



edition: october 14, 2022

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## 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](http://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.

## **g**enesis 4.9 \*

And the LORD said unto Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?"

And he said, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?"

### **Q**uestionary

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1. Never mind any of the possible "historical" first thoughts or utterances expressed by humankind in mortality. Textually speaking, Cain's arrogant response to God's question contains the first human words spoken outside the garden of Eden.
  - ? How real is Cain's "question"? What answer does his rhetorical question demand?
  - ? What message or messages do you think the writer of Genesis is sending when the first recorded "mortal thought and statement" is one that questions one individual's responsibility for the welfare of another?
  - ? What private attitudes and actions as well as public ideologies and policies in today's world duplicate the refusal to look after others?
  - ? Consider the American right's response to the coronavirus and its refusal to abide by behavior's known to protect everyone, especially society's vulnerable. How do these attitudes and actions replicate those of Cain?

**genesis 6.** <sup>5-6, 11-13</sup> \*

<sup>5</sup>And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup>And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

<sup>11</sup>The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup>And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. <sup>13</sup>And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What do you imagine when you consider a society in which “**every** imagination... was evil **continually**”?
- ? When you imagine a world “filled with violence,” what do you see and feel?
- ? How closely or distantly do you feel our modern world is to the one described in today’s reading?
- ? How do you feel about God being violent in response to human violence?
- ? Can you explain the collapse of violent societies without implicating God in the violent collapse? How? What human mechanism would be at work?

## Genesis 13.<sup>1, 5-12</sup> \*

<sup>1</sup>Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south....

<sup>5</sup>And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. <sup>6</sup>And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. <sup>7</sup>And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

<sup>8</sup>And Abram said unto Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

<sup>10</sup>And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. <sup>11</sup>Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. <sup>12</sup>Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

## Questionary

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1. In today's reading, Abraham responds to the unhealthy economic competition that had developed between himself and his nephew.
  - ? What is Abraham's response to the unhealthy economic competition?
  - ? How do you feel about Abraham's willingness to lose "profits" rather than engage in unhealthy competition with an economic competitor?
  - ? How practical, do you feel, would it be today to follow Abraham's example? What would following his example look like?
  - ? What does Abraham's action suggest about his priorities in regard to "profits" verses morality and healthy human relationships?
  - ? How does Abraham's rejection of "profits" at all cost demonstrate his faith in God?
  - ? To what extent do our society's economic ideology and policies encourage, or not encourage imitation of such generosity?

2. In past Read, Ponder, Pray exercises we have examined the following passages.

"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19.<sup>9-10</sup>).

"When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow" (Leviticus 19.<sup>19-21</sup>).

"If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand;' and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against



thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deuteronomy 15.<sup>7-11</sup>).

“Let them repent of all their sins, and of all their covetous desires, before me, saith the Lord; for what is property unto me? saith the Lord” (DC 117.<sup>4</sup>).

- ? How do these relate to today’s reading?
- ? What do all of these suggest about the Lord’s feelings about “economic profits”?
- ? How consistent with these principles are you—both privately and publicly as a citizen?
- ? How consistent with these principles are your culture’s economic policies and institutions?

## **g**enesis 15.<sup>1</sup>

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying,  
“Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield,  
and thy exceeding great reward.”

### **Q**uestionary

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1. In Genesis 13.<sup>9</sup>, Abraham showed his faith in God’s watch-care over him by acting generously toward an economic competitor. In today’s reading, God assures Abraham that He, God, is Abraham real “reward” or “wage,” “salary.”
  - ? How satisfied are you with God, Himself, as your principle daily and life reward?
  - ? What is the nature of that “reward”?
  - ? What is the principle “reward” after which your society labors?

## Genesis 26.<sup>6-11</sup>

<sup>6</sup>And Isaac dwelt in Gerar: <sup>7</sup>and the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, “She is my sister:” for he feared to say, “She is my wife;” lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.

<sup>8</sup>And\* when he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. <sup>9</sup>And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, “Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, ‘She is my sister?’”

And Isaac said unto him, “Because I said, Lest I die for her.”

<sup>10</sup>And Abimelech said, “What is this thou hast done unto us? One of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us.”

<sup>11</sup>And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, “He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

## Questionary

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In addition to being a *Just Scripture* reading, today’s reading is the second of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham.

1. Isaac and his wife, Rebecca, had an experience very similar to that of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Gen. 12.<sup>14-20</sup>) and in Gerar (Gen. 20).
  - ? What do you think when you consider the apparent common nature of this particular behavior?
  - ? What does it tell you about the nature of monarchy and unchecked political power?
  - ? What does it tell you about the nature and vulnerability of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities in Isaac’s time?
  - ? What does it tell you about the nature and vulnerabilities of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities that Isaac would resort to lying about the relationship between himself and his wife?
  - ? If this lie served to protect Isaac, how well did it serve Rebecca?
  - ? How do you feel when you contemplate a man or woman having their spouse taken from them because of the absence of legal protections for refugees/immigrants?
  - ? What is the nature of vulnerabilities for refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities in your nation?
  - ? How do you feel when you contemplate the vulnerabilities of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities in today’s world?
  - ? In what ways do you either contribute to their vulnerabilities or seek to relieve them of such vulnerabilities?

