm, the Psalmist had confessed his belief that

“Those who know Your character, put their trust in You,  
for You never abandon those who seek You, YHWH” (vs. 10).

We can assume that this is true at both the micro and macro level, at the individual and national level. But the Psalmist is insistent on bringing God's dependability right down to the lowest levels of society: to

those who are devalued and dismissed, and thus targeted with and victimized by the malevolence and hostility of those whom society values more; those who are wealthy and powerful and influential.

“But truly the destitute are never forgotten,  
or the hope of the downtrodden ever lost.”

Though God is unimaginably high and mighty, he never forgets the low and powerless.

“Though YHWH is exalted, still He takes notice of the lowly,  
while He remains distant with the exalted.”<sup>1</sup>

Though in his might He is creator of “heaven and earth and ocean,” He is a God of lowliness. As such, he is

“the One who effects justice for the oppressed,  
the One who provides food for the hungry,  
YHWH, who liberates those held captive,  
YHWH, who gives sight to the blind,  
YHWH, who lifts those who are exhausted,  
YHWH, who loves those who do right,  
YHWH, who watches after foreigners;  
He adopts orphans and widows  
but undermines the pursuits of the malevolently immoral.”<sup>2</sup>

The Lord is particularly watchful over those victimized, oppressed, downtrodden, and impoverished—perhaps because so few watch over them and so many victimize them. As the Lord began to explain the character of Zion to Joseph Smith and to prepare the prophet to restructure the world through its principles, He made sure Joseph understood one of His principal motivations for Zion’s establishment: “the poor have complained before me.”<sup>3</sup> Such it always is, as the Psalmist bears witness.

After a final plea (vss. 19-20), in Psalm 10 the Psalmist will return to this theme with a vengeance as he clearly delineates “the pursuits of the malevolently immoral.”

The nations of this world would do well to give heed to the Psalmist’s insights found in Psalms 9 and 10—remember, the two psalms should be read as one. Those who have a voice in the election of their leaders would do well to give heed to these insights.

The Psalmist is not the only one issuing forth a warning to the nations and their inhabitants.

“For I, the Almighty, have laid my hands upon the nations, to scourge them for their wickedness.

And verily I say unto you, the rest of my servants, go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit, in your several callings, unto the great and notable cities and villages, reproving the world in righteousness of all their unrighteous and ungodly deeds, setting forth clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days. For, with you saith the Lord Almighty, I will rend their kingdoms; I will not only shake the earth, but the starry heavens shall tremble.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 138.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 146.<sup>5-9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> DC 38.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>4</sup> DC 84.<sup>96, 117-118</sup>

All this, for the oppressed, the downtrodden, the impoverished; for those victimized by this world with its perverted and twisted values and contempt for the downtrodden.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

<sup>19</sup>Arise YHWH. Mere mortals should not prevail.

Nations should be governed by You

<sup>20</sup>Give them, YHWH, insecurity

that nations come to understand that they are mortal.

In Psalm 9, the Psalmist is once more faced with those who oppose him (vss. 3 and 13). As he considers this, the Psalmist calls to mind the reality that malevolent and oppressive forces—both individual and national—opposed to a well-ordered society and, especially, the vulnerable in society, have always been present. He remembers that in the past when Israel faced malevolent enemies, God came to Israel’s help and that those hostile nations were brought to complete destruction (vss. 5-6, 15-17).

Having recalled God’s past help against antagonistic forces, the Psalmist draws conclusions about God, His Character, and His present stance visa via those who are hostile to the Psalmist. God is just and right in His world governance. God is especially solicitous of the oppressed, the destitute, and the downtrodden (vss. 7-12, 16-18). In making these discoveries about the character of God and in knowing that he, himself, is one of the world’s ever-present oppressed, the Psalmist is confident that God will respond to his appeal for help against his adversaries (vss. 1-4, 13-14).

Clearly the Psalmist is grateful for and personally encouraged by what history has taught him about the character of God. But the Psalmist is no narcissist. He thinks of others. As he looks outside himself to the larger world, he wants others, many others, entire nations of others to learn what he has learned. He wants the oppressed everywhere to find comfort and trust in God. He wants all nations to know their place, acknowledge their inadequacies, and allow themselves to be governed by God.

So it is that the Psalmist pleads to God that He demonstrate to the nations their vulnerabilities so that “nations come to understand that they are mortal.” Such revelation, often utterly unanticipated, is life-changing at the individual level. Moses was forever changed by his encounter with God.

“\*It was for the space of many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man; and he said unto himself: ‘Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed.’”<sup>1</sup>

The Psalmist expressed a similar idea.

“The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man,  
that they are vanity.”<sup>2</sup>

“Give us help from trouble:  
for vain is the help of man.”<sup>3</sup>

“Human beings are simply worthless;  
humankind completely untrustworthy.  
On a weight scale, they are, combined, less than air.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moses 1.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 94.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 108.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 62.<sup>9</sup>

But just as importantly, this revelation is necessary at a national and global level. Nations must understand, as Isaiah pronounced,

“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,  
and are counted as the small dust of the balance:  
behold, he [God] taketh up the isles as a very little thing.”<sup>5</sup>

Such global and national awareness and humility are necessary if malevolence and hostility toward one another and especially toward the vulnerable are to come to an end. We still wait for the Lord to teach the nations their lowly place, even if it be through the things they suffer. For the nations must “come to understand that they are mortal.” The vulnerable must be defended and, more, know victory over their oppressors.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 40.<sup>15</sup>



## meditation 7— psalm 10 (introductory)

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In considering Psalm 10, we should remember where we are and where we have been. After what many consider to be two introductory psalms (1-2), the following five psalms of complaint addressed the same or a similar situation in which the Psalmist was under attack by those who accused him of wrongdoing and having lost access to God and His help (ps. 3-7). The Psalmist maintained his innocence in relation to the specific charges and expectantly anticipated that God would come to his aid. The Psalmist's expectation of God's help, however, was not based solely upon his own innocence in relation to the charges. It was also based upon the character of God: God is unwaveringly faithful to those who look to Him.

