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Table of contents

introduction	3
psalm 51. ¹⁻⁶ — atonement/ lent	5
psalm 51. ⁷⁻¹² — atonement	7
psalm 51. ¹⁶⁻¹⁷ — atonement.....	9
psalm 51. ^{7-12, 16-17} — lent	11
psalm 51. ¹³⁻¹⁵	13
psalm 51. ¹³⁻¹⁹	14
psalm 52. ^{1-4, 7} — just scripture.....	16
psalm 55. ¹⁶⁻¹⁷	18
psalm 62. ⁵⁻⁸	19
psalm 63. ¹⁻⁸	20
psalm 63. ³⁻⁷ — atonement	22
psalm 67. ¹⁻⁷ — atonement	23
psalm 69. ¹⁻⁵	25
psalm 69. ⁶⁻⁸	28
psalm 69. ⁹⁻¹²	30
psalm 69. ¹³⁻¹⁵	32
psalm 69. ¹⁶⁻²¹	34
psalm 69. ²²⁻²⁸	36
psalm 69. ²⁹⁻³³	38
psalm 69. ³⁴⁻³⁶	40
psalm 71. ¹⁴⁻¹⁹ — atonement	42
psalm 72. ^{4, 12-14} — just scripture.....	44
psalm 72. ¹⁷⁻¹⁹	45
psalm 73. ¹⁻³ — just scripture.....	46

psalm 73. ⁴⁻¹² — just scripture	48
psalm 73. ¹³⁻¹⁶ — just scripture	50
psalm 73. ¹⁷⁻²⁰ — just scripture.....	52
psalm 73. ²¹⁻²⁶	54
psalm 73. ²⁷⁻²⁸	56
psalm 77. ¹⁻¹²	57
psalm 82. ²⁻⁵ — just scripture	59
psalm 89. ¹⁻²	61
psalm 94. ¹⁻³	62
psalm 94. ⁴⁻⁷ — just scripture	64
psalm 94. ⁸⁻¹¹ — just scripture	66
psalm 94. ¹²⁻¹⁵	67
psalm 94. ¹⁶⁻¹⁹	68
psalm 94. ²⁰⁻²³ — just scripture.....	69
psalm 100. ¹⁻³	71

Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Psalm 51.¹⁻⁶— atonement/ lent

¹Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy lovingkindness:
according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies
blot out my transgressions.
²Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
³For I acknowledge my transgressions:
and my sin is ever before me.
⁴Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done this evil in thy sight:
that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest,
and be clear when thou judgest.
⁵Behold, I was shapen in iniquity;
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Today's is the 15th reading for Lent 2024.

Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

In addition to being one of our Lent readings, this passage is the first of three from Psalm 51 and is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "How We Repent and Change."*

Because this psalm's superscription connects it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation l^e-david may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. In the Book of Mosiah, King Benjamin comments, "ye have been calling on his [God's] name, and begging for a remission of your sins' (Mosiah 4.²⁰). He also asks "Are we not all beggars?" (vs. 19)
? How does the Psalmist reflect this same truth that we are beggars when it comes to seeking forgiveness? Consider particularly verse 1.
2. We will read the KJV's, "according to thy lovingkindness," as "because of thy lovingkindness (or fidelity)." We will read its, "according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies," as "in keeping with the multitude of thy tender mercies."
? Do such readings change the way you understand the Psalmist's request for "lovingkindness" and

“mercy”?

- ? Do they shed light on the reality of our being beggars when it comes to seeking forgiveness?
 - ? What do they reveal about the character, nature, and disposition of God?
3. Unlike Psalm 38, where the Psalmist utilized several intense metaphors to describe the depth of his sin and the remorse that he felt for them, the Psalmist does not use intense imagery in this Psalm. But his language does reflect a similar intensity.
- ? How does the Psalmist get across the intensity he feels about his sins in today’s reading?
 - ? How many different words does the Psalmist use to describe his error and misdeeds?
 - ? What is the impact of the Psalmist’s use of so many words associated with error: “transgressions” (twice), “iniquity,” “sin, sinned” (three times), and “evil”?
 - ? How does this reflect his intensity of feelings?
 - ? What other language reflects the Psalmist’s strong feelings?
 - ? What does the Psalmist ask God to do with his sins?
 - ? When you think of “blotting out” and “washing thoroughly,” what images come to your mind?
 - ? How are they appropriate images in reflecting what we hope God will do with our sins?
- ? How will today’s reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 51.⁷⁻¹²—Atonement

- ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness;
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- ⁹Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all mine iniquities.
- ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹Cast me not away from thy presence;
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;
and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Questionary

Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 142). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance.

Today's reading, the second of three from Psalm 51. It also represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Justification: How We Repent and Change." *

Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l^e-david* may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 6 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In today's passage, the Psalmist makes several requests.
 - ? What are those requests?
 - ? What comes to your mind when you consider the following requests that the Psalmist makes of God?
 - Purge me with hyssop
 - Hide thy face from my sins
 - Create in me a clean heart
 - Renew a right spirit within me
 - Cast me not away from thy presence
 - ? How does actually "*create* a clean heart" where it does not exist?

- ? How does he “renew a right spirit”?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What role do you play in this divine “creative” and “renewing” work?
 - ? How does this “creative” and “renewing” go beyond the request for mere “cleansing”?
2. In verse 9, the Psalmist makes use of two very different metaphor’s for forgiveness. In the first God covers his eyes so that he does not even see the sin. In the second, God seems almost to attack and annihilate sin.
- ? What do you think when you contemplate these two different ways of viewing forgiveness?
 - ? Why, do you think, does the Psalmist resort to so many different metaphors for forgiveness—sometimes presenting metaphors that seem to contradict each other (for how could God attack something that he refuses to see)?
- ? How will today’s reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create, renew, and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 51.¹⁶⁻¹⁷—Atonement

¹⁶For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
thou delightest not in burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.” *

We have shared this before, I have found from past experience that it does not hurt to provide the reminder often. Because this psalm’s superscription associates it with David’s sins in relation to the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David’s capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent’s life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l^e-david* (of David) may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David’s sin should not be dogmatically maintained. It was utilized by many who came to the Jewish temple seeking forgiveness of sins.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner’s experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”
 - ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
 - ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
 - ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, and that it is this that we must bring and present to God?
 - ? How difficult is it to present a wounded heart to God as opposed to a heart that is well (humility)?
2. This reading is placed under the heading of our Atonement reading, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.”
 - ? How appropriate, do you feel, is this passage under this heading?
 - ? Why is the Savior’s willing acceptance of our broken (unwell) heart such an act of grace?
 - ? What do you think when you consider that although traditionally God required a sacrifice be “without blemish” this passage contends that God is happy with and accepts the “blemished” sacrifice of our broken, wounded heart?
- ? We usually domesticate the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” into some desirable “humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that one seeks to avoid?

- ? How do you feel about the promise to the humiliated that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?
- ? How will today's reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus' life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 51.^{7-12, 16-17}—lent

- ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness;
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- ⁹Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all mine iniquities.
- ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹Cast me not away from thy presence;
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;
and uphold me with thy free spirit.
- ¹⁶For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.

Questionary

Today's is the 30th reading for Lent 2024. It represents a return to the Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These seven psalms have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

We have shared this before. I have found from past experience that it does not hurt to provide the reminder often. Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l^c-david* may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God. If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 6 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In today's passage, the Psalmist makes several requests.
 - ? What are those requests?
 - ? As you consider each, how do they reflect your own feelings?
2. Among his requests, the Psalmist pleads,
 - “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
 - ? What is the significance of hyssop?

- ? Where else in the Old Testament is hyssop used?
 - ? What, do you think, might be the relationship between using hyssop to apply the Passover lamb's blood to a doorway and its metaphorical use as a spiritually cleansing agent?
3. In verse 9, the Psalmist makes use of two very different metaphor's for forgiveness.

“Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all mine iniquities.”

In the first God covers his eyes so that he does not even see the sin. In the second, God seems almost to attack and annihilate sin.

- ? What do you think when you contemplate these two different ways of viewing forgiveness?
 - ? Why, do you think, does the Psalmist resort to so many different metaphors for forgiveness?
4. The Psalmist also asks that God “create in me a clean heart” and “renew a right spirit within me.”
- ? How does this go beyond the request for cleansing?
 - ? How does God actually “*create* a clean heart” where it does not exist?
 - ? How does God really “*renew* a right spirit”?
 - ? What makes you answer as you do?
 - ? What role do you play in this divine “creative” and “renewing” work?
 - ? What is the relationship and balance between your efforts and God's?
5. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”
- ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
 - ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
 - ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, which we bring and present to God?
 - ? How difficult is it to present a wounded heart to God as opposed to a heart that is well—as in our traditional understanding of a broken heart as “humility”?
 - ? We usually understand the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” as some type of domesticated and positive “humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that one usually seeks to avoid?
 - ? How do you feel about the promise to the individual humiliated at and by their sins that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?
 - ? How will today's reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

Psalms 51.¹³⁻¹⁵

¹³Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguilt,
O God, thou God of my salvation:
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

¹⁵O Lord, open thou my lips;
and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

Questionary

Today's is the 32nd reading for Lent 2024 and represents a follow up to our two previous readings from Psalm 51, one of seven Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These seven psalms have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

1. In the previous readings from Psalm 51, the Psalmist confesses his “evil,” “transgressions,” “iniquities,” and “sins” and asks God for forgiveness. In today's reading, the Psalmist commits himself to a particular course of action if and when his request for forgiveness is granted.
 - ? What does the Psalmist promise to do in response to God's merciful forgiveness?
 - ? How do you feel about this response?
 - ? Is it enough? Would you expect more? What more would you expect?
2. Both Book of Mormon characters, Enos and Alma, did as the Psalmist did: confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness. Both received a remission of sins. In response to being forgiven, the two men have the following to say.

“And after I, Enos, had heard these words [“thy sins are forgiven”], my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites” (En. 1.¹¹).

“Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Al. 36.²⁴).

- ? How do Enos' and Alma's response to God's merciful forgiveness compare to that which the Psalmist promises?
- ? What do you think and how do you feel about these three men's interest in sharing their experience with others in hopes of helping them also experience God's merciful forgiveness?
- ? How do these responses to God's mercy and forgiveness compare with your own?
- ? What can you do to imitate these three individuals?