## Genesis 26.<sup>12-16</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. <sup>13</sup>And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: <sup>14</sup>for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup>For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. <sup>16</sup>And Abimelech said unto Isaac, "Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we."

### Questionary

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Today's reading is the third of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham. In the second reading, Philistine political readers took advantage of Isaac's refugee/immigrant and unprotected status by kidnapping his wife.

1. After reporting that Isaac, the refugee/immigrant, has experienced success in his adopted country, the inspired writer informs us that "the Philistines envied him."
  - ? What comes to your mind when you consider this envy of the foreigner?
  - ? Why is suspicion and envy of immigrants/foreigners such a common occurrence?
  - ? How is suspicion and envy of immigrants/refugees/foreigners manifest in your society?
2. After reporting the Philistine suspicion/envy of the foreigner, Isaac, the inspired writer reports how the Philistines suspicion/envy resorted to violent economic sabotage in hopes of impeding Isaac's success.
  - ? What form did the violent economic sabotage take?
  - ? How does your society impede the progress of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
  - ? How do not only individual prejudices but, just as importantly, public policies seek to impede the progress of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
  - ? What do you do individually and as a citizen to resist such private prejudices and unjust public policies as impede the success of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
  - ? What do you do to actively advocate and work for the success of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
3. Finally, the Philistine king expels Isaac from Philistine because, he says, "thou art much mightier than we."
  - ? Where and when else do we heard a similar concern in the Old Testament?

In Exodus, we hear Pharaoh demand that something be done with the Israelites because "the people of Israel are more and mightier than we" (1.<sup>9</sup>).

- ? Are there populations in your society that induce such fear by the dominant population due to the foreigners' increasing numbers, influence, and successes?
- ? How did such experiences affect Israel as it became a nation with its own dominate population?
- ? After considering Israel's and Israel's ancestors treatment as refugees/immigrants/foreigners what do you think and feel as you consider the Bible's repeated demands that refugees/immigrants/foreigners (strangers) be treated justly? Following are just a few examples.

“Thou shalt neither vex a *stranger*, nor oppress him: for ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22.<sup>21</sup>).

“Also thou shalt not oppress a *stranger*: for ye know the heart of a *stranger*, seeing ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 23.<sup>9</sup>).

“And if a *stranger* sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the *stranger* that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19.<sup>33-34</sup>).

“For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the *stranger*, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the *stranger*: for ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10.<sup>17-19</sup>).

“When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the *stranger*, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the *stranger*, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the *stranger*, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing” (Deut. 19.<sup>19-22</sup>).

“For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the *stranger*, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever” (Jer. 7.<sup>5-7</sup>).

“Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the *stranger*, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place” (Jer. 22.<sup>3</sup>).

“See how each of the princes of Israel who are in you uses his power to shed blood. In you they have treated father and mother with contempt; in you they have oppressed the *foreigner* and mistreated the fatherless and the widow” (Ez. 22.<sup>6-7</sup> NIV).

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the frequent association that the Lord makes between foreigners/refugees/immigrants and widows and orphans?
- ? What do these populations have in common?
- ? How would you feel if we suggested that the demand for just treatment of foreigners could be thought of not only as an “Article of Faith,” but of part of the nation’s “Constitution”?

## Genesis 26.<sup>17-25</sup>

<sup>17</sup>And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. <sup>18</sup>And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. <sup>19</sup>And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. <sup>20</sup>And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, "The water is ours:" and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him.

<sup>21</sup>And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.

<sup>22</sup>And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

<sup>23</sup>And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. <sup>24</sup>And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said,

"I am the God of Abraham thy father:  
fear not, for I am with thee,  
and will bless thee,  
and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake."

<sup>25</sup>And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

## Questionary

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Today's reading is the fourth of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham. In the second reading, Philistine political readers took advantage of Isaac's refugee/immigrant and unprotected status by kidnapping his wife. In the third reading, the Philistines, envious of Isaac's success, sought to impede his progress through economic sabotage.

1. In our previous reading from Genesis 26 (verses 12-16), we learned how the Philistines sabotaged Isaac's efforts to thrive in the Philistine culture and economy. In today's reading, we learn that they had practiced the same form of refugee/immigrant/foreigner sabotage in Abraham's life and during his stay in Philistine.  
? What form did this economic sabotage take in Abraham's lifetime?
2. After Isaac and those associated with him had found water, "the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, 'The water is ours'" and confiscated the wells.  
? What do you think and feel when you contemplate the "natural citizenry's" contention that possessions acquired by refugees/immigrants/foreigners are in affect stolen from the natural citizenry?  
? What examples of this attitude, this envy, the possessiveness can you point to in today's society?  
? How would you feel if we suggested that the desire to withhold health care benefits from "illegals" is an example of this "stingy" attitude on the part of the "natural citizenry"?