After a sort of apotheosis in which the Psalmist observed the preeminence of God in both this world and in the cosmos, then saw and wondered at God's interest in lowly humanity (ps. 8), the Psalmist is made to reject any and all parochial understanding of God and His willing assistance in human affairs (ps. 9). Thus, in Psalm 9, the Psalmist's view turns somewhat global. He sees God as a just world-wide ruler. He recalls God's past acts of help against national enemies and finds in this yet another reason to trust God to act, not only in his own life but in the life of all the abused and downtrodden, of whom the Psalmist now sees himself as but one of many the world over. Mortals, especially those who oppose God and the well-ordered society by acting as abusers and oppressors of others, should take heed, and understand their smallness and vulnerability in the face of God's preeminence and His just rule in the world and the universe.

In light of these facts about God, the Psalmist begins Psalm 10 by expressing dismay at God's seeming absence in the distress which the Psalmist and other oppressed individuals with whom he numbers himself are made to endure (vs. 1).

Now, to this point, the Psalmist has been somewhat lean in his description of those who attack him and, he now understands, many others who are vulnerable to abuse. The enemies and oppressors are many (3.<sup>2</sup>). They discourage trust in God (3.<sup>2</sup>; 4.<sup>6</sup>). They utilize lies as a weapon (4.<sup>2</sup>; 5.<sup>6,9</sup>; 7.<sup>14</sup>). They are violent (5.<sup>6</sup>; 9.<sup>12</sup>). They are relentless (7.<sup>12</sup>). They are deadly—temporally and spiritually (7.<sup>12-16</sup>). But in Psalm 10, the Psalmist goes further. Here, he not only describes the abusers, naming them “malevolently immoral,” but exposes the inner motivations, thoughts, and rationales by which they conduct and justify their malevolent attitudes and behaviors.

To be sure, God is the principal figure of the Book of Psalms just as the “tree of life” is the principal figure of the Lehi's inspired dream found in 1 Nephi 8. We are moved and inspired by the portrayal and testimony of the great and incomparable Being of whom the Psalmist bears witness. But, just as Lehi identifies and describes forces that stand in opposition to the tree—forces represented by the great and spacious building—the Psalmist identifies and describes forces that stand in opposition to God and to a well-ordered society—both in time and eternity.

Ideally, I suppose, we would act rightly by coming to know and striving to emulate God, the perfect role model, best seen in Jesus' portrayal of God as found on the pages of the New Testament Gospels. However, as history and the present suggest, the exemplary life of Jesus has largely fallen on deaf ears.

At the other extreme, we might be kept in the right way through harsh threats, as Enos suggests in his rather pessimistic view of human nature.

“And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things—stirring them up continually to keep

them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a middle road between optimistic presentation of God and pessimistic presentation of threat. That middle ground is to portray in stark and graphic detail the motives and actions of those who oppose God and oppress the disadvantaged, and then hope we can and will look in the mirror to see what we see there reflected back at us. We must be cognizant and knowing about both God and the forces that oppose Him.

Outside the New Testament Gospels where God is portrayed in the person of Jesus, no book of scripture is better at describing God than the Book of Psalms. At the same time, no book is more consistent and descriptive of the “malevolently immoral” that oppose God and have dominated the world stage from its very beginnings than the Book of Psalms. And among the individual psalms, this psalm stands near the top as it is here that we get the Book’s first extended meditation on the wicked, the ungodly, the malevolently immoral in all their ugliness.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Enos 1.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Why, Yahweh, are You now so standoffish?  
Why do You remain absent during these distressing times? (author's translation)

Some years ago I met with a student who was angry with God. Hopping mad, in fact. When I asked her if she had told God how she felt, she looked at me like I was out of my mind. "Of course not. I can't say that to Him!"

I asked her, "So, you think He doesn't already know?" She realized immediately how silly it was to not "go public" with something that God already knew. She later informed me that things had gotten better between her and God since she had decided to always be completely honest with Him.

One of the things that I appreciate most about the Psalmists, is their brutal honesty with God. The Psalmist begins this psalm by expressing his perplexity. He has just reexamined in his mind God's past acts in delivering Israel from its enemies (9.<sup>5-6, 15</sup>)—Psalm 9 and 10, remember, were once a single psalm. He cannot understand God's inactivity in the face of the present distress. He will go on in the psalm to describe the distress.

I believe that God desires and treasures such honesty as that in which the Psalmist engages. He appreciates, of course, hearing our expressions of love of and trust in Him. However, He is no less appreciative when we confess our true feelings, even if they are something like, "I'm not liking You very much right now," or "I'm really not sure You know what You are doing."