Psalm 51.¹³⁻¹⁹

- ¹³Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
- ¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,
O God, thou God of my salvation:
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.
- ¹⁵O Lord, open thou my lips;
and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
- ¹⁶For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.
- ¹⁸Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion:
build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
with burnt offering and whole burnt offering:
then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

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Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's reading, the last of three from Psalm 51.

Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l^c-david* may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 12 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In return for Yahweh's mercy in forgiving him, the Psalmist speaks of his commitment to proclaim Yahweh's goodness to others (verse 13 and 15).
? After reading Enos 1.⁹ and Alma 36.²⁴, respectively, consider how and to what degree you have responded likewise to God's mercy in your own life.

“Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I 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.”

“Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

2. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”
 - ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
 - ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
 - ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, which we bring and present to God?
3. In Hebrew, the Psalmist asks to be “delivered from blood.”
 - ? To what might this refer in addition to actual murder?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that it takes in all forms of violence?
 - ? In what forms of individual and societal violence are we engaged and for which we require forgiveness?
- ? We usually domesticate the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” into some desirable “humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that is not sought for?
- ? How do you feel about the promise to the humiliated that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?

Psalm 52.^{1-4,7}— just scripture

¹Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?
the goodness of God endureth continually.

²Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs;
like a sharp razor,
working deceitfully.

³Thou lovest evil more than good;
and lying rather than to speak righteousness.

⁴Thou lovest all devouring words,
O thou deceitful tongue.

⁷Lo, this is the man
that made not God his strength;
but trusted in the abundance of his riches,
and strengthened himself in his wickedness.

Questionary

1. This psalm exposes the common strategies that the “mighty man” (Hebrew, *gibbôr*) or “societal leaders” use to maintain their privileged position. Consider each of them.

they “promote” themselves through “wicked” means
they “plot destruction”
they operate treacherously
they promote evil over good
they speak lies rather than what is right
they misuse their wealth to promote themselves

- ? In considering current societal leaders, does this ring true to you, or does it seem overly pessimistic?
- ? Is there anything you can do to make known your disapproval of such leadership?

2. We live in an age of willful acceptance of the skillful liar. All we ask is that we be told what we wish to hear. The Psalmist utilizes a powerful and disturbing image of the harmful effects of the liar and his lies. Take a moment to consider and picture this imagery in your mind.

“Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs;
like a sharp razor...”

- ? How does this imagery of a razor and the truth it portrays make you feel?
- ? What kind of damage does a “sharp razor” do?
- ? How does the current environment of lies in high places cut deeply into the fabric of American life?
- ? How do you avoid being cut to pieces by such devious individuals?
- ? What can you do to check society’s hunger for untruths?

3. On numerous occasions, we have discussed the nature of Hebrew poetry, particularly its use of parallelism, in which, often, the parallelism is “synonymous.” This means that a second line of poetry repeats and amplifies a first line. Today’s reading ends with such synonymous parallelism.

“...but trusted in the abundance of his riches,
and strengthened himself in his wickedness.”

“Trusted” and “strengthen” are parallel, as are “riches” and “wickedness.” Together, we understand that the powerful “trusts in wickedness” or, in other words, “strengthens” himself with his “abundance” of “riches.”

Once more, we see the Old Testament's negative perspective concerning riches, especially an abundance of them. They are nearly always associated with wickedness—either in how they were obtained, how they are utilized, or both.

- ? How do you feel about such evaluations?
- ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's likening deceit and lies to a "sharp razor"?
- ? What kind of damage does a "sharp razor" do?
- ? How does the current environment of lies in high places cut deeply into the fabric of American life?

- ? Why does the Psalmist count as "wickedness" the "trust in the abundance of... riches"?
- ? How prevalent is this form of "wickedness"?
- ? What do you do to avoid this form of "wickedness" in your own life?

Psalm 55.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

¹⁶As for me, I will call upon God;
and the LORD shall save me.

¹⁷Evening, and morning, and at noon,
will I pray, and cry aloud:
and he shall hear my voice.

Questionary

- ? How consistent and meaningful is your prayer life?
- ? Do you feel that there is true back and forth communication?
- ? What could you do to improve your prayer life and increase real two-way communication between yourself and heaven?

Psalm 62.⁵⁻⁸

⁵My soul, wait thou only upon God;
for my expectation is from him.

⁶He only is my rock and my salvation:
he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

⁷In God is my salvation and my glory:
the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

⁸Trust in him at all times;
ye people, pour out your heart before him:
God is a refuge for us.

Questionary

- ? “Waiting” and “expectation” are parallel in the first two lines of poetry. How is “waiting” upon God, rather than being a simple matter of the passing of time, the same as having an “expectation” of God’s arrival?
- ? What do you think of when you think of God as a “rock,” “defense,” and “refuge”?

Psalm 63.¹⁻⁸

- ¹O God, thou art my God;
early will I seek thee:
my soul thirsteth for thee,
my flesh longeth for thee
in a dry and thirsty land,
where no water is;
²To see thy power and thy glory,
so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.
³Because thy lovingkindness is better than life,
my lips shall praise thee.
⁴Thus will I bless thee while I live:
I will lift up my hands in thy name.
⁵My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;
and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:
⁶When I remember thee upon my bed,
and meditate on thee in the night watches.
⁷Because thou hast been my help,
therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.
⁸My soul followeth hard after thee:
thy right hand upholdeth me.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the 32nd in a series of Advent readings (this one "post-Advent") that will continue throughout the month of December.

1. The Psalmist utilizes the imagery of being "in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" when he considers life without God's ministering presence.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate this imagery?
 - ? Do you relate to this at all?
 - ? Have you had similar feelings? Experiences?
 - ? In what ways can this celestial experience be viewed as "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is"?
 - ? How and in what ways does God provide for our spiritual thirst while we pass through mortality?
2. Consider these confessions of the Psalmist:
 - "Thy lovingkindness is better than life."
 - "Early will I seek thee"
 - "My soul followeth hard after thee."
 - ? To what degree do you share the Psalmist's deep appreciation for God?
 - ? What evidence of this appreciation would another find in your daily life?
 - ? What does it mean to you to "followeth hard" after the Lord?
 - ? How high a priority is it in your life to "followeth hard" after the Lord?
 - ? What is the relationship between "following hard" after him and seeking Him "early"?
3. The Psalmist claims that his soul is "satisfied as with marrow and fatness" when he "meditates on [God] in the night watches."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about your attempts to meditate or ponder more consistently?
 - ? Can you relate to the Psalmist's language concerning the benefits of meditation, or

- pondering?
- ? Through your meditation have you felt that you have been “satisfied as with marrow and fatness”?
 - ? What could you do to strengthen this experience?
 - ? How could “meditating” upon the Lord in the “night watches” strengthen you, help you to resist temptation, and make you more serviceable in his kingdom and in your community?

Psalms 63.³⁻⁷— **A**tonement

- ³Because thy lovingkindness is better than life,
my lips shall praise thee.
- ⁴Thus will I bless thee while I live:
I will lift up my hands in thy name.
- ⁵My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;
and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:
- ⁶when I remember thee upon my bed,
and meditate on thee in the night watches.
- ⁷Because thou hast been my help,
therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

1. The Psalmist bears witness that God’s “lovingkindness is better than life.”
 - ? What is meant by “lovingkindness”?
 - ? What are your thoughts and feelings when you contemplate God’s “lovingkindness” as “fidelity” or “faithfulness” to you?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read that God’s fidelity “is better than life”?
 - ? What would others see in your life as evidence that God’s fidelity is “better than life”?
 2. The Psalmist speaks of being satisfied with God’s fidelity “as with marrow and fatness.”
 - ? What do you think of when you think of “marrow and fatness”?
 3. The Psalmist speaks of “remembering thee upon my bed” and “meditating on thee in the night watches?”
 - ? What does it mean to “remember” and “meditate” upon God?
 - ? How much time and effort do you devote to meditating upon God?
 4. The Psalmist is committed to taking shelter “in the shadow of thy wings.”
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you consider this imagery?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 67.¹⁻⁷— atonement

- ¹’ēlohîm! May you show us grace, and bless us!
May you lighten us with your presence
²that how you conduct yourself might be known throughout the earth;
made known to all peoples the victory you can bring.
³That the nations might acknowledge you,
all peoples yield to you;
⁴that hosts of people might raise a shout of joy
when you govern the nations justly,
when you supply direction to the peoples of the earth;
⁵that the nations might acknowledge you,
every people yield to you.
⁶Earth will then yield its bounty.
^{’ē}lohîm, our God, will bless us.
⁷’ēlohîm will bless us
because every corner of the earth reveres him (author’s translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, following is that of the King James Bible.

- ¹God be merciful unto us, and bless us;
and cause his face to shine upon us;
²That thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving health among all nations.
³Let the people praise thee, O God;
let all the people praise thee.
⁴O let the nations be glad and sing for joy:
for thou shalt judge the people righteously,
and govern the nations upon earth.
⁵Let the people praise thee, O God;
let all the people praise thee.
⁶Then shall the earth yield her increase;
and God, even our own God, shall bless us.
⁷God shall bless us;
and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sanctification: Imitating and living Atonement.”*

1. As beneficiaries of Jesus’ atonement, we are obligated to “be a blessing” to and positive influence in the world.
? How does today’s reading relate to this obligation?
2. Speaking for the nation, the Psalmist asks that God be “merciful,” “bless,” and “cause his face to shine” upon the nation.
? What is his motive, or what does he hope will be achieved through God’s mercy, blessing, and presence?
? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that the Psalmist hopes for Israel’s blessedness so that other nations will learn to honor, worship, and serve God?
? How do other blessings, especially those of a temporal nature, pale in comparison to the blessings of making the world more godly and obedient to God.
? What additional blessing might come to us as the world increases in its commitment to serving God?