**Exodus 20.**<sup>17</sup>

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

**Q**uestionary

- 
1. The Lord admonishes, “cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another” (DC 88.<sup>123</sup>).  
? How does imparting to others help to battle the sin of covetousness?
  2. In Colossians 3.<sup>5</sup>, the apostle Paul identifies covetousness with idolatry.  
? How is covetousness indicative of one who worships false gods?  
? What societal evils are a consequence of covetousness?  
? What thoughts and behaviors accompany covetousness?

## Exodus 22.<sup>21-24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

<sup>22</sup>Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. <sup>23</sup>If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; <sup>24</sup>and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

### Questionary

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Given America's current immigration policies—policies that breach international law, traditional American values, basic human decency, and divine mandates—today's reading seems appropriate and pertinent.

1. In today's reading, Yahweh identifies three classes found in society that come under Yahweh's special protection.
    - ? What are those three classes?
    - ? What do these three classes have in common?
    - ? Take a moment to list one or two ways that each of these classes are vulnerable to being taken advantage of, mistreated, and oppressed.
    - ? What does it mean to "vex" or "oppress" an immigrant?
  2. When instructing ancient Israel in regard to issues related to social justice, it is very, very common for Yahweh to remind them, as he does here, that "ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."
    - ? Why do you think Yahweh so often reminds Israel of their own oppressive experience?
    - ? What is the significance of this reminder?
    - ? What does it mean for American's today as they consider their treatment of immigrant
  3. Yahweh warns Israel that "if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot..." Consider this "in any wise."
    - ? In what ways can vulnerable immigrants be afflicted?
    - ? How is our American society doing in this regard?
    - ? How do feel about Yahweh's assurance that he hears when afflicted and oppressed peoples cry out to him?
    - ? Is it possible that immigrants—such as those DACA children who were brought here, have never known anything else, and have no claim on any other country or have any other country to claim them—have cause to feel oppressed, cry to God, and, thereby, bring God's correction upon America?
    - ? How might you respond to such affliction of the stranger?
- ? How does the Lord's stipulation in today's reading concerning strangers jive with what we are witnessing in American immigration policies and on the nation's southern border?
  - ? What does this reading suggest that we can expect by way of future consequences for the oppression that is taking place there?



**Exodus 22.<sup>25</sup>**

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What is it about lending money at interest, do you think, that the Lord finds objectionable?
- ? What does the Lord's prohibition against lending money at interest suggest about how God expects us to feel about and act toward our fellowmen and women?

**Exodus 23.<sup>1-2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.

<sup>2</sup>Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd. (NIV)

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What sort of testimony would a “malicious witness” offer in hopes of “help[ing] a guilty person”... and/or libeling the innocent?
- ? What does “siding with the crowd” look like?
- ? In what ways are we witnessing such wrongdoing in today’s legal and political environment?
- ? To what modern examples can you point?

**Exodus 23.**<sup>6-7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.

<sup>7</sup>Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. (NIV)

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What types of political and judicial activities and behavior constitute “bribery”?
- ? What examples have you seen in your society in which justice for “poor” and “innocent” people has been subverted with money, power, and prestige?

**Exodus 23.<sup>9</sup>**

Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What is the significance of “knowing the heart of a stranger”?
  - ? How do you think God feels about America’s treatment of the “stranger”?

## Leviticus 19.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. <sup>10</sup>And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.

### Questionary

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1. As we have observed before, although the particulars of this passage may not be applicable to our day and society, there are principles that can be drawn from the particulars. Consider the instruction that in harvesting their crops, farmers are to leave a portion of their crop unharvested in order to provide for the poor and foreigners. Of necessity, of course, this cuts into the farmer's "profit margin."
  - ? How do you feel about the Lord's instruction that the farmer "suffer a loss of profit" so that the poor and foreign born can be cared for?
  - ? Does this seem unreasonable? Impractical? Just? Fair?
  - ? What does this suggest about the Lord's expectations of those who would be his disciples?
  - ? What does this suggest about the Lord's attitude toward "profit" and how he expects disciples to view "profit"?
  - ? What does this suggest concerning the Lord's expectations concerning the farmer's attitude toward the poor and foreign born?
  - ? Based upon this instruction with its implied divine expectations, how are you personally measuring up to the Lord's value system?
  - ? Based upon this instruction with its implied divine expectations, how is our modern society measuring up to the Lord's value system?
  - ? What type of "public policy" could and should you encourage and support so that our society reflects such godly instruction and expectations?
  - ? What can you do now to encourage such "public policy"?
2. Today's reading ends with "I am the Lord your God."
  - ? What is the relationship between this final declaration and the generous and moral economic principles expounded in today's reading?
  - ? What is the relationship between this final declaration and the faithful worship of God?