I view such honesty on the part of the Psalmists as one of their greatest strengths and reflective of deep and profound faith and trust in God. I believe that God views such honesty on our part as a sign of our love and trust in Him. When we are sincerely honest with God, I believe, the relationship between Him and us grows stronger. We learn to trust Him more. And, perhaps, He comes to trust us more.

Or, at least, I like to think so, because, for me, today, the Psalmist's complaint, "Why do You remain absent during these distressing times?" resonates deeply. I find our present times extremely distressing. I am distressed with my nation's past and present love affair with perhaps the single most immoral, anti-Christ, and dangerous politician—if he can indeed be called that—in our nation's history. I am distressed at the harm this love affair has done to the moral fiber—such as it was—of our nation. Every day I lament Alma's too-true lament

"Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men."<sup>1</sup>

I am distressed at the dishonesty and greed of our politicians who have been corrupted by corporate greed and dishonesty.

"Your leaders are criminals,  
collaborators with thieves.  
All of them want bribes,  
and, more, actively seek out kickbacks."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 45.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 1.<sup>23</sup>

I am distressed that citizens of my country, including those who call themselves Christians, have largely accepted and adopted the idolatrous propaganda—worthy, really, of the name, “false doctrine”—of the business class. I am distressed that in their inability or unwillingness to discern the false doctrine and abject greed of the elite business and political classes, the middle class has adopted, as wicked King Noah’s people, the same idolatrous and abject greed.

“Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them.”<sup>3</sup>

I am distressed that this abject and idolatrous greed has brought suffering upon millions of innocent people—men, women, and, most distressingly, children—in the lower classes.

“O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies—because of the praise of the world? Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not? Yea, why do ye build up your secret abominations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans to mourn before the Lord, and also the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry unto the Lord from the ground, for vengeance upon your heads?”<sup>4</sup>

I am distressed that so many in my nation have willfully accepted and propagated patently and obvious lies and conspiracy theories rather than face the truth that they are descending into darkness and destruction because of their idolatrous ideologies and the behavior that flows from them.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”<sup>5</sup>

I could go on. I am distressed. The Psalmist makes a lot of grand claims about God’s active deliverance of those who suffer through the oppression of others. But I am not seeing it. God looks to be inactive and absent to me. I am distressed at the human behavior I witness. I am distressed at God’s seeming indifference and inaction—though, I confess, I am not sure what I would have Him do.

The reader may wonder why, here, I must rant so, and stir up all this modern muck. Must I always come back to TFG, our putrefied politics, our idolatrous materialism, and our inability to discern the vileness they bring into our daily lives and the suffering they heap upon the vulnerable? You will see, if you will, how very applicable my distress is to this 10<sup>th</sup> Psalm. After all his complaints about his enemies found in Psalms 3-7 and 9, the Psalmist will finally give a name to those who distress him—the “wicked” or “malevolent immoral”—and provide detailed accounting of their character, motivations, and the global suffering they cause. He will reveal the global reach and character of the malevolent and immoral. His descriptions will all look very, very familiar. Uncomfortably familiar. Psalm 10 represents an intense rant against the malevolently immoral.

So, yes, the Psalmist’s complaint resonates deeply in me,

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<sup>3</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mormon 8.<sup>38-40</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 4.<sup>3-4</sup>

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

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

## meditation 9— psalm 10.<sup>2-3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>In self-importance, the malevolently immoral vigorously pursues the disadvantaged.  
The disadvantaged are ensnared by the plans they conceive.

<sup>3</sup>For the malevolently immoral finds fulfillment only in satisfying their own lust,  
and laud one accumulating unjust profits—he who shows disdain for YHWH!” (author’s translation).

The Book of Psalms began with a macarism, a statement of happiness, fulfillment, and security. They are fulfilled, happy, and secure who “choose YHWH’s direction” and “consult his *Tôrâ* at all times.”<sup>1</sup> But before this positive statement, came a negative one, a warning. They are fulfilled, happy, and secure who “do *not* walk by the direction of the malevolently immoral.”<sup>2</sup> One follows the directions of God or of the malevolently immoral. The latter oppose God. There are those who resist and oppose God and those who love and seek to follow Him. The reality and existence of such opposition must always be in mind, and never forgotten.

In Psalm 2, the Psalmist wondered that not only individuals but entire nations resisted and opposed God.

“Why do the nations raise such a ruckus,  
and entire populations grouse to no avail?

The world’s kings offer resistance;  
world leaders form a united front  
against YHWH

and against his *Māšîaḥ*.

‘We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control, [they say].’<sup>3</sup>”

This resistance and opposition to God shows the nations of this world and its leadership to have been infiltrated and dominated by the malevolently immoral, whom Psalm 1 already marked as opposers of God.

In Psalms 3-7, many resisted, opposed, and attacked the Psalmist who was a devoted, if imperfect, follower of God. In these five psalms, the Psalmist was somewhat lean in his description of those who opposed him and, he comes to understand in Psalm 9, many others who are vulnerable to abuse. Those who oppose the Psalmist are many (3.<sup>2</sup>). They discourage trust in God (3.<sup>2</sup>; 4.<sup>6</sup>). They utilize lies as a weapon (4.<sup>2</sup>; 5.<sup>6,9</sup>; 7.<sup>14</sup>). They are violent (5.<sup>6</sup>; 9.<sup>12</sup>). They are relentless (7.<sup>12</sup>). They are deadly—temporally and spiritually (7.<sup>12-16</sup>).