3. The Psalmist hopes that the world will learn about God through the faithfulness his people have toward Him and the faithfulness He shows to His people.
 - ? What does he want the world to know about God?
 4. The Psalmist hopes for a day when “the earth yield[s] her increase” as a result of the world’s increased devotion to God.
 - ? What does an increase in the earth’s “yield” mean to you?
 - ? What would be the benefits of an increase in the earth’s yield?
 5. In Ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴, Paul lists a number of blessings that come to the church through Christ. One of the things he hopes is that the church will “be to the praise of his glory.”
 - ? How does Paul’s hope relate to today’s reading?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 69.¹⁻⁵

¹Save me, O God;
for the waters are come in unto my soul.
²I sink in deep mire,
where there is no standing:
I am come into deep waters,
where the floods overflow me.
³I am weary of my crying:
my throat is dried:
mine eyes fail
while I wait for my God.
⁴They that hate me without a cause
are more than the hairs of mine head:
they that would destroy me,
being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty:
then I restored that which I took not away.
⁵O God, thou knowest my foolishness;
and my sins are not hid from thee.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the first of eight readings taken from Psalm 69. For those interested, following is another, the author's, translation of these five verses.

¹Rescue me, 'ēlōhîm;
for the water has risen right up to my neck.
²I am sunk in such deep mud
that it is impossible to keep my footing.
I have fallen into unfathomably deep waters
in which a swift current sweeps over me.
³I am exhausted from screaming for help.
My throat is raw,
my eyesight fails
from waiting for my God.
⁴More numerous than the hair on my head
are those who hate me without reason.
They are intent on my annihilation—
my enemies without a cause.
What I had not stolen
I was forced to return.
⁵'ēlōhîm, you know my folly,
and my guilt is not hidden from you.

The Book of Psalms is the Old Testament's most frequently quoted book in the New Testament. In addition, the Book of Psalms is frequently quoted by the New Testament Gospel writers as they narrative Jesus' experiences during his atoning passion. Most famous, perhaps, of all is Jesus' prayer offered on the cross—a prayer taken from the Psalms—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (22.¹). While I believe that the Psalmist's sufferings are his, it seems that the sufferings described in the Psalms can also be related to Jesus' sufferings.

This frequent use of Psalms in Jesus' experiences could be explained in a number of ways. At the very least, and, for some, the most likely, is that the Gospel writers found parallels between the Psalmist and Jesus. Also likely, Jesus found in the Psalmist and his experiences words to which he

related and which he could relate to his own experiences. Another possibility is that the sufferings experienced by the Psalmist were part of ancient temple ritual, ritual that pointed to the suffering of God—a not uncommon form of ancient Near Eastern ritual (a discussion of which, however fascinating, is too detailed to examine here). Finally, some—with help from passages such as Acts 2.29-35—consider David, credited with having written many Psalms, to be a prophet and thus to be professing or predicting future events in Jesus’ life.

We mention all of this because two verses from this Psalm (9, 21), are utilized in some form or another in the Gospels in reference to Jesus. Whatever one decides about the Psalms’ use in the Gospels and in relation to Jesus, the Psalmist expressed many sentiments—trust, faith, concern, lament—that can be related to Jesus’ experiences and with which Jesus himself could have related as he sought to “liken the scriptures” to himself.

We examine, then, Psalm 69 both from the ancient Psalmist’s perspective and from the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. Read verses 1-3 in both translations provided above.
 - ? What do you understand the Psalmist to be suffering?
 - ? What do you see when you imagine the Psalmist in water that has risen right up to his chin?
 - ? How well and accurately do these verses describe the experience and the terror of drowning?
 - ? What do you feel when you read the Psalmist describe his raw throat as a result of his prolonged screaming, “Help! I’m drowning! Help.! Help!”?
 - ? What do you feel when you read that the Psalmist has been screaming for help for so long and so hard that as blood rushes to his throat to enable his screams, his eyesight blurs because his eyes are denied needed blood?
 - ? How “physiologically” accurate are the Psalmist’s descriptions of his experience?
2. In verse 4, the Psalmist suddenly begins to complain of “enemies” who “hate” him and level unjust accusations of guilt against him.
 - ? If the Psalmist is alone and in danger of dying from drowning, what do you make of his suddenly complaining about enemies?
 - ? How do drowning and being accused of guilt relate to each other?
3. While the Psalmist complains of unjust accusations of guilt leveled against him, at the same time he confesses that he is far from perfect as he speaks of “my wrongdoings.”
 - ? How do you resolve these two seemingly contradictory observations?
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist confessing sinfulness even as he tries to defend himself against accusations that are false?
4. Later in the Psalm, the Psalmist pleads, “let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.”
 - ? What do you think when you consider a pit that closes in a sufferer?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the possibility that the “pit” is a symbol for hell?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the possibility that the Psalmist’s accusing enemies are actually demonic beings from hell who surround him in “the pit”?
 - ? How is the imagery of physical drowning and the terror it brings appropriate to the pains of hell and the terror of demonic forces that level accusations of wrongdoing?
5. Later in the Psalm, we will read, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up (vs. 9). Then, in verse 21, we read, “They gave me also gall for my meat; / and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Both these passages find purchase in the New Testament Gospels’ narrative related to Jesus’ passion.
 - ? How might the Psalmist’s words found in today’s reading be appropriate to Jesus’ experiences during his life, ministry, and passion?
 - ? How might the Psalmist’s words found in today’s reading be appropriate to Jesus’ prayers in, for example, Gethsemane and at Golgotha?

- ? While Jesus lived a sinless life, how might it be possible for him to speak of “my wrongdoing”?
- ? How do you feel about Jesus becoming so attached to us that he feels our sins become part of himself?

Psalm 69.⁶⁻⁸

⁶Let not them that wait on thee,
O Lord GOD of hosts,
be ashamed for my sake:
let not those that seek thee
be confounded for my sake,
O God of Israel.

⁷Because for thy sake I have borne reproach;
shame hath covered my face.

⁸I am become a stranger unto my brethren,
and an alien unto my mother's children.

Questionary

Today's reading is the second of eight readings taken from Psalm 69.

The Book of Psalms is the Old Testament's most frequently quoted book in the New Testament. In addition, the Book of Psalms is frequently quoted by the New Testament Gospel writers as they narrate Jesus' experiences during his atoning passion. Most famous, perhaps, of all is Jesus' prayer offered on the cross—a prayer taken from the Psalms—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (22.¹). While I believe that the Psalmist's sufferings are his, it seems that the sufferings described in the Psalms can also be related to Jesus' sufferings.

This frequent use of Psalms in Jesus' experiences could be explained in a number of ways. At the very least, and, for some, the most likely, is that the Gospel writers found parallels between the Psalmist and Jesus. Also likely, Jesus found in the Psalmist and his experiences words to which he related and which he could relate to his own experiences. Another possibility is that the sufferings experienced by the Psalmist were part of ancient temple ritual, ritual that pointed to the suffering of God—a not uncommon form of ancient Near Eastern ritual (a discussion of which, however fascinating, is too detailed to examine here). Finally, some—with help from passages such as Acts 2.29-35—consider David, credited with having written many Psalms, to be a prophet and thus to be professing or predicting future events in Jesus' life.

We mention all of this because two verses from this Psalm (9, 21), are utilized in some form or another in the Gospels in reference to Jesus. Whatever one decides about the Psalms' use in the Gospels and in relation to Jesus, the Psalmist expressed many sentiments—trust, faith, concern, lament—that can be related to Jesus' experiences and with which Jesus himself could have related as he sought to "liken the scriptures" to himself.

We examine, then, Psalm 69 both from the ancient Psalmist's perspective and from the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the first reading (verses 1-5), the Psalmist expressed the horror of suffering, a suffering that is likened to that of the pains of hell. The suffering is made more intense by those who accuse the Psalmist of sin and guilt.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist turns his prayer from his own excruciating ordeal to the potential harm that might come upon others because of him and his trials.
 - ? How does the Psalmist feel about the possibility that others might suffer because of some weakness in him?
 - ? How do you feel when, in spite of his deep distress and need for God's help, you witness the Psalmist turn his attention to harms that might come upon others, and pleads for their wellbeing?
 - ? How might this be likened to Jesus' concern for others?
 - ? Do you think that Jesus experienced such concerns for the welfare of others as he suffered in

- Gethsemane and Calvary, perhaps concerned about his ability to endure his ordeal? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What would have happened to us had Jesus failed in the mission his Father gave him to accomplish?
 - ? Was such failure ever a possibility? Why do you answer as you do?
2. We discover in verse seven that the Psalmist is being prosecuted and is suffering “reproach” and “shame” because of his relationship with and commitment to God.
- ? Have you in the past or are you now experiencing such discomfort at the hands of others because of your commitment to God?
 - ? How can focusing on the impact that your response has on others who are vulnerable impact your response to your own suffering?
 - ? How was this true of Jesus?
3. The Psalmist complains that he has become “a stranger” and “an alien” even to those who ought to be closest to him, especially family.
- ? What does this suggest to you about the depth of the “reproach” and “shame” that are being heaped upon him?
 - ? What does this tell you about the possibilities open to the Psalmist for help from others?
 - ? What does this tell you about the Psalmists need for God’s help?
 - ? What evidence is there that Jesus experiences a similar depth of alienation with those who were closest to him?

Psalm 69.⁹⁻¹²

⁹For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up;
and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.

¹⁰When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting,
that was to my reproach.

¹¹I made sackcloth also my garment;
and I become a proverb to them.

¹²They that sit in the gate speak against me;
and I was the song of the drunkards.

Questionary

Today's reading is the third of eight readings taken from Psalm 69.

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We examine, then, Psalm 69 both from the ancient Psalmist's perspective and from the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the first reading (verses 1-5), the Psalmist expressed the horror of suffering, a suffering that is likened to that of the pains of hell. The suffering is made more intense by those who accuse the Psalmist of sin and guilt. In the second reading (6-8), we found that part of the hate that came the Psalmist's way was due to his love and commitment to God. We also heard him express his concern for the harm that might come to others if he were to fail God.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist expresses additional trials that came to him because of his devotion to God.
 - ? How was his devotion to God exhibited in today's reading?
 - ? What was the nature of the trials that came to him because of his devotion to God?
2. The Psalmist considered the attacks upon him as a reflection of his persecutors' alienation toward God.
 - ? How do you feel about this observation?
 - ? How does this observation relate to the following passages?