## **Leviticus 19.**<sup>11-14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

<sup>12</sup>And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

<sup>13</sup>Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

<sup>14</sup>Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

### **Q**uestionary

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- ? Why, do you think, does God consider delaying, withholding, and even underpaying worker's wages to be fraud and robbery?
- ? What does such fraud or robbery look like in today's society?

## **Leviticus 19.<sup>15</sup>**

Do not act with inequity in any legal procedure. You are not to give advantage to the vulnerable, or show favoritism toward the influential. You are to adjudicate each citizen's case with justice (Author's translation).

### **Q**uestionary

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- ? How well is the American legal system abiding by this Biblical mandate?
- ? What can you do as one, lone citizen to encourage and demand justice in the American legal system?

## Leviticus 19.<sup>33-34</sup>— just scripture

<sup>33</sup>And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. <sup>34</sup>But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

### Questionary

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1. God forbids his people to “vex” foreigners residing among them.
    - ? What does it mean to you to “vex”?
  2. The Hebrew word could be translated as “suppress,” or “oppress.”
    - ? What connotation does “oppress” have for you? What about “suppress”?
  3. God’s injunction to his people in relation to their treatment of foreigners among them goes beyond that of forbidding mistreatment. It also requires that “thou shalt love him as thyself.”
    - ? What would private actions and public policies look like in order to be in conformity with this injunction?
    - ? How well do you follow these two injunctions in your private life— 1) do not “vex” foreigners living among you, 2) but treat them as you would want to be treated if you were a foreigner?
    - ? How well do you follow these two injunctions in your public life, or your role as a voting citizen?
    - ? Do you encourage and support government leaders and institutions that govern consistent with these two injunctions?
    - ? How well does your society and government do at following these divine injunctions?
  4. God gives the following reason for Israel needing to obey these injunctions: “for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
    - ? How does Israel’s experience as refugees in Egypt inform their understanding of the foreigners that are among them?
    - ? Why does their own experiences as refugees in Egypt require that Israelites avoid—privately and publicly—vexing foreigners among them, but treating them as they would be treated as foreigners?
    - ? LDS people were once treated poorly, even to the point of forcing them to leave the United States and escape into the territories. How should this experiences inform and shape the way they treat oppressed peoples, especially foreigners?
- ? How do you feel about God’s demand that a resident alien is to be treated as a citizen?
  - ? How closely is the U.S. following such an injunction?



**d**euteronomy 1.<sup>16-17</sup>— just scripture

<sup>16</sup>And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. <sup>17</sup>He shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man...

**Q**uestionary

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- ? How are the legislators who create laws, the judges who rule on them, and the attorneys who use the laws in our culture doing in treating persons of all classes with equity and justice?
- ? To what specific examples would you point to justify your answer to the previous question?
- ? What can you do as a citizen to demand strict equity and justice in the legal system?

## Deuteronomy 5.<sup>12-15</sup>— just scripture

<sup>12</sup>Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. <sup>13</sup>Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: <sup>14</sup>but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. <sup>15</sup>And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

## Questionary

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1. God ask that we “keep the sabbath day to sanctify it...”
  - ? What does it mean to you to “sanctify” the sabbath?
  - ? If we understand “sanctify” to mean, “make distinct, or set apart,” how do you make the sabbath distinct from the other six days of the week?
2. The Lord says, “Therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.” “Therefore,” signifies the reason that Israel is to keep the sabbath day. Now, in Exodus, Israel was to observe the sabbath in imitation of God’s rest at the end of his creative efforts. However, Deuteronomy suggests a different reason:

“Thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm.”

  - ? What does this reason for observing the sabbath suggest about the sabbath?
3. The sabbath is a reminder of Israel’s captivity in Egypt and the emancipation that Yahweh effected in the national history. Israel is now instructed to act in behalf of others (even animals!), as God acted in its behalf. They are to be liberators.

“Thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

The observance of the sabbath is, then, much more than a kind of legalistic consideration about what we do and don’t do on the sabbath. Observance of the sabbath is, at least in part, a social and economic issue. “Because I emancipated you from your Egyptian labor, you are to free those who work for you of their labor one day a week.” Taking a day off work to permit others a day off has implications for one’s priorities.

  - ? How does observance of the sabbath day reflect one’s priorities for achieving a just society over those of personal gain and profit?
  - ? How is our society doing in reflecting appropriate social priorities through sabbath day observance?
  - ? What can you do, not only to observe the sabbath in your own life, but to encourage society to use the sabbath day as means of developing a just society by easing the labors of laborers?