After a brief respite from these hostile forces in Psalm 8, In Psalm 9-10, the Psalmist is once more dismayed to find himself opposed by hostile forces (see, for our purposes, 10.<sup>1</sup>). But here, in the ten verses comprised of verses 2-11 of Psalm 10, the Psalmist launches into his first of many extended meditations on the specific and ugly attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and character of the opposition: the wicked, the ungodly, the malevolently immoral. In this meditation, we consider verses 2 and 3.

“In self-importance, the malevolently immoral vigorously pursues the disadvantaged.  
The disadvantaged are ensnared by the plans they conceive.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 2.<sup>1-3</sup>

For the malevolently immoral finds fulfillment only in satisfying their own lust,  
and laud one accumulating unjust profits—he who shows disdain for YHWH!”

As we noted, the first Psalm began with a warning concerning individuals it calls “malevolently immoral.” Their counsel stands in direct opposition to God and the direction He provides in His *Tôrâ*. The Psalm closed out by mentioning this class of people three more times in verses 4, 5, and 6. They make their next appearance by name in Psalm 7,<sup>9</sup> where they are those who oppose the Psalmist and falsely accuse him of wrongdoing. They appear by name again in Psalm 9 (vss. 5, 16, 17). Here they are individuals who possess and act with hostility toward others. Their lifestyle will land them in hell.

The Hebrew word for these individuals is *rāšā*’. A wide variety of translators and translation committees have traditionally and most often translated this word as “wicked.” “Ungodly” is not uncommon. 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 a character flaw in the individuals called *rāšā*’. Just as importantly, such individuals are *rāšā*’ because they are engaged in willful and purposeful public thoughts and behaviors that they fully recognize as likely being harmful to others and to society as a whole.

As we have said of the word, *hesed*—our, “unwavering devotion”—Hebrew, *rāšā*’ feels too big for a single English word translation. Our “malevolently immoral” attempts to get at all described in the previous paragraph. “Malevolence,” is no accident. The word 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.

The two verses explored in this meditation put a little more meat on the bones and expand upon the character of the *rāšā*’. The malevolently immoral act out of exaggerated self-importance. The malevolently immoral also act out of lustful appetites which they seek to satisfy above all other considerations. They associate with and champion those who acquire material wealth through any means, even those that are fraudulent, giving evidence to the fact that they put worldly, materialistic achievements above all else. Indeed, their participation with and championing of those who fraudulently acquire material wealth—the most common way of acquiring material wealth, according to the Hebrew prophets—shows them to be in opposition to God, Himself.

As a corollary to their self-importance and lust, the malevolently immoral necessarily possess a deflated value of and contempt for others. Their contempt is particularly acute in regard to society’s disadvantaged. They purposefully, actively, and vigorously plan, calculate, scheme, and act in ways that put society’s disadvantaged at even further disadvantage.

Indeed, the *rāšā*’, the malevolently immoral, and the *’ānī/’ānāw*—the disadvantaged, downtrodden, poor, exploited, abused, and oppressed—are engaged in a macabre dance. Both are largely defined by the other and the interaction that takes place between them. The malevolence and immorality of the *rāšā*’ is found most clearly in their conduct toward and treatment of the *’ānī/’ānāw*. The disadvantage, downtroddenness, exploitation, abuse, and oppression of the *’ānī/’ānāw* is largely the result of the malevolent immorality of the *rāšā*’.

It is perhaps no accident that the *’ānī/’ānāw* appeared for the first time in the Book of Psalms in association with the Book’s first detailed and extended meditation on the *rāšā*’ (Ps. 9-10). There could not be the one without the other. “There was no poor among them,” we are informed of Zion.<sup>4</sup> It may just be that there are poor because of the existence of the malevolently immoral. The malevolently immoral

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<sup>4</sup> Moses 7.<sup>18</sup>

create them. Where there is an absence of the malevolently immoral, there is an absence of the poor.’ The Book of Psalms will frequently return to the relationship between the downtrodden and the malevolently immoral.

Scriptures such as Psalm 9 and 10 with passages such as this one (vss. 2 and 3), serve as both guide and warning to individuals and society today. When we see individuals and society show disdain for and mistreat society’s disadvantaged members, we are fully justified in concluding that those individuals and societies are malevolently immoral. When we see large segments of society empower—through election or otherwise—those who disdain and mistreat the disadvantaged and who enact and maintain legislation and policies that carry out disdain and mistreatment of the disadvantaged through public policy, we can call that segment of society, malevolently immoral. There are times—times such as we are currently living in—when the character of society in relation to the disadvantaged is malevolently immoral. And we can confidently conclude that such individuals and societies act contrary to the character and will of God. They stand in opposition to Him in the same way that the great and spacious building stood in opposition to Him.<sup>5</sup>

Psalm 9 and 10, along with many other psalms provide ample warning concerning the attitudes, behaviors, and fate of malevolently immoral individuals and societies that belittle, abuse, and oppress the disadvantaged and downtrodden. Indeed, as we will see, the Psalmist is often driven to inspired imprecation against the malevolently immoral. We can understand why.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>5</sup> See 1 Nephi 8



## meditation 10—psalm 10.<sup>4-6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The malevolently immoral, consistent with their stubborn arrogance, are unreflective.

<sup>5</sup>’ēlōhîm is not considered in any of their plans.

<sup>5</sup>They twist ’ēlōhîm’s principles.