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, 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” (Matthew 22.³⁶⁻⁴⁰).

“If a man say, ‘I love God,’ and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4.²⁰⁻²¹).

- ? How did others respond to the Psalmist when he repented or humbled himself before God (as indicated by fasting and wearing of sackcloth)

Psalm 69.¹³⁻¹⁵

¹³But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD,
in an acceptable time:

O God, in the multitude of thy mercy
hear me, in the truth of thy salvation.

¹⁴Deliver me out of the mire,
and let me not sink:

let me be delivered from them that hate me,
and out of the deep waters.

¹⁵Let not the waterflood overflow me,
neither let the deep swallow me up,
and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

Questionary

Today's reading is the fourth of eight readings taken from Psalm 69.

The Book of Psalms is the Old Testament's most frequently quoted book in the New Testament. In addition, the Book of Psalms is frequently quoted by the New Testament Gospel writers as they narrate Jesus' experiences during his atoning passion. Most famous, perhaps, of all is Jesus' prayer offered on the cross—a prayer taken from the Psalms—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (22.¹). While I believe that the Psalmist's sufferings are his, it seems that the sufferings described in the Psalms can also be related to Jesus' sufferings.

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In the first reading (verses 1-5), the Psalmist expressed the horror of suffering, a suffering that is likened to that of the pains of hell. The suffering is made more intense by those who accuse the Psalmist of sin and guilt. In the second reading (verses 6-8), we found that part of the hate that came the Psalmist's way was due to his love and commitment to God. We also heard him express his concern for the harm that might come to others if he were to fail God. In the third reading (verses 9-12), the Psalmist continued to lament the challenges that came to him due to his commitment to God.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist returns to the imagery of the pit with its mire and deep waters with which he began the psalm. Compare the following passages.

"For my soul is full of troubles:
and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

I am counted with them that go down into the pit:
 I am as a man that hath no strength:
 Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave,
 whom thou rememberest no more:
 and they are cut off from thy hand.
 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit,
 in darkness, in the deeps.
 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me,
 and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves” (Psalm 88.³⁻⁷).

This one was spoken to Joseph Smith.

“And if thou shouldst be cast into *the pit*, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be *cast into the deep*; if the *billowing surge* conspire against thee; if *fierce winds* become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if *the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee...* (DC 122.⁷).

- ? What do you see in your mind’s eye when you envision the pit into which the Psalmist has fallen?
 - ? Why is this imagery so appropriate and affective as symbolic of hell?
2. Just as we saw earlier, at the same time that the Psalmist is threatened by the pit, or hell, he is also under attack by enemies who throw accusations of guilt against him. These enemies could simply be poetic imagination and hyperbole. They could be human. They could be demonic forces that reside in hell.
- ? What do you think of these three options? Which seems most likely to you? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What thoughts come to your mind as you contemplate demonic accusers?
 - ? How does the following passage relate to this idea of demonic accusers?

“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: *for the accuser of our brethren* is cast down, *which accused them before our God* day and night” (Revelation 12.¹⁰).

- ? Satan (and his hosts?) is certainly a “tempter.” But he is also an accuser. How has/does he accuse you?
- ? Jesus was certainly accused of sin by his human enemies. How do you feel and what do you think when you consider the possibility that Jesus might have also suffered accusation of sin at the hands of demonic forces?

We can think, “Jesus did not sin, so could not be accused of sin.” But remember, he “took upon himself” our sins. Paul suggests that this means more than he “carried” or “bore” our sins, as if carrying a boulder on his shoulders. Jesus, Paul says, was “made... to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5.²¹). Somehow, our sins became his. He took possession of them. It became as if they were his and he had committed them.

- ? What comes to your mind when you consider these truths?

Reread today’s reading as if it were part of a prayer on Jesus’ lips as he suffered in Gethsemane or at Golgotha.

- ? What do you think and feel as you do so?
- ? How does this add to your understanding of and appreciation for Jesus’ passion (see Acts 1.³) in Gethsemane and Golgotha?

Psalm 69.¹⁶⁻²¹

- ¹⁶Hear me, O LORD; for thy lovingkindness is good:
turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.
- ¹⁷And hide not thy face from thy servant;
for I am in trouble: hear me speedily.
- ¹⁸Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it:
deliver me because of mine enemies.
- ¹⁹Thou hast known my reproach,
and my shame, and my dishonour:
mine adversaries are all before thee.
- ²⁰Reproach hath broken my heart;
and I am full of heaviness:
and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none.
- ²¹They gave me also gall for my meat;
and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Questionary

Today's reading is the fifth of eight readings taken from Psalm 69.

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We mention all of this because two verses from this Psalm (9, 21), are utilized in some form or another in the Gospels in reference to Jesus. Whatever one decides about the Psalms' use in the Gospels and in relation to Jesus, the Psalmist expressed many sentiments—trust, faith, concern, lament—that can be related to Jesus' experiences and with which Jesus himself could have related as he sought to "liken the scriptures" to himself.

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In the first reading (verses 1-5), the Psalmist expressed the horror of suffering, a suffering that is likened to that of the pains of hell. The suffering is made more intense by those who accuse the Psalmist of sin and guilt. In the second reading (verses 6-8), we found that part of the hate that came the Psalmist's way was due to his love and commitment to God. We also heard him express his concern for the harm that might come to others if he were to fail God. In the third reading (verses 9-12), the Psalmist continued to lament the challenges that came to him due to his commitment to God. In the fourth reading (verses 13-15), the Psalmist returns to likening his suffering to that of hell.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist pleads for deliverance from the "trouble," "reproach," "shame," and "dishonor" that his enemies heap upon him. He complains that "reproach hath broken my heart."
 - ? What do you think and feel when you think of the Psalmist having his heart broke?
 - ? In what ways was such a complaint appropriate to Jesus and his sufferings?
2. The Psalmist also complains, "I am full of heaviness."
 - ? What do you think of when you think of heaviness in an emotional sense?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you compare the Psalmist's complaint with the following passage?

"And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; and saith unto them, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death...'"
(Mark 14.³³⁻³⁴).
3. The Psalmist also complains,

"I looked for some to take pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none."

 - ? How do these sentiments and this solitary experience relate to Jesus during his passion?
4. The Psalmist's enemies give him "gall" (something bitter/poisonous)/ "vinegar" (something sour).
 - ? What is the intention of his enemies in so doing?
 - ? How do you feel about someone "piling on" to someone already suffering?

Psalm 69.²²⁻²⁸

- ²²Let their table become a snare before them:
and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.
- ²³Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not;
and make their loins continually to shake.
- ²⁴Pour out thine indignation upon them,
and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.
- ²⁵Let their habitation be desolate;
and let none dwell in their tents.
- ²⁶For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten;
and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.
- ²⁷Add iniquity unto their iniquity:
and let them not come into thy righteousness.
- ²⁸Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
and not be written with the righteous.

Q

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In the first reading (verses 1-5), the Psalmist expressed the horror of suffering, a suffering that is likened to that of the pains of hell. The suffering is made more intense by those who accuse the Psalmist of sin and guilt. In the second reading (verses 6-8), we found that part of the hate that came the Psalmist's way was due to his love and commitment to God. We also heard him express his concern for the harm that might come to others if he were to fail God. In the third reading (verses 9-12), the Psalmist continued to lament the challenges that came to him due to his commitment to God. In the fourth reading (verses 13-15), the Psalmist returns to likening his suffering to that of hell. In the fifth reading (16-21), we hear the Psalmist's complaint and lament concerning his sufferings.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist turns his attention from his sufferings and directly on his persecutors, offering "execration" upon them.
 - ? What is meant by execration?
2. The Psalmist asks God to curse his persecutors in a number of ways.
 - ? After making a list of the curses that the Psalmist's wishes upon his enemies, is there one or two that stand out to you?
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist feeling about his enemies as he does and wishing evil upon them?

Throughout this Psalm, we have drawn parallels between the Psalmist's harrowing experiences and those associated with Jesus' passion.

- ? To what degree do the Psalmist's feelings and desires for his enemies correspond to feelings that Jesus might have possessed toward his persecutors? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? Whatever you decide about Jesus' feelings, how accurately do the execrations reflect what happened to those who persecuted and killed him—not just individually, but societally?

Psalm 69.²⁹⁻³³

- ²⁹But I am poor and sorrowful:
let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.
- ³⁰I will praise the name of God with a song,
and will magnify him with thanksgiving.
- ³¹This also shall please the LORD
better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.
- ³²The humble shall see this, and be glad:
and your heart shall live that seek God.
- ³³For the LORD heareth the poor,
and despiseth not his prisoners.

Questionary

Today's reading is the seventh of eight readings taken from Psalm 69.

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1. In today's reading, the Psalmist expresses his intent to worship and praise God.
? How, does the Psalmist think, will God respond to his praise?

- ? How, does the Psalmist hope, will those who hear his praise be influenced and impacted by his praise?
- 2. The Psalmist asserts that God is more pleased with thankful praise than with sacrifice.
 - ? Why would this be?
 - ? What is the equivalent religious activity in your life that is similar to temple sacrifice, but inferior to thankful praise?
- 3. In the final verse of this reading, the psalmist assures that God is cognizant of and responsive to the needs of “the impoverished” and “the imprisoned.”
 - ? What do these two classes of citizens have in common?
 - ? How do you feel about the poetic parallelism closely relating the two classes?
 - ? How are aspects of the life of the poor often criminalized by society?

Psalm 69.³⁴⁻³⁶

³⁴Let the heaven and earth praise him,
the seas, and everything that moveth therein.

³⁵For God will save Zion,
and will build the cities of Judah:
that they may dwell there,
and have it in possession.

³⁶The seed also of his servants shall inherit it:
and they that love his name shall dwell therein.

Questionary

Today's reading is the last of eight readings taken from Psalm 69.

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1. In today's reading, the Psalmist concludes the psalm with expressions of praise and worship.
? What reasons does the Psalmist give for his desire to praise God?

- ? What role does his own rescue at the hands of God play in his assurance of Judah's rescue and enduring existence?
- ? What has gone done in your life to draw out your own praise of him?