## Deuteronomy 10.<sup>17-19</sup>— just scripture

<sup>17</sup>For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: <sup>18</sup>He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. <sup>19</sup>Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

### Questionary

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1. In today's reading, Yahweh is credited with several commendable actions. Take a moment to identify them.

? How are your feelings for God effected by your awareness of these attributes?

In regard to the last attribute—he “loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment”—Israel is invited to imitate God. It is reasonable to conclude that we are invited to imitate him in each of his societal actions:

- There are to be no legal injustices due to the influence of money.
- Vulnerable portions of the population should receive equal treatment in the legal system.

? How consistent with this divine principles is your community—local, state, and nation?

2. In addition to showing compassion to foreign residents because of God's example, Israel is also asked to show compassion to foreign residents because they themselves were once oppressed foreign residents. They therefore know how oppression feels and should know better than become oppressor.

? ? How do the following words spoken by King Benjamin related to this part of Yahweh's message?

“Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—but I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God. For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?”  
(Mosiah 4.<sup>17-19</sup>)

? Why is God so anxious to take up the cause of orphans, widows, and immigrants?

? In light of the way they are treated in our society, who is likely to take up their cause if not God?

? Does God only work personally in behalf of these vulnerable populations, or is he, to some degree, reliant upon those who think of themselves as his disciples?

## Deuteronomy 15.<sup>1-4</sup>— just scripture

<sup>1</sup>At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. <sup>2</sup>And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release. <sup>3</sup>Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; <sup>4</sup>save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it...

## Questionary

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Today's reading includes economic stipulations that, while perhaps not directly applicable to our modern economic system, may contain principles that can guide us in our modern private and public economic lives.

1. The Lord stipulates that all debt acquired over the course of seven years is to be forgiven a fellow Israelite.
    - ? How would you feel as the lender if asked to cancel someone's debt before it was paid off?
  2. Today, we would almost certainly worry that such a policy would create "sloth" on the part of the debtor. "What," we might ask, "is to keep the debtor from being slow to repay, knowing the year of release is approaching?"
    - ? Do you suppose such concerns were felt back then as well?
    - ? What does this economic policy suggest about the attitude of the two—debtor and lender—toward each other?
    - ? What does this suggest concerning the attitude of a lender toward money and profit?
    - ? Given the seeming impracticality of doing this in today economic environment, what does it suggest about modern day relationships?
  3. There seems to have been a different policy for a fellow Israelite and a non-Israelite.
    - ? Why do you think there was a difference?
    - ? How do you feel about the difference?
    - ? Would you be more comfortable with such an economic practice if it were based upon a covenant that both debtor and lender had made with God?
    - ? What principle do you learn from this passage?
    - ? Are there any attitudinal adjustments you could make to be more consistent, at least, with the economic principles behind this practice?
- ? How does the following quote relate to today's passage and principles found in it?
- "Peer through the lens of neoliberalism and you see more clearly how the political thinkers most admired by Thatcher and Reagan helped shape the ideal of society as a kind of universal market (and not, for example, a polis, a civil sphere or a kind of family) and of human beings as profit-and-loss calculators (and not bearers of grace, or of inalienable rights and duties). Of course the goal was to weaken the welfare state and any commitment to full employment, and – always – to cut taxes and deregulate. But "neoliberalism" indicates something more than a standard rightwing wish list. It was a way of reordering social reality, and of rethinking our status as individuals....
- "In short, 'neoliberalism' is not simply a name for pro-market policies, or for the compromises with finance capitalism made by failing social democratic parties. It is a name for a premise that, quietly, has come to regulate all we practice [sic] and believe: that competition is the only legitimate organising [sic] principle for human activity" (Stephen Metcalf, "Neoliberalism: the idea that swallowed the world," [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)—The Long Read).
- ? How could today's scripture be applied to current financial challenges related to the coronavirus?

- ? How do you feel about the Lord's requirement that debts be canceled periodically?
- ? What "reasonable" economic and moral objections might be expressed in relation to such cancelation of debt?
- ? How would the Lord respond to such objections to show that the policy is not, in fact, as "objectionable" as might appear?
- ? How could this be applied to current financial challenges related to the coronavirus?

## Deuteronomy 15.<sup>7-11</sup>— just scripture

<sup>7</sup>If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: <sup>8</sup>but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. <sup>9</sup>Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand;’ and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. <sup>10</sup>Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. <sup>11</sup>For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

## Questionary

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Today’s reading, the second from Deuteronomy 15, relates, like the first reading (vs. 1-4), to questions of loaning money and the release of debts.

1. Today’s passage provides several “do’s and don’ts” in relation to how individuals and societies are to think about and treat the poor.