<sup>6</sup>’ēlōhîm’s elevated judgement opposes them.

Anything that would restraint them they blow off.

<sup>6</sup>They say to themselves, “I cannot be toppled.

My future holds no misfortune” (author’s translation).

In interpreting Psalms 3-7, we treated them as if they all addressed the same or a very similar circumstance. There, the Psalmist was opposed by those who leveled false accusations of wrongdoing against him. Though attackers were absent in Psalm 8—a kind of apotheosis, as we understand it, in which the Psalmist view of things becomes somewhat global—they are back in Psalms 9 and 10, which should be read as one psalm.

In Psalms 3-7, the enemies were for the most part personal and private, the Psalmist being their primary target. The Psalmist’s main concern was for himself and the damage those who opposed him might do to his reputation and the harm they might inflict in and upon his life. But, perhaps influenced by the global insights of Psalm 8, in Psalm 9-10, the Psalmist considered not only his personal enemies but those which his own nation faced in the past (9.<sup>5-6, 15</sup>). Here, the enemies become less personal and more global—although the *rāšā’*, the malevolently immoral, are always mentioned in the singular, the verbs associated with their thoughts and behaviors alternate back and forth between singular and plural. It is almost as if the Psalmist has realized that his private experiences with those who oppose him are not unique. Rather, the malevolently immoral exist not only as individuals but as a class and infest the entire world.

Perhaps because the malevolently immoral—though the Psalmist did not so name them in Psalms 3-7, the characteristics, desires, and actions of his enemies there is consistent with what he has to say about the malevolently immoral in Psalm 9-10—are everywhere present in human affairs and society, the Psalmist engages in an extended meditation on their character and actions. This meditation extends from 10.<sup>2-11</sup>. It is the first of several that we will find in the Book of Psalms.

In Psalm 10.<sup>1</sup>, the Psalmist gives expression to the dismay he felt at God’s inaction in the face of the present distressing times and the dangers posed by the malevolently immoral. No doubt, he is dismayed at God’s seeming inaction on his behalf, but perhaps the Psalmist is also dismayed that God might stand aloof from the pain that so many malevolently immoral brought upon so many, especially the disadvantaged, the downtrodden, and the powerless. In 10.<sup>2-3</sup>, the Psalmist observes that it is self-importance and lust that drives the malevolently immoral to purposefully plot and act against the interest of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. He recognizes in the behavior of the malevolently immoral more than a simple flaunting of societal norms. He recognizes a disdain for God, Himself. This observation leads him to the reflections that we find in today’s passage, 10.<sup>4-6</sup>.

Though the malevolently immoral are exceptionally self-interested, their arrogance makes it impossible for them to engage in any type of introspection that might lead to self-awareness. There is a big difference between being self-interested, which seems to look outward into the world for what it has to offer, and self-awareness, which is inward looking. We will leave it to the psychologists to explain this observation of the Psalmist.

As the malevolently immoral look out into the world, and especially as they make their plans in opposition to the interests of the disadvantaged and downtrodden, they give no more thought to God and his principles than they give to being introspective. If they do for a moment consider God and his

principles, which inevitable stand in opposition to their desires and actions, they pooh-pooh anything that might threaten to check their lusts and find ways to twist divine principles to match and justify their own behavior. They simply will not accept any suggestion, whether from man or God, that their attitudes and behaviors might be wrong, for this might lead to a diminishment of their ultimate desires: the things of this world, which are most often acquired through false worldly values and devious, often violent means.

In their arrogance, the malevolently immoral cannot give room to the possibility of failure. Theirs is always a trajectory of onwards and upwards. Failure and misfortune are the inheritance of the weak and disadvantaged. The doctrine of the malevolently immoral is fully compatible with modern Darwinian capitalism and the survival of the fittest, in which the true God, who is to be served, is replaced with an idolatrous one, who serves humans such as to guarantee success.

The Psalmist's observations are important. And timely. Our society would do well to consider them. To ponder them. To internalize them. To act upon them. To let them bring it to repentance.

We have spoken of the Psalmist's "observations" concerning the malevolently immoral. We have spoken of the Psalmist "meditating" on the character and behavior of the malevolently immoral. But we would not want to leave the wrong impression. We would not want to leave the impression that such "observation" and "meditation" are carried out in the spirit of intellectualism or philosophy, or that it is conducted in an emotionally calm and detached manner.

We could just as easily have called what the Psalmist does here "complaint," and "jeremiad," even. The Psalmist is not a detached observer. He is passionate about what he sees as he looks out into the world. So, rather than simply mulling over his observations in his own mind, the Psalmist is presenting them to God. And his presentation is not intended to demonstrate his intellectual and observational acumen. No, the Psalms hopes to waken a God who seems to be slumbering. The Psalmist hopes to move God to action against the malevolently immoral—against their success, at the very least, but, if need be, then against the very fiends, themselves.

We are in full agreement with the Psalmist's observations concerning the destructiveness of the malevolently immoral in the lives of individuals and societies. Our agreement with him extends so far as to our possessing the same hope: that God will act to put a stop to the decadent arrogance, the unchecked lust, and the purposeful destructiveness of the malevolently immoral.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

<sup>4</sup>The malevolently immoral, consistent with their stubborn arrogance, are unreflective.

<sup>5</sup>’Īlōhîm is not considered in any of their plans.

<sup>5</sup>They twist God’s principles.