2. The Psalmist sees that

God will save Zion,
and will build the cities of Judah:
that they may dwell there,
and have it in possession.

- ? What is a possible allegorical application of this promise that you can make in your own life?
- ? What, for example, would be the allegorical application of God building, rebuilding, expanding, and securing "the cities of Judah"?

Psalm 71.¹⁴⁻¹⁹— **Atonement**

- ¹⁴But I will hope continually,
and will yet praise thee more and more.
- ¹⁵My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness
and thy salvation all the day;
for I know not the numbers thereof.
- ¹⁶I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD:
I will make mention of thy righteousness,
even of thine only.
- ¹⁷O God, thou hast taught me from my youth:
and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.
- ¹⁸Now also when I am old and grayheaded,
O God, forsake me not;
until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation,
and thy power to every one that is to come.
- ¹⁹Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high,
who hast done great things:
O God, who is like unto thee!

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

1. The Psalmist says that he will speak of God’s “righteousness” and “salvation.”
 - ? What does he mean by God’s “righteousness”?
 - ? How is this manifest in your daily life?
 - ? What does he mean by God’s “salvation”?
 - ? How is this manifest in your daily life?
 - ? How would you feel and what would you think if we thought of God’s “salvation” as God’s “victory”?
 - ? What victories has he brought into your life?
 - ? How much like the Psalmist are you, in that God is a significant part of your daily speech?
2. The Psalmist promises God, “I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.”
 - ? Why does the Psalmist feel the need to make this promise?
 - ? Who else’s “righteousness” could he “make mention” of?
 - ? Why is it that only God possesses a “righteousness” that is worth thinking and speaking of?
3. From his youth to his old age and unto the present and future generations, the Psalmist has testified of God—his “righteousness,” his “salvation,” his “wonderous works,” his “strength,” and his “power.”
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist and his dedication to God and to proclaiming him?
 - ? How accurately could this be said by and of you?
4. Today’s reading ends with “O God, who is like unto thee?”
 - ? How do you feel when you read this witness?
 - ? Why is it important to feel and acknowledge this truth?
 - ? How does a knowledge of this truth serve as a protection against the whiles of others who would have you be in awe of them and become their disciples?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
“Justification: How We Repent and Change”
“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 72.^{4, 12-14}— just scripture

⁴He shall judge the poor of the people,
he shall save the children of the needy,
and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

¹²For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth;
the poor also, and him that hath no helper.

¹³He shall spare the poor and needy,
and shall save the souls of the needy.

¹⁴He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence:
and precious shall their blood be in his sight.

Questionary

1. The KJV has God “judging the poor of the people.”
 - ? What does it mean to “judge the poor”?
 - ? How does the following translation clarify your understanding?

May he, then, administer justice to the nation’s vulnerable.
May he come to the rescue of the destitute’s children
and crush those who would violently loot them.
 - ? How do you feel about the implication that the poor or treated unjustly?
 - ? How does God adjudicate for the poor?
2. The Psalmist uses several verbs to describe the Lord’s actions toward the poor and needy.
 - ? What are those other verbs?
 - ? What evidence do you find in scripture for the Psalmist’s contention that God is a protector of the poor and vulnerable—that he adjudicates for them, “saves” them, “delivers” them, “spares” them, and “redeemed” them?
 - ? What evidence do you see in today’s world that God is a protector of the poor and vulnerable—that he adjudicates for them, “saves” them, “delivers” them, “spares” them, and “redeemed” them?
 - ? What role do you, as a disciple, play in assisting God in this goal of protecting poor vulnerable people?
 - ? How effective is God likely to be without human agents assisting and partnering with hm?

Psalm 72.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

¹⁷His name shall endure for ever:

his name shall be continued as long as the sun:

And men shall be blessed in him:

all nations shall call him blessed.

¹⁸Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
who only doeth wondrous things.

¹⁹And blessed be his glorious name for ever:

and let the whole earth be filled with his glory;

Amen, and Amen.

Questionary

1. The idea of “blessedness” dominates today’s reading.

? What does it mean to “bless God”?

? How do the following passages relate to today’s reading?

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 31.¹³)

“And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever...

And thus we saw the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things—where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever; before whose throne all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever” (DC 76.^{21, 92-93}).

? Do you find yourself blessing, shouting praises unto, worshiping, and giving glory to God often?

2. The Psalmist speaks of God as one “who only [alone] doeth wondrous things.’ Elsewhere, the Psalmist says of God that “his name alone is excellent” (148.¹³).

? What do you understand the Psalmist to mean by all this?

? Do you find yourself regularly thinking and feeling as the Psalmist does here when you think of and approach God?

? What events surrounding the Easter season do you think confirm and enhance the Psalmist’s feelings about God’s infinite supremacy?

3. The Psalmist ends with “Amen, and amen.”

? What is the impact—emotional and spiritual—of this “double amen”?

Psalm 73.¹⁻³ — just scripture

¹How good ¹Ēlohîm is to Yiśrā'ēl,
to those of pure heart!

²But I, for a time, lost my footing;
lost my balance.

³I felt envious of the delusional
when I observed how well off the impious were (Author's translation).

Questionary

Today's is the first of six readings from Psalm 73. For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

¹Truly God is good to Israel,
even to such as are of a clean heart.

²But as for me, my feet were almost gone;
my steps had well nigh slipped.

³For I was envious at the foolish,
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

1. This psalm is extraordinary in a number of ways, not least of which is the Psalmist's open self-criticism.
 - ? About what is the Psalmist critical of himself? (The answer can be found in today's reading, but the reader should feel free to look beyond these verses, to those that follow, for a deeper appreciation of the reasons for the Psalmist's self-criticism.)
2. The Psalmist speaks of losing his sense of balance.
 - ? What does he mean by this?
 - ? How did he lose his balance?
 - ? In what ways might you lose balance in your life?
 - ? In what ways might you lose your balance spiritually?
 - ? How and why can seeing wicked people succeed and advance in this life and the things of this world cause us to lose balance and question our assumptions?
3. The Psalmist says that he "felt envious of the delusional."
 - ? What, do you think, did the Psalmist mean by this?
 - ? What would "the delusional" have that the Psalmist missed and wanted?
 - ? The "delusional" are those who do not see things for what they really are. What was the "reality" that the Psalmist saw that he wished he could unsee? (Again, the answer can be found in today's reading, but the Psalmist conducts a more comprehensive examination of his disillusionment in the following verses.)
4. The Psalmist "observed how well off the impious were."
 - ? How do you respond to the Psalmist's observation?
 - ? How would you explain the temporal, financial, and societal success that wicked people so often have?
 - ? What does the wicked's success in acquiring wealth and power and prestige (all of which we will see in the verses following) suggest about the value and importance of such acquisitions?
 - ? What sorts of "doctrines" could cause us to become confused about "values" and the causes behind the wickeds' seeming successes?
 - ? If you have been confused or frustrated by the temporal successes of the wicked, to what do you credit your confusion? If you haven't felt confused or frustrated by such success, to what do you credit your ability to keep balance?
5. The Psalmist opened this psalm by lauding God for how good he is "to those of pure heart."

- ? What does it mean to be “pure in heart” or “pure in thought,” especially in light of the Psalmist’s confessions of imbalance and improper reasoning that follow his invocation?

Psalm 73.⁴⁻¹²— just scripture

- ⁴Even in death, they experience no suffering,
but die with stomachs full.
- ⁵They do not experience the hardships of common people,
nor are they struck as others are struck.
- ⁶This is why they wear their self-conceit as a neckless;
envelope themselves in a garment of cruelty.
- ⁷Their eyes bug out on account of their chubbiness;
their physique boggles the mind.
- ⁸They are disdainful and promote wanton oppression.
Their rhetoric is ever so soaring.
- ⁹They claim divine license;
their assertions are found the world over.
- ¹⁰This is why peoples keep turning to them;
why, as overflowing water, they flow to them.
- ¹¹They say, “How could God know?
How could ‘Elyôn possess any awareness?”
- ¹²In summary: these are the impious;
ever secure, always increasing in wealth.

Questionary

Today’s is the second of six readings from Psalm 73.

In our first reading from Psalm 73 (verses 1-3), the Psalmist confessed that he had lost his sense of spiritual balance and that he “felt envious of the delusional” when he saw the physical and temporal well-being of impious individuals.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

- ⁴For there are no bands in their death:
but their strength is firm.
- ⁵They are not in trouble as other men;
neither are they plagued like other men.
- ⁶Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;
violence covereth them as a garment.
- ⁷Their eyes stand out with fatness:
they have more than heart could wish.
- ⁸They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression:
they speak loftily.
- ⁹They set their mouth against the heavens,
and their tongue walketh through the earth.
- ¹⁰Therefore his people return hither:
and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.
- ¹¹And they say, “How doth God know?
and is there knowledge in the most High?”
- ¹²Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world;
they increase in riches.

1. In today’s reading, the Psalmist lists some of the ways that the well-being of the impious is manifest.
 - ? In what ways does the well-being of the impious manifest itself?
 - ? What is the relationship between the impious and the wealthy?

2. In speaking of the impious wealthy, the Psalmist says that “their eyes stand out with fatness.”
 - ? What do you see when you picture this imagery?
 - ? What do eyes bugging out indicate about the life of the wealthy?
3. The Psalmist suggests that the impious wealthy credit their wealth and well-being to God.
 - ? How do you feel about the wealthy’s assertion?
 - ? What sort of evidences and arguments do they present to justify their assertion?
 - ? What false economic and even religious doctrines contribute to such false assertions?
 - ? How are these false evidences, arguments, and doctrines (economic and religious) utilized in today’s world to justify the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others?
4. Verse 11 relates how the confident self-assertions of the impious wealthy, seemingly supported by their well-being, cause populations to keep coming back to them for leadership.
 - ? How do you feel about this observation?
 - ? What modern day examples of this observation do you see in today’s society?
5. In verse 12, the Psalmist observes how the example and well-being of the impious causes others to question God, his interest in human affairs, and even his existence.
 - ? How do you feel about this observation?
 - ? How does this observation manifest itself in today’s society?
6. We have consistently challenged the too prevalent and false idea that material well-being comes as the result of faithful obedience to God.
 - ? How does today’s reading relate to this challenge?