“Thou shalt not”

“Harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor”

“Thine eye be evil against thy poor brother

“Heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him”

“Thou shalt”

“Open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land”

- ? Note the focus on several body parts: “heart,” “hand,” and “eye.” Do you have any thoughts about the significance of this bodily multiplication?
  - ? How do you and society “perceive” the poor?
  - ? How do you and society “feel about” the poor?
  - ? How do you and society “act toward” the poor?
  - ? How do you feel about the counsel that we not only not be stingy toward the poor, but actually be abundantly generous (“open thine hand wide”)?
  - ? How can one “grieve” when assisting the poor?
2. Again, although the particulars of Israelite economic law are different than ours, principles can be drawn from them. For example, every 7 years all debts acquired by fellow Israelites were to be cancelled—keep in mind, in addition, that loans were to be interest free. Today’s passage counsels that the monied interests were not to withhold loans to the poor because the year of cancellation was approaching.
    - ? What does this suggest about the attitude the monied interests were to have about loans provided to the poor?
    - ? How do you feel about Yahweh’s expectation that the wealthy would be more concerned with seeing that the poor have their needs met than getting every penny of a loan back?
    - ? Years ago, I had a friend who was a well-known economist. He never tired of telling me that such policies as interest-free loans and cancellation of loans was foolish. Do you find yourself agreeing with him?
    - ? What seems to be God’s principle concern—care for the poor or “fairness” toward the wealthy?
  - ? How might today’s reading be applicable in the age of coronavirus and the payments individuals are struggling to make due to job losses, etc?
  - ? How well is your nation doing at being true to the spirit of this divine direction?

- ? How do you feel about the Lord's assertion that he has given wealth to some for the specific purpose of having them care for the needy—for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee?
- ? What do you make of the fact that there is no instruction given to the wealthy/lender concerning the need to establish the "worthiness" of the poor for the assistance offered the poor or the money lent?
- ? How do you feel about the Lord's requirement that loans made to the poor be cancelled periodically?

## Deuteronomy 15.<sup>12-15, 18</sup>— just scripture

<sup>12</sup>And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. <sup>13</sup>And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: <sup>14</sup>thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. <sup>15</sup>And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day....

<sup>18</sup>It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

## Questionary

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Today's reading is our third from the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. The first two readings (15.<sup>1-4</sup> & <sup>7-11</sup>) addressed attitudes and actions surrounding the lending of money and the release of debt. The direction was entirely directed at the lender, presumably because the lender possesses all the power in the lending/borrowing relationship.

1. Interestingly, while the lender is counseled to not withhold loans because the time of release is approaching, the borrower is given no counsel. He might have been counseled to not slow or even cease repayment as the period of release neared, but he wasn't. No doubt Yahweh would want such uprightness on the part of the borrower, but the text is quiet about this—and is addressed nowhere else.
  - ? Why, do you think, the counsel was only directed at the lender?
2. Today's reading addresses the release of slaves. We will not address the question of slavery and the Lord's condoning of it in Old Testament times. It may seem strange to examine such a passage in a time and place where slavery is not practiced. But, don't get hung up on the slave aspect of this verse, but consider:
  - ? Is there a principle that can be drawn from this passage that is applicable to our modern world and your life?
3. As was the case with lending, so here the counsel is all directed at the party that possesses all the power—the slave-holder. Yahweh encourages the slave-holder to adopt certain attitudes and actions at the time he releases the slave.
  - ? What are those attitudes and actions?
4. Consider the following desired attitudes and actions on the part of the slave-holder.
  - Thou shalt not let him go away empty
  - Thou shalt furnish him liberally
  - It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free
  - ? What does this suggest concerning the attitude that Yahweh hopes the ex-slave-holder will have toward the newly released slave?
  - ? How do you feel about Yahweh's requirement that the ex-slave-holder, essentially, help the ex-slave establish himself as a freeman?
  - ? How, do you suppose, did the ancient slave holder feel about this stipulation? Did he think it just?
  - ? As we have asked in the previous readings from this chapter, what does this suggest concerning the attitude Yahweh expects of the slave-holder in relation to money, profits, etc.
  - ? What modern day applications might you make from today's reading?
  - ? What priorities are we to possess when it comes to individuals' needs and dignity verses profits?



- ? Could this be applied by employers toward their employees? If so, how?
  - ? How consistent with the principles are you? How consistent is our Society?
  - ? What could you do to encourage more consistency with such principles in our society?
5. As is so often the case when counseling certain attitudes and actions, Yahweh demands that “thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee.”
- ? Why was this remembrance so vital?
  - ? Could we relate it in any way to the oft-quoted sentiment: “There, but for the grace of God, go I”?
  - ? If we considered the modern debt culture, how might we “let [debtors] go free,” not “empty,” but “furnished liberally so that they might get a new start?”
  - ? What does God expect in the relationship between the rich and powerful, and the poor and vulnerable?

## Deuteronomy 24.<sup>14-15</sup>— just scripture

<sup>14</sup>Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: <sup>15</sup>at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.