God’s elevated judgement opposes them.

Anything that would restraint them they blow off.

<sup>6</sup>They say to themselves, “I cannot be toppled.

My future holds no misfortune” (author’s translation).

Already in this psalm, the Psalmist has expressed his confusion about God’s inaction in the face of the abuse heaped upon society’s vulnerable (verses 2-3). This abuse flows from “the wicked” who are rich and powerful and care only about feeding their insatiable appetite for wealth and power—a selfishness and appetite they find exemplary.

In this reading, the Psalmist identifies the causes for the sorry moral state of the wealthy and malevolently immoral. As we would expect in an ancient society in which God’s existence is taken for granted, the immoral are not atheists. But, in accepting his existence, the wealthy and malevolently immoral are contemptuous of God. Distressed, and feeling condemned and constrained by God’s lofty values, the wicked expect God to stay in his lane and give them open highway to do whatever they please. He simply has no business stepping out of the realm of the sacred and dabbling in the material and profane world of, for example, economics and politics. Any suggestion that this profane realm is imbued with the sacred and that immoral and self-serving attitudes and actions in this realm have far-reaching negative consequences in this world and the world to come is dismissed with a contemptuous snort. The malevolently immoral simply will not allow his appetites to be restrained, nor will he accept being held responsible for his foul deeds. Not even by God. Enconced securely behind his gilded gates, he demands a theology that pronounces him safe from all misfortune and immune from accountability.

If all this sounds familiar, modern even, it should. This stubborn resistance to God and the righteous checks he places on human greed pervades modern America. This resistance is accepted and justified by America’s middle classes. It is exuberantly adopted and lived by America’s upper classes and power elites. And, finally, this stubborn resistance to God and the righteous checks he places on human greed is the cause of much of the suffering that America’s lower classes endure at the hands of those who claim to know and love God and so should know better. Notwithstanding the hope and vain claims to the contrary, there will be a day of reckoning.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

## m editation 12— psalm 10.<sup>7-10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Their mouth is full of cursing and injurious lies:  
while misery and cruelty flow from their tongue.

<sup>8</sup>They sit in ambush outside villages.  
From concealed places they slay the innocent;  
their eyes peer out at the vulnerable.

<sup>9</sup>Like a lion, they lie in wait from a concealed place in the brush.  
They lie in ambush to seize the downtrodden.  
They seize the downtrodden, dragging him into their lair.

<sup>10</sup>They crouch low, hunch down,  
and fall upon the bones of the vulnerable (author's translation).

Though the Book of Psalms is primarily focused on God and his engagement with humanity, it recognizes that there are forces that exist and act in opposition to God. The importance of the latter reality can, perhaps, be seen in the fact that these opposing forces—given, among others, the name, “malevolently immoral”—appeared in the very first line of the very first verse of the very first Psalm. Indeed, they were mentioned even before God, Himself. The malevolently immoral were mentioned three more times in that first psalm. The Book of Psalms has much to say about the forces that oppose God. It would not be too much to say that this is one of the Book's principal themes.

Psalm 2 presented us with a view of global forces opposed to God.

“Why do the nations raise such a ruckus,  
and entire populations grouse to no avail?  
The world's kings offer resistance;  
world leaders form a united front  
against YHWH  
and against his Māšîaḥ.  
‘We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control.’”<sup>1</sup>

Then, in Psalms 3-7, the Psalmist was confronted by forces that opposed him. In the middle psalm of these five, the Psalmist came to believe that his enemies' unfounded opposition to him really represented opposition to God.

“Banish them because of the enormity of their legal overstep,  
since their defiance is really directed against You.”<sup>2</sup>

Here, we are reminded of Jesus' teaching through parable that whatever we do or don't do to one another we do to God.<sup>3</sup> It is our contention that though they were not named, “malevolently immoral,” in Psalm 2 or 3-7, those who oppose, respectively, God and the Psalmist in these psalms, are, in fact, part of the class called, “malevolently immoral.”

The Psalmist's principal concern in Psalms 3-7 was largely personal. However, after the apotheosis of

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 2.<sup>1-3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Matthew 25.<sup>31-46</sup>

Psalm 8 in which God is seen to be engaged the world over, Psalms 9-10 adopt a less private and more global attitude toward the malevolently immoral. Here, the Psalmist affirms that enemies such as his are present and active in the lives of individuals all over the world. With this global perspective, the Psalmist feels it necessary to describe the character and activities of the malevolently immoral in greater detail than he has heretofore done.

We are the beneficiaries of his insights. But, within Psalm 10 the purpose is less didactic and more plaintive. The Psalmist uses the description to move a God who seems, to him, inattentive and inactive (10.<sup>1</sup>), to action not only in his own life but in the life of all those suffering under the domination of the malevolently immoral.

In Psalm 10, the Psalmist describes the malevolently immoral as being self-interested and filled with lust. In their drive to fulfill their selfish interests they make the vulnerable and disadvantaged their primary target (vss. 2-3). Indeed, the disadvantaged seem to be a product of the attitudes and actions of the malevolently immoral. In Psalm 1, the directions of the malevolently immoral stand in opposition to the directions God provides in Torah (1.<sup>1-2</sup>). In Psalm 10, the malevolently immoral twist and blow off divine principles that would restrain their acting out of self-interest and lust (vs 4-5). With their exaggerated sense of self-importance, they also blow off any suggestion that they might suffer negative consequences for their actions (vs. 6).