Psalm 73.¹³⁻¹⁶ — just scripture

- ¹³What a waste, my efforts to keep myself innocent,
washing my hands in purification rites;
¹⁴while I am battered every single day,
battered every morning by my internal debate!
¹⁵If I had decided that this is how I would evaluate matters,
I would have become unreliable to an entire generation of your children!
¹⁶As I continued to think on this, hoping to understand,
it became a burden to me.

Questionary

Today's is the third of six readings from Psalm 73.

In our first reading from Psalm 73 (verses 1-3), the Psalmist confessed that he had lost his sense of spiritual balance and that he “felt envious of the delusional” when he saw the physical and temporal well-being of impious individuals.

In the second reading (verses 4-12), the Psalmist listed some of the ways that the well-being of the impious is manifest: comfort in life, full stomachs, physical corpulence from good nutrition, self-conceit, public influence, claims of election by God, and finally, easy deaths.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

- ¹³Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain,
and washed my hands in innocency.
¹⁴For all the day long have I been plagued,
and chastened every morning.
¹⁵If I say, I will speak thus;
behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.
¹⁶When I thought to know this,
it was too painful for me;

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist shares some of the thoughts and feelings he had while in his state of spiritual imbalance.
? What are those thoughts and feelings? Restate them in your own words.
2. Seeing the impious enjoy “the good life,” the psalmist questions why he should try to live morally and keep himself clean from sin.
? Have you, or do you ever have such thoughts and feelings? How do you get past them?
? What would you say to others who might have such thoughts and feelings and consider yielding to the temptation to yield to the carnal (not just or even primarily sexual!!) part of themselves.
3. The Psalmist speaks of the internal turmoil that accompanied his doubts.
? Have you or do you now struggle with spiritual doubts? What are the nature of those doubts?
? How have or do you deal with them?
? How do your thoughts and feelings about your doubts change as you consider that the Psalmist too had serious and debilitating doubts?
? As we proceed through the Psalm, watch for ways that the Psalmist comes to terms with his doubts.
4. In verse 15, the Psalmist reflects on the impact he might have had on those around him had he continued to question the benefits of faithfulness toward God, concluded the “good life” was worth whatever impiety might bring it about, and broadcast his false thoughts and feelings to others.

- ? How do you feel about the sense the Psalmist possesses of responsibility to others?
- ? How can you be true to your own thoughts and feelings and, at the same time, be a faithful witness to those around you?
- ? What responsibilities, especially, do you have to assist those around you and your society at large to keep a proper perspective on wealth, piety toward God and the relationship between them?
- ? How are you fulfilling those responsibilities?
- ? What more could you do?

Psalm 73.¹⁷⁻²⁰— just scripture

- ¹⁷Until, that is, I entered the holy place of God,
there to discern what awaits the impious.
- ¹⁸Rather, you subject them to delusions.
You let them fall prey to lies.
- ¹⁹How suddenly they become accursed;
come to a complete end through multiple catastrophes!
- ²⁰They are as a dream from which one awakens.
My Lord, upon waking up, their illusionary form is deemed hateful.

Questionary

Today's is the fourth of six readings from Psalm 73.

In our first reading from Psalm 73 (verses 1-3), the Psalmist confessed that he had lost his sense of spiritual balance and that he “felt envious of the delusional” when he saw the physical and temporal well-being of impious individuals.

In the second reading (verses 4-12), the Psalmist listed some of the ways that the well-being of the impious is manifest: comfort in life, full stomachs, physical corpulence from good nutrition, self-conceit, public influence, claims of election by God, and finally, easy deaths.

In our third reading (verses 13-15), the Psalmist returned to his spiritual imbalance. He speaks of the doubts it raised in his mind, the turmoil these doubts caused, and his questioning the worth of striving to live “the good life.” Finally, he wondered what impact he might have had on others had he yielded to his doubts.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

- ¹⁷Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then understood I their end.
- ¹⁸Surely thou didst set them in slippery places:
thou castedst them down into destruction.
- ¹⁹How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!
they are utterly consumed with terrors.
- ²⁰As a dream when one awaketh;
so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist regains his sense of spiritual balance.
 - ? How did he do this?
 - ? What is it about the temple, its rituals, and its teaching that helps one maintain spiritual balance?
 - ? What does the temple teach that specifically helps one maintain their balance in relation to material wealth?
 - ? When has the temple helped you maintain or helped you regain a sense of spiritual balance?
 - ? What evidences are there in your life that you have a sense of balance in relation to the things of this world, especially its glorification of wealth?
 - ? What does the temple teach you about “what awaits the impious”?
2. The Psalmist speaks of the impious wealthy falling prey to delusions and lies.
 - ? To what sorts of delusions and lies do the impious wealthy fall?
 - ? How prevalent is this weakness in today's society?
 - ? What sorts of delusions and lies are evidenced in today's society in relation to materialism and wealth?
 - ? How good are you at avoiding the delusions and deceptions of today's society?

3. The Psalmist calls the impious “accursed,” and warns that they will be undone by “multiple catastrophes.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about it?

Psalm 73.²¹⁻²⁶

²¹My mind became disillusioned.

Inside, I felt humiliation.

²²I, myself, had been stupid and knew nothing.

Beastly was I before you.

²³Still, I am always with you.

You keep hold of me by your own power.

²⁴You direct me with your guidance,

then, receive me gloriously.

²⁵Who do I have in heaven, but you?

I have no earthly desires.

²⁶The carnal and the spiritual parts of me were exhausted,

my heart stone hard,

but you, 'ēlohîm, remain the gift bequeathed to me forever.

Questionary

Today's is the fifth of six readings from Psalm 73.

In our first reading from Psalm 73 (verses 1-3), the Psalmist confessed that he had lost his sense of spiritual balance and that he "felt envious of the delusional" when he saw the physical and temporal well-being of impious individuals.

In the second reading (verses 4-12), the Psalmist listed some of the ways that the well-being of the impious is manifest: comfort in life, full stomachs, physical corpulence from good nutrition, self-conceit, public influence, claims of election by God, and finally, easy deaths.

In our third reading (verses 13-16), the Psalmist returned to his spiritual imbalance. He speaks of the doubts it raised in his mind, the turmoil these doubts caused, and his questioning the worth of striving to live "the good life." Finally, he wondered what impact he might have had on others had he yielded to his doubts.

In our fourth reading (verses 17-20), the Psalmist recovers from his spiritual imbalance through the instruction and revelation that he finds in the temple. There, the Psalmist discovers that the impious are subject to lies and that the "security" they experience is delusional. They and their false security is seen to be as insubstantial as a dream.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

²¹Thus my heart was grieved,
and I was pricked in my reins.

²²So foolish was I, and ignorant:
I was as a beast before thee.

²³Nevertheless I am continually with thee:
thou hast holden me by my right hand.

²⁴Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,
and afterward receive me to glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but thee?
and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.

²⁶My flesh and my heart faileth:
but God is the strength of my heart,
and my portion for ever.

1. In today's reading the Psalmist returns once more to his spiritual imbalance.
 - ? What language does the Psalmist use to describe himself in his spiritual blindness?
 - ? How do you feel when you read him refer to himself as

Stupid?
Beastly?
Hard hearted

- ? What do you feel when you read him speak of his disillusion with himself, his personal sense of humiliation, and the exhaustion of his doubts?
 - ? Have you experienced similar feelings? How did you work through them?
2. Notwithstanding his self-criticism, the Psalmist made an unexpected discovery.
- ? What was that discovery?
 - ? How do you feel when you consider God's faithfulness to the Psalmist in spite of his foolish perspective and doubts?
 - ? How does the Apostle Paul's witness concerning God fidelity toward us, even in weakness and sin, relate to, support, and enhance the Psalmist's witness?
"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5.⁶⁻⁸).
 - ? What evidence have you seen in your life that God remains true to you even when you are not at your best?
3. Consider the Psalmist's following confession:
- Who do I have in heaven, but you?
I have no earthly desires.
- ? How strongly do you relate to such sentiments?
- Consider Lehi's witness about the tree he saw in his dream.
- "And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit" (1 Nephi 8.¹⁰⁻¹²).
- ? What evidence would others see in your life that God, and the possibility of having a lively relationship with him, is of the highest priority to you?
- ? What false doctrines and traditions cause us to become so hardened that we cannot see the lies that lay behind the glorification of wealth and "self-sufficiency"?

Psalm 73.²⁷⁻²⁸

²⁷So it is that those who distance themselves from you perish.

You make an end to those who play the harlot in departing from you.

²⁸But for me, having God near, that is what is precious to me.

I choose my Lord, YHWH, as the place I'll go for shelter,
there, to tally all your achievements.

Questionary

Today's is the last of six readings from Psalm 73.

In our first reading from Psalm 73 (verses 1-3), the Psalmist confessed that he had lost his sense of spiritual balance and that he "felt envious of the delusional" when he saw the physical and temporal well-being of impious individuals.

In the second reading (verses 4-12), the Psalmist listed some of the ways that the well-being of the impious is manifest: comfort in life, full stomachs, physical corpulence from good nutrition, self-conceit, public influence, claims of election by God, and finally, easy deaths.

In our third reading (verses 13-16), the Psalmist returned to his spiritual imbalance. He speaks of the doubts it raised in his mind, the turmoil these doubts caused, and his questioning the worth of striving to live "the good life." Finally, he wondered what impact he might have had on others had he yielded to his doubts.

In our fourth reading (verses 17-20), the Psalmist recovers from his spiritual imbalance through the instruction and revelation that he finds in the temple. There, the Psalmist discovers that the impious are subject to lies and that the "security" they experience is delusional. They and their false security is seen to be as insubstantial as a dream.

In our fifth reading (verses 21-26), the Psalmist returns yet again to his spiritual imbalance, which he labels as stupid, beastly, hard hearted. Nevertheless, the Psalmist bears witness of God's fidelity to him, God's fidelity to him, is the cause of the Psalmist's ardent desire for God about all other things.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

²⁷For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish:
thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.

²⁸But it is good for me to draw near to God:
I have put my trust in the Lord GOD,
that I may declare all thy works.