### Questionary

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1. There is, of course, an important and essential historical and “literal” reading to this text.  
? But, what general principles can be drawn from the historical reading and applied to modern life?
2. Take a few moments to consider and wrote up a general principle and modern application that can be drawn from this text.  
? What do you think is meant by the observation that the poor “setteth their hearts upon their hire”?
3. The poor “depend upon a just wage” and the faithful and timely disbursement of such funds. God expects employers to provide such just wages in a timely fashion so that the poor do not find themselves in even temporary want. Just wages allow workers to live secure and dignified lives. In our day, this would be called, perhaps, not a “minimum wage,” but a “living wage.”  
? How is our society doing in this important aspect of “following God’s commandments”?
4. On the “just reporting page of this site, the reader can find a story entitled, “Rigged: Forced into Debt, Worked to Exhaustion, Left with Nothing” (17 June 2017).  
? How would this story be different if the Lord’s counsel found in Deuteronomy 24.<sup>14-15</sup> were observed by the companies in question?
5. Immigration has been for some time been a hot topic. Many immigrants, including those who come illegally, are often hired by U.S. businesses to work, often, “low wage jobs.”  
? Would today’s passage have anything to say to U.S. businesses and business men/women?
6. There is simply no doubt that the Lord hears the complaint of those poor, whose employers do not provide such just wages. There is simply no doubt that “it be sin unto” such employers. Neither is there any doubt that “it be sin unto” a government, its elected officials, and an electorate that votes officials into office that do not legislate for such just wages. Finally, and most shameful of all, there is no doubt that “it be sin unto” a supposed Christianity that does not loudly and incessantly agitate for such just wages.  
? What responsibility do you have for seeing, and what can you do to see that U.S. businesses treat wage workers consistent with divinely inspired counsel?
- ? The Lord’s law has very specific directions concerning how a wage earner is to be treated by his or her employer. How well is your society keeping these directions?
- ? What responsibility do you have to safeguard the interests of the wage earner in your society?
- ? Are you acting and advocating for the observance of Biblical stipulations concerning treatment of wage earners?

## Deuteronomy 24.<sup>19-22</sup>— just scripture

<sup>19</sup>When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

<sup>20</sup>When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

<sup>21</sup>When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

<sup>22</sup>And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

## Questionary

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Today, we examine a passage with implications concerning economic principles and attitudes related to the just society. Again, although the specific practices may not apply to our economic system, we may draw principles from the practices.

1. In a previous reading from this same chapter, verses 9-13, we saw that farmers were not to harvest all their crops, but leave a portion for the poor to harvest for their own desperate needs. In today's reading, we learn that the Lord not only required farmers to leave a portion of their crops unharvested, but that after they have harvested a field, they were not to go back through the fields to collect what their harvesting had missed, leaving even what was missed to the poor.
    - ? What principles do you see active in this instruction?
    - ? What do you think God hoped the farmer would learn about and feel toward the poor by observing this principle?
    - ? What do you think the farmer would learn about God and his feelings toward the poor by observing this principle?
    - ? What do you think God was teaching farmers, and society in general, about the Lord's feelings about profits and profit margins, especially in regard to their relation to caring for the poor?
  2. Today's reading speaks of "strangers, orphans, and widows."
    - ? What do these groups have in common that they are considered together?
    - ? In addition to these, what other classes of people are likewise vulnerable to insecurities and abuse in our society today?
  3. Consider the injunction: "remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing." Note especially the "therefore."
    - ? What does one's having been subject to hardship and vulnerabilities have to do with the necessity of taking care of others experiencing hardships and vulnerabilities?
    - ? In what way is the now successful farmer like the present vulnerable "stranger, orphan, and widow"?
    - ? What does this teach/remind one about the nature of "dependence," "independence," and "interdependence"?
    - ? What could you do for vulnerable individuals and groups that is consistent with the principles being taught in today's reading?
- ? What does it say about the Lord's assumptions concerning his people's material and financial priorities that he expects his people to put the good of the poor above their own personal maximum profits?

## 2kings 3.<sup>24-27</sup>— just scripture

<sup>24</sup>And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country. <sup>25</sup>And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it. <sup>26</sup>And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not. <sup>27</sup>Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against [anxiety in] Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.

## Qquestionary

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- ? Why do you feel that the Israelites, who supposedly did not believe that Moab's god, Kemosh, was really a god, became anxious after witnessing the king's human sacrifice and abandoned their war against Moab?
- ? How do you feel about the fact that whatever Israel or you think about Moab's god and the unacceptable nature of human sacrifice, the human sacrifice achieved its purpose?
- ? This story suggests that even if there is no god—assuming Chemosh is not really a god—human sacrifice can take place and achieve its ends?
- ? What forms of human sacrifice are taking place in American culture today—remember, one need not have an actual god present for there to be human sacrifice that achieves its ends?