This brings us to the verses under examination in this meditation. In Psalms 3-7, the Psalmist had identified his personal enemies as liars.

“How long will you men of repute smear my reputation?  
How long will you love falsehood  
and seek after deception?”<sup>4</sup>

“Nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven.”<sup>5</sup>

“If I have done this,  
if I bear responsibility for this wrong...”<sup>6</sup>

But in Psalm 10, we learn that lying and deception are recurring, calculated, and purposeful strategies the malevolently immoral use for achieving their immoral ends. However, we must not think of liars and lying in simple terms of propagating untruths, “alternative facts.” Rather, the lying of liars serves a purpose. Deception is an instrument of intentional harm and violence. The Psalmist stated this in Psalm 5 as he contemplated his enemies.

“Nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven  
*Ruinous intent* resides deep inside them.”<sup>7</sup>

So, now, the Psalmist identifies the same characteristic in the malevolently immoral.

“Their mouth is full of cursing and *injurious* lies:  
while *misery and cruelty* flow from their tongue.”

How injurious and cruel are they, these malevolently immoral? In complaining about his private enemies,

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 4.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 7.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>9</sup>

the Psalmist found something animalistic and inhuman in them.

“Rescue me lest he, as a lion, tear me to pieces;  
mutilate me with no chance of recovery.”<sup>8</sup>

In Psalm 10, the Psalmist expands upon this theme. With his global perspective, the Psalmist understands and confesses that the malevolently immoral are not to be thought of in terms of singularity. There is a whole pride of lions lurking, hunting, tearing, and devouring.

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

There is nothing in the behavior of the malevolently immoral that is accidental or haphazard. Their activities cannot be chalked up to “misunderstanding” or simple “error.” Their activities are well thought out and planned. They are planned in secrecy and stealth. They seek out and recruit collaborators (See Ps. 1.<sup>1</sup>). Their needs, their lusts, their appetites are voracious. Unlike animals, though, the appetite of the malevolently immoral is insatiable.

And, once more, their activities, their voracious appetite are turned especially upon the innocent, the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the downtrodden.

“They lie in ambush to seize the downtrodden.  
They seize the downtrodden, dragging him into their lair.”

Just as the lion instinctively sniffs out the weak gazelle in the herd and focuses its hunting efforts on it, the malevolently immoral—often hunting in packs, as lions do—devour the resources, the hopes, and the lives of the downtrodden and disadvantaged. How very brave and heroic of them!

The Book of Psalm began by promising fulfillment, security, happiness, and advancement to those who

“Choose YHWH’s direction,  
and consult his Tôrâ at all times.”<sup>9</sup>

This direction and guide with principles that lead to good living and happiness stood in opposition to the direction and principles offered by the malevolently immoral (1.<sup>1</sup>). In Psalm 10, the Psalmist provides us with further means to identify and avoid the deception of the malevolently immoral and the values they espouse.

The malevolently immoral give themselves away through their self-interest, their lust, their lying, their scheming, their disregard for the worth of others, and their violation of others for their own ends. Alongside all these giveaways, is their abuse, oppression, and attack against downtrodden, disadvantaged, and poor people. If it is “by their fruits” that we can know the “ravening wolves” that falsely pose as

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<sup>8</sup> Psalm 7.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>2</sup>

prophets,<sup>10</sup> it is by the individual's and society's treatment of the downtrodden and disadvantaged that we can know the malevolently immoral.

The Psalmist sees that they are a global force to be reckoned with. They are very active today. They have convinced entire societies that their path is the path of happiness. They have convinced entire societies to devalue and abuse the downtrodden and the disadvantages. They lie. This path is the path to misery and destruction for one and all not only in this world but in the world to come. As we witness the malevolently immoral hunt down and devour, we cry out with Psalmist,

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

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>10</sup> See Mt. 7.<sup>15</sup> ff.

- <sup>8</sup>They sit in ambush outside villages.  
From concealed places they slay the innocent;  
their eyes peer out at the vulnerable.
- <sup>9</sup>Like a lion, they lie in wait from a concealed place in the brush.  
They lie in ambush to seize the downtrodden.  
They seize the downtrodden, dragging him into their lair.
- <sup>10</sup>They crouch low, hunch down,  
and fall upon the bones of the vulnerable.
- <sup>11</sup>They say to themselves, “God pays no attention.  
He’s absent. He sees nothing, ever” (author’s translation).

As the Psalmist describes the thoughts and actions of the malevolently immoral in this, the tenth psalm, we would be remiss if we limited our insights into these thoughts and actions to a few individual bad apples. The fact is, there really are very few places in all scripture that contain a better description of the very nature of wickedness itself than that which is found in this psalm. So far in this psalm, the Psalmist has utilized a rich vocabulary to describe the malevolently immoral and the nature of their motives and actions. But finally, the Psalmist seems to conclude that the rich vocabulary is still insufficient to adequately describe the insidious nature of the immorality he seeks to describe. So, he resorts to imagery.