1. The Hebrew prophets make common and frequent use of prostitution as a metaphor for Israel's unfaithfulness or infidelity toward God.
 - ? We have now examined the entire 73rd Psalm. With what form of prostitution, or infidelity toward God has the psalm concerned itself?
 - ? To what people, places, things, institutions, etc. might an individual sell themselves?
 - ? To what people, places, things, institutions, etc. might an entire society sell itself?
 - ? What sorts of individual and societal whoredom is currently being practiced?
2. The Psalmist speaks of trusting or taking shelter in God.
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you imagine God as a "shelter."
3. Take some time to "tally" God's "achievements in your life."
 - ? What did you find?
 - ? Spend some time in prayer discussing them, how you feel about them, and how they impact your feelings for God.

Psalm 77.¹⁻¹²

- ¹I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.
- ²When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.
- ³I remembered you, God, and I groaned;
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.
- ⁴You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.
- ⁵I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;
- ⁶I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:
- ⁷“Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?
- ⁸Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?
- ⁹Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”
- ¹⁰Then I thought, “To this I will appeal:
the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.
- ¹¹I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
- ¹²I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds” (NIV).

Questionary

Today's reading is different at a couple of levels. First, I have utilized the New International Version for the reading. This translation maintains, I feel, the flow of the Psalmist's thoughts, prayer, and complaint a little better than the KJV.

1. Second, it is a complaint. Our readings from the Psalms have focused on the Psalmist's faith, his trust in God. I maintain that even in complaint, the Psalmist demonstrates his faith in God. He recognizes that God can be trusted with our doubts, fears, uncertainties, frustrations, etc.
? Do you trust God with your uglier moments? Your doubts? Your frustrations, not just with life, but with him?
? If not, why not?

Some years ago, I visited with a young woman who was extremely angry with God over an injustice committed against her by a family member. As we spoke, I asked her, “So, have you expressed all of this to God in prayer?”

“Of course, not,” she replied, “I can't speak to him like that.”

“Oh, good,” I said wryly. “Let's keep it secret from him.” After a pause, I went on. “So, what, you don't think he already knows how you feel?”

“Well, I guess he does.”

“Well, then, you need to talk to him about it. Say it. Openly and candidly. Don't hold back.”

We then reviewed times when the Psalmist and others, such as Jeremiah did it. To make a long story, short, she tried it and finally began to heal.

2. In addition to the Psalmist's honest complaint, notice some of the strategies he uses to work through his fear, doubt, and frustration.

“I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

- ? How might recalling the Lord’s faithful and saving acts from the past, both in your life and in the life of those who have come before, help in moments of doubt and distress?
- ? How might scriptural accounts of God’s faithful and saving acts help in such moments?
- ? How might the Psalmist’s own (numerous) complaints assist you in such moments.
- ? How can rehearsing such faithful and saving acts to God himself during your prayer, make your prayer more effectual?
- ? How can it become something that God appreciates and to which he responds?

Psalm 82.²⁻⁵— just scripture

- ²How long will ye judge unjustly,
and accept the persons of the wicked?
³Defend the poor and fatherless:
do justice to the afflicted and needy.
⁴Deliver the poor and needy:
rid them out of the hand of the wicked.
⁵They know not, neither will they understand;
they walk on in darkness:
all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

Questionary

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist presents a contrast between common societal practices that he witnessed and societal practices that God desires. Here is the contrast.

Common societal practices

How long will ye judge unjustly,
and accept the persons of the wicked?

Godly societal practices

Defend the poor and fatherless:
do justice to the afflicted and needy.

Deliver the poor and needy:
rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

? What observations do you have about this contrast?

? Who are the "wicked" that are being "accepted," and receiving preferential treatment in the courts and other societal institutions?

2. The "wicked," are the opposite of "poor," "fatherless," "afflicted," and "needy." In other words, the wicked, as we found them to be in Psalm 73.³⁻⁹, are the wealthy.

? How do you feel about this observation?

? If the Psalmist were present in our society, would he make similar observations about the unequal treatment of rich and poor?

3. In the final verse, the Psalmist pronounces his judgement concerning such institutional injustice.

They know not, neither will they understand;
they walk on in darkness:
all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

? What comes to mind when you read, "the foundations of the earth are out of course"?

4. If the "foundations of the earth are out of course," there is the implication that there was and is a preferred "course" on which the earth is to be founded.

? How does this passage from Moses shed light on the preferred course?

"I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father but behold they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (Moses 7.³³).

? What is that "course"?

? Who are the "persons of the wicked" who are "accepted"?

? What does it mean to be "accepted"?

? What type of person has the clout and influence to manipulate legal procedures brought against

them?

? Who are “the wicked” whose hands are against the “poor,” “needy,” and “fatherless”?

When a people and nation, aided and abetted by those who claim to be Christian, abandon the poor, the sick, the needy, the vulnerable and innocent children as the three branches of U.S. government as presently constituted seem hell-bent on doing (health care being but one of numerous examples), the God of Heaven sadly acknowledges that his created order has forsaken him and his ideals. Creation is twisted, and perverted. Americans and American Christianity are in danger of defiling and losing the image of God in which they were created.

Psalm 89.¹⁻²

¹I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever:
with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.

²For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up for ever:
thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens."

Questionary

- ? God's "faithfulness" is mentioned twice in today's reading. What does it mean that God is "faithful"?
- ? To what or to whom is he faithful?
- ? What experiences have you had in your life that confirm that God is true, dependable and trustworthy... possessing absolute fidelity toward you?

Psalm 94.¹⁻³

¹Avenging God, YHWH,
avenging God, reveal yourself.

²Rise up, Ruler of the world;
cause to rebound on those of rank what they deserve.

³How long will the ungodly, YHWH;
how long will the ungodly dominate? (Author's translation)

Questionary

Today's is the first of six readings from Psalm 94. For those who wish to compare translations, below is the KJV.

¹O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth;
O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.

²Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth:
render a reward to the proud.

³LORD, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked triumph?

1. Psalm 94 begins with the Psalmist's plea that God, "to whom vengeance belongeth, shew [himself]."
 - ? Of what, do you think, does God's vengeance consist?
 - ? How do you feel about a God that practices "vengeance"?
 - ? How can we be certain that when we make appeal to God's vengeance we are not simply projecting our own desire for vengeance upon God?
2. The appeal to God to act vengefully is repeated twice in verse one. In verse three, the question, "how long shall the wicked triumph?" is repeated twice.
 - ? What thoughts do you have about this use and significance of this "poetic device" of "doubling"?
 - ? When you think of "the wicked" of what class/es of people do you think?
 - ? Do you feel that you have or are now a member of such a class of people?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do?
3. The Psalmist seems to be disturbed, not so much by the presence of "the wicked," but from their apparent "triumph."
 - ? What do you think the Psalmist means by "triumph"?
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's perception itself that "the wicked" experience—long or short-term—successes?
 - ? Do you agree with the Psalmist that "the wicked" often do experience "success" at least as the world defines it? Why do you answer as you do?
4. Some have described "vengeance" as "the act of setting the record straight."
 - ? How is thinking of "the wicked" as "triumphing" a "crooked" view of reality?
 - ? How would you feel about seeing "vengeance" as God acting in such a way as to expose the "lie" behind "the wicked's" apparent "triumph"?
 - ? What would you say to the contention that "vengeance" is not so much about "punishing the wicked" as it is about disabusing the world, including "the righteous," of values that allow them to falsely grant "triumph" to "the wicked"?

We might think of God's interaction with the enslaving Egyptian empire. To all appearances, the Egyptians were profiting off their oppression of Hebrew slaves. God did not do vengeance against the Egyptians out of any personal need to vent his anger, but in an attempt to reveal the reality that oppression was not, in the end, profitable, and so should be avoided at all costs.

“Vengeance,” then, “set the record straight” concerning the true nature and end of oppression. If this “lesson” were heeded, not only would Hebrews be “delivered” from oppression, but perhaps many other oppressed peoples as well.

Psalm 94.⁴⁻⁷— just scripture

⁴How long shall they utter and speak hard things?
and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?

⁵They break in pieces thy people, O LORD,
and afflict thine heritage.

⁶They slay the widow and the stranger,
and murder the fatherless.

⁷Yet they say, “The LORD shall not see,
neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the second of six from Psalm 94. In the first reading we listened in on the Psalmist’s prayer as he pleaded with God to exercise “vengeance” upon the wicked, who seemed to be triumphing through and in their wickedness.

1. Whereas verse three in the previous reading from Psalm 94 left “the wicked” and their actions undefined, today’s reading gives definition to the attitudes and actions of the wicked.
 - ? What attitudes, characteristics, and actions does today’s reading credit “the wicked”?
 - ? What is the nature of their wickedness?
 - ? What vulnerabilities do widows, foreigners, and orphans have in common?
 - ? What responsibilities does society have toward those who have no accessible family support?
 - ? What other vulnerable populations make up society today?
 - ? How do you feel about a society that 1) provides no care for such vulnerable people and 2) uses their vulnerabilities to take advantage and even oppress them?
 - ? How does the Lord feel about such a society?

2. Consider the following passage?

“And I said,
Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob,
and ye princes of the house of Israel;
Is it not for you to know judgment [justice]?
Who hate the good, and love the evil;
who pluck off their skin from off them,
and their flesh from off their bones;
Who also eat the flesh of my people,
and flay their skin from off them;
and they break their bones,
and chop them in pieces, as for the pot,
and as flesh within the caldron” (Micah 3.¹⁻³).

- ? How does this passage relate to today’s reading?
 - ? What do they have in common?
 - ? How do you feel about the Lord’s use of cannibalism as a metaphor for social injustice?
 - ? As vile as the thought of cannibalism is, there are those who engaged in it in the ancient world. What “benefits” supposedly flowed from it?
 - ? How is cannibalism similar to the social injustices practiced by the powerful against the vulnerable?
3. Verse seven describes how the powerful feel that they will not be held accountable for injustice practiced against the vulnerable.
 - ? What, do you think, leads the powerful oppressors to feel that they will not be held to account for their injustice?