The wickedness that the malevolently immoral commit against the vulnerable, the poor, the downtrodden, the unsuspecting innocent is likened to the hunt of a lion. Like the crouching lion, the malevolently immoral attempt to hide what they are doing. They always call their wickedness something else. Giving it the reasonable, innocent sounding title—“capitalism” is one of my favorites. But propaganda cannot hide the reality. The violence is like the sound of a lion feasting upon the still warm flesh of its prey, during which feast the sharp white ivory of the lion’s teeth scrapes against the victim’s white bones. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

But, unlike lions that do not eat their own, the malevolently immoral do, thus becoming less hunters than cannibals. We are unsurprised when the Psalmist asks his horrifying question:

“How can they not understand, those who act so cruelly;  
those who devour My people as if they were eating some common bread,  
refusing to acknowledge YHWH?”<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, they continue to believe, or pretend to believe, that God cannot see through their camouflage; does not see what they do for the depravity that it is. But they would be wrong. In the end, no matter how low they crouch to avoid God’s judgement, they will not be able to hide from Him who sees all.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 14.<sup>4</sup>



- <sup>12</sup>Rise up, YHWH, my God!  
Strike out with Your power.  
Do not abandon the downtrodden,  
<sup>13</sup>on which basis the malevolently immoral could hold 'ēlōhîm in contempt,  
saying to themselves, “God doesn’t care.”  
<sup>14</sup>But You do see, indeed you do.  
You do look upon misfortune and vexation.  
It is in Your power.  
The helpless leaves it to You.  
You are the orphan’s protector.  
<sup>15</sup>Break the power of those guilty of malevolence and cruelty.  
Give full attention to their willful wrongdoing until it can’t be found (author’s translation).

So far in this psalm, the Psalmist has provided us with as good a description as anywhere in scripture of the depravity of the malevolently immoral, in particular in their oppression of the vulnerable and downtrodden. It is brutal. It is not a dog-eat-dog world. Rather, it is a predator-eat-prey world. The Psalmist has watched this world unfold before him and has expressed his perplexity, maybe even a little anger, over God’s silence and inactivity in the face of such brutality. Finally, the Psalmist seems to come to the end of his rope. He cannot take God’s inaction any longer.

If he is honest about his perplexity over God’s inactivity, he is no less honest in telling God what he expects and wants from God. He wants God to come to the rescue of the prey. Since the predator has no intentions of ceasing and desisting from his rampage—indeed, he refuses to see it as a rampage or acknowledge, if it is a rampage, that he can be held accountable for it—this rescue will entail striking out against the predator. God’s continued silence will only serve to reinforce the attitudes and actions of the wicked, thus allowing them to continue. This continuance will bring more suffering to those already suffering under the normal and natural trials of life.

“But.” Suddenly the Psalmist’s previous meditations on God’s past acts of rescue (Psalm 9), come back, full force into his mind. “But, you *do* see.” And not only “see.” God acknowledges the dire straits of the prey and takes the situation in hand. He does come to the aid of those who ask for his protection—even if and when it requires the shattering of the malevolently immoral and exposing for all to see that power for the depravity that it is.

What goes around, comes around. The “Law of restoration” cannot be broken. The oppressor becomes the oppressed. It is as inevitable as day and night. We don’t have to be happy about the malevolently immoral getting their comeuppance. But we can pray for it. For, whether we know it or not, when we pray for the deliverance of the oppressed and downtrodden, we are likely praying for the breaking down of the oppressor because, as the Psalmist has already shown us, the oppressor is utterly resistant to acknowledging their malevolent immorality or accepting responsibility for it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: may 14, 2024*)

m editation 15— psalm 10.<sup>16-18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>YHWH is king forever and always,  
while nations disappear from existence.

<sup>17</sup>The desires of the downtrodden You do indeed hear, YHWH.  
You strengthen their inner resolve.  
You lend a listening ear.

<sup>18</sup>In Your defending orphan and oppressed  
never again will a mere mortal earthling seem intimidating (author's translation).

The malevolently immoral have had a good run. They have dominated the human experience since the beginning. Uruk, Babylon, Nineveh, Memphis, Thebes, Teotihuacan, Chichen Itza, Troy, Mycenae, Athens, Rome, Constantinople, Florence, Paris, London, Berlin, Tokyo, Shanghai, New York, Chicago, Washington DC—everywhere they have demanded to have their way, no matter the cost to others. One can almost forget that they are mortal; that they are not gods. Certainly, they have often forgotten. “He says to himself, ‘I cannot be toppled. My future holds no misfortune.’”<sup>1</sup> Even the Psalmist could lose his footing and fall prey to their false bravado; think more of them than he ought, thinking no more clearly than an animal.

“But I, for a time, lost my footing;  
lost my balance.  
I felt envious of the corrupt  
when I observed how well off the malevolently immoral were....

My mind then became disillusioned.  
Inside, I felt humiliation.  
I, myself, had been stupid and knew nothing.  
Beastly was I before you.”<sup>2</sup>

But the Psalmist is not confused in this Psalm. We would do well to remember the Psalmist's insight. God will put an end to the demi-god status of the nations of this world governed by the malevolently immoral who resist God at every turn. They will lose their ability to intimidate. For God will show his hand. He will show all what true divinity looks like when he shows his hand, and, as righteous king, rescues those upon whom the predator has preyed. “So,” the Psalmist admonishes,

“Don't be overawed when someone grows wealthy;  
as their house grows more impressive.  
Because, when they die, they can't take a thing;  
their grandeur won't follow along.  
Though they might celebrate their life while living,  
others praising them because they do well for themselves,  
they will end up right where their fathers did.”<sup>3</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 14, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 10.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 73.<sup>2-3, 21-22</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 49.<sup>17-20</sup>