- ? How does society's refusal to hold the powerful responsible for their injustice contribute to their dismissal of God and the possibility that he will hold them accountable?
 - ? If a society holds the powerful unaccountable, and, at the same time, holds itself up as a "chosen nation," why should the powerful not feel that God himself will not hold them accountable for their injustices?
4. In reading the first three verses, we heard the Psalmist plead that God exercise vengeance against the powerful and wicked, who arrogantly assert that they will not be held accountable for their injustices.
- ? After reading the specific attitudes and actions of the wicked found in today's reading, what additional insights into the vengeance of God—its nature and purposes—do you have?
 - ? How do you feel about the oppressor's assertion that God does not observe, care about, or respond to the oppression of vulnerable populations of society?
 - ? What evidence have you seen that God observes, cares about, or responds to oppression?
 - ? What kind of divine response should the U.S. expect from God in light of its treatment of refugees/resident aliens, widows, and children without the protection of parents?

Psalm 94.⁸⁻¹¹— just scripture

- ⁸Understand, ye brutish among the people:
and ye fools, when will ye be wise?
⁹He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?
he that formed the eye, shall he not see?
¹⁰He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?
he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?
¹¹The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man,
that they are vanity.

Questionary

Today's reading is the third of six from Psalm 94. In the first reading. In the first reading we listened in on the Psalmist's prayer as he pleaded with God to exercise "vengeance" upon the wicked, who seemed to be triumphing through and in their wickedness. In the second reading, we discovered the nature of the wicked's wickedness—abuse of vulnerable members of society, for which the powerful believed that they would never be held accountable.

1. In today's reading the Psalmist challenges the wicked abusers' contention that they will not be held to account for their abuse.
? How does the Psalmist accomplish this?
2. Though society may willfully choose to not see or hear, pretend to not understand, and refuse to call the powerful to account for their abuse, there is one who see, hears, understands, calls to account, and sets things right.
? According to the Psalmist's witness, who does all of this?
? In what ways does our society pretend ignorance of the abuse the powerful inflict upon vulnerable individuals and classes?
? What can someone who seeks to be a true disciple of God say and do to bring society to see and hear and know what it does not wish to see and hear and know?
3. The Psalmist asks the delusional abusers and the society that countenances and condones their abuse of the vulnerable this question about God: "Shall not he correct?"
? What is the relationship between this correction and the vengeance about which the Psalmist has previously spoken in this psalm?
4. Today's reading ends with the Psalmist's reflection upon God's estimation of mankind: "the thoughts of man... are vanity."
? What is meant by "thoughts"?
? How would you feel about and what would you understand from the reading, "the plans/intents of man are vanity"?
? What is meant by "vanity"?
? In what way are human plans "unprofitable," "worthless," "futile"?

We might consider this divine perception concerning man as a general perception—one that is true of all peoples and societies. However, we should probably first read it in the context of the present psalm.

- ? What are the plans and devises of the powerful as they abuse the vulnerable? What do they hope to achieve through oppression? What "profit" do they hope to acquire?
? In reality, what profit will they acquire?

"Vanity," at its most literal level is "breath," or "vapor."

- ? What does this tell you about what the powerful will win through their abuse of the vulnerable?

Psalms 94.¹²⁻¹⁵

¹²Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD,
and teachest him out of thy law;

¹³That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity,
until the pit be digged for the wicked.

¹⁴For the LORD will not cast off his people,
neither will he forsake his inheritance.

¹⁵But judgment shall return unto righteousness:
and all the upright in heart shall follow it.

Questionary

Today's reading is the fourth of six from Psalm 94. In the first reading, in the first reading we listened in on the Psalmist's prayer as he pleaded with God to exercise "vengeance" upon the wicked, who seemed to be triumphing through and in their wickedness. In the second reading, we discovered the nature of the wicked's wickedness—abuse of vulnerable members of society, for which the powerful believed that they would never be held accountable. In the third reading, the Psalmist challenged the wicked abusers' contention that they would not be held to account for their abuse.

1. From our previous reading in Psalm 94, we heard the Psalmist's testimony that "the thoughts" or "plans, "intentions" of men and women are "vanity" (verse 11). In today's reading, the Psalmist pronounces a blessing on those "whom [God] chastens."
 - ? What is the relationship between the Lord's chastening and mankind's vain plans and actions—portrayed as "boastful," "oppressive," "murderous," and unpunished?
 - ? What is the Psalmist suggesting by having two adjacent lines of poetry in which "chastening" and "teaching" are parallel to one another?
2. In verse 15, the Psalmist declares that "judgment shall return unto righteousness."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? Does the NIV translation of this line—"Judgment will again be founded on righteousness"—clarify or alter your understand of the line? If so, how?
 - ? What actions and attitudes described in Psalm 94 to this point evince that "judgments" have been founded on "unrighteousness"?
 - ? What does the promise of righteous judgment portend for the oppressed "widow," "foreigner," and "fatherless" mentioned previously in verse 6?

Psalm 94.¹⁶⁻¹⁹

- ¹⁶Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?
or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?
- ¹⁷Unless the LORD had been my help,
my soul had almost dwelt in silence.
- ¹⁸When I said, “My foot slippeth;”
thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.
- ¹⁹In the multitude of my thoughts within me
thy comforts delight my soul.

Questionary

Today’s reading is the fifth of six from Psalm 94. In the first reading. In the first reading we listened in on the Psalmist’s prayer as he pleaded with God to exercise “vengeance” upon the wicked, who seemed to be triumphing through and in their wickedness. In the second reading, we discovered the nature of the wicked’s wickedness—abuse of vulnerable members of society, for which the powerful believed that they would never be held accountable. In the third reading, the Psalmist challenged the wicked abusers’ contention that they would not be held to account for their abuse. In the fourth reading, the oppressed are assured that the Lord would champion their cause though they may suffer at the hands of their persecutors for a time. In the fifth reading, the Psalmist continued to express his confidence in the Lord.

1. In verse 16, the Psalmist speaks of “evildoers” and “workers of iniquity.”
 - ? In reviewing the previous verses in Psalm 94, and considering the context of the Psalm, what is the nature, the character of the evildoers’ and the iniquitous’ actions and attitudes?
2. In today’s reading, the Psalmist testifies concerning the help he received from the Lord.
 - ? What form or forms does the Lord assistance take toward the Psalmist?
3. Verse 17 reads
 - Unless the LORD had been my help,
my soul had almost dwelt in silence.
 - ? Have you received help from the Lord when faced with challenges that you felt were insurmountable without the Lord’s help?
 - ? What were the circumstances and what form did the help take?
4. In verse 19, the Psalmist testifies,
 - In the multitude of my thoughts within me [When anxiety was great within me... NIV]
thy comforts delight my soul.
 - ? When and under what circumstances has the Lord spoken comfort to your soul?
5. Review the challenges the Psalmist faces and addresses in Psalm 94 (verses 2-7).
 - ? Given these challenges, what form, do you think, did the Lord’s “help” and “comfort” take?
 - ? What types of “help” and expressions of “comfort” might the Lord offer “the widow,” and “the fatherless”—i.e., vulnerable segments of society?
 - ? Have you seen evidence of the Lord’s help and comfort toward such populations in your own community, nation?
 - ? How might the Lord’s help to such populations come through someone such as yourself? What might you do to be on the Lord’s side of this “conflict” between the powerful interests and those of the vulnerable?

Psalm 94.²⁰⁻²³— just scripture

²⁰Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee,
which frameth mischief by a law?

²¹They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous,
and condemn the innocent blood.

²²But the LORD is my defence;
and my God is the rock of my refuge.

²³And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity,
and shall cut them off in their own wickedness;
yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.

Questionary

Today's reading is the last of six from Psalm 94. In the first reading we listened in on the Psalmist's prayer as he pleaded with God to exercise "vengeance" upon the wicked, who seemed to be triumphing through and in their wickedness. In the second reading, we discovered the nature of the wicked's wickedness—abuse of vulnerable members of society, for which the powerful believed that they would never be held accountable. In the third reading, the Psalmist challenged the wicked abusers' contention that they would not be held to account for their abuse. In the fourth reading, the oppressed is assured that the Lord would champion their cause though they may suffer at the hands of their persecutors for a time. In the fifth reading, the Psalmist testifies of his own experience with the Lord's rescue as evidence for the hope he holds out to the vulnerable oppressed.

1. In an earlier reading from Psalm 94, we learned that the "workers of iniquity" violently oppressed even to the point of death "widows," "foreigners," and "orphans" (verse 6). In today's reading, we learn something about the nature of the oppression conducted by the "workers of iniquity."
? What is it that we learn about the oppression?

The oppression was not simply "personal" or "individual," but "institutional" ("by a law"). It is almost universal that when the Old Testament addresses the sins of the elite and of government officials it almost always comes around to their treatment of vulnerable individuals and populations.

- ? How do you feel about this insight?
? How appropriate to today's elite and governments is this insight?
? What is the significance of understanding the oppression as institution?
? What types of institutional policies can you imagine that the Psalmist might view as oppressive toward 1) the elderly, 2) foreigners, and 3) orphans?
? Are there laws relating to these and other vulnerable populations today that are institutionally oppressive?
? What can you do about them?
2. Today's reading begins with a question that the Psalmist poses: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee."
? We might easily imagine what "fellowship with God" looks and feels like at the personal level, but what is meant by a "throne" having or not having "fellowship with God"?
3. The Psalmist says that government institutions that oppress vulnerable populations "bring upon them[selves] their own iniquity."
? What does this mean to you?
? What types of "oppression" might come back upon government institutions that pass oppressive laws?
4. Verse 6 spoke of oppressive violence against the elderly, the foreigner, and the orphan. Today's reading speaks of violent and oppressive laws formed against the "righteous," and "innocent."

- ? What do you think and how do you feel when you see vulnerable and oppressed populations being equated with “the righteous” and “innocent”?
- ? Is this consistent or inconsistent with our modern view of oppressed and vulnerable populations?

Psalm 100.¹⁻³

¹Make a joyful noise unto the LORD,
all ye lands.

²Serve the LORD with gladness:
come before his presence with singing.

³Know ye that the LORD he is God:
it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Questionary

- ? How do we sometimes act as if we were self-made?
- ? What are the evils and consequences of such delusion?
- ? How do you make “a joyful noise unto the LORD”?