**Psalm 2.**<sup>1-3</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>1</sup>Why do the nations raise such a ruckus,  
and entire populations make a fuss that will come to nothing?  
<sup>2</sup>The world's kings offer resistance;  
world leaders form a united front  
against YHWH  
and against his Māšiah.  
<sup>3</sup>“We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control,” [they say] (author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, following is the JKV.

- <sup>1</sup>Why do the heathen rage,  
and the people imagine a vain thing?  
<sup>2</sup>The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD,  
and against his anointed, saying,  
<sup>3</sup>“Let us break their bands asunder,  
and cast away their cords from us.”

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist offers his perspective on the attitudes about and actions toward God on the part of nations and their leaders. He then offers evidence of these attitudes and actions toward God by directly quoting them.
  - ? Based upon the Psalmist's description of these attitudes and actions, how does he feel about the nations' rebellion against God?
  - ? Does he seem fearful? Indignant? Mocking?
  - ? What do you see in the Psalmist's description that makes you answer as you do?
2. While the original context for this complaint against world leaders might have been rebellion against Judah's king, anointed and placed upon the throne through Yahweh's sanction, it might also be read more universally.
  - ? How apt would this complaint be today?
  - ? What policies and activities on the part of the world's kingdoms suggest that the Psalmist's indictment concerning national leaders' rebellion and crimes against God is as applicable today as it was then?
  - ? What can you do to resist and reverse this ungodly rebellion?
3. In a well-known parable, Jesus tells of a king who makes the following pronouncement:

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25.<sup>40</sup>).

  - ? How does this New Testament assertion relate to the Psalmist's complaint about the rebellion against God on the part of the world's nations and their leaders?
  - ? What does the treatment of “the least of these” on the part of nations and their leaders suggest concerning their attitudes and actions toward God and his rule?
  - ? Comparing the world's treatment of “the least of these” with that of God, how comfortable, would you say, would nations and their leaders be with the Lord's manner of world leadership?
  - ? What attitudes and actions toward “the least of these” on the part of the world's nations and their leaders evidence rebellion against the rule of God?

**Psalm 9.**<sup>7-12, 18</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>7</sup>But the LORD shall endure for ever:  
he hath prepared his throne for judgment.
- <sup>8</sup>And he shall judge the world in righteousness,  
he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.
- <sup>9</sup>The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed,  
a refuge in times of trouble.
- <sup>10</sup>And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee:  
for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.
- <sup>11</sup>Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion:  
declare among the people his doings.
- <sup>12</sup>When he maketh inquisition for blood,  
he remembereth them:  
he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.
- <sup>18</sup>For the needy shall not alway be forgotten:  
the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.

**Q**uestionary

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1. Verses 7-8 speak of God's role as judge. Verses 9, 12, and 18 provide the context for understanding the emphasis on God's righteous and upright judgment.  
? What aspect of God's judgment is the emphasis of these verses?
2. Today's reading testifies that God's judgment is focused on  
Providing "refuge for the oppressed"  
Meeting the needs of the "humiliated"  
Helping the poor realize their hopes for a better life.  
? How do you feel about this emphasis on God's judgment?  
? How does the emphasis on God's "judgment" go beyond the courtroom, to include "economics"?
3. At the center of today's reading (verse 11) is the feeling that the divine "righteous" and "upright" judgment in behalf of the "oppressed," "Humiliated," and "poor" invokes in the Psalmist.  
? What is the Psalmist's feelings about God's judgment in behalf of these vulnerable populations?  
? Have you seen evidence of this same judgment in behalf of the vulnerable in your own local community? Extended community? Nation?  
? Do you feel about God as the Psalmist does, when you see evidences of God "judging" or "advocating" for the needs of oppressed, humiliated, and poor people?  
? What can you do to partner with God in this judging or advocacy for vulnerable individuals?  
? What can you do to encourage your community to partner with God in this endeavor?
4. The Psalmist suggests that in this world the "needy" have been "forgotten" or "ignored" and that their "expectations" or "hopes" have "perished" or been "thwarted."  
? What evidence do you see that confirms the Psalmist's witness?  
? What do you do to assure that you are not contributing to the poor being ignored and their hope for a better life being shattered?

**Psalm 9.**<sup>15-20</sup>— just scripture

<sup>15</sup>Nations sink in the pit they themselves dig.

Their feet are ensnared in the trap that they themselves hide.

<sup>16</sup>YHWH is known for the appropriate way he governs—

in the wicked being ensnared by what their own hands create.

<sup>17</sup>The wicked go to Še'ôl—

even every nation that disregards 'ēlōhîm—

<sup>18</sup>For the poor are not to always be ignored,

or the hope of the oppressed always dashed.

<sup>19</sup>Arise YHWH.

Don't let mere mortals prevail.

<sup>20</sup>Govern the nations that exist before you.

Give, O YHWH, insecurities to them

so nations understand that they are deficient (Author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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- ? How do you feel about Še'ôl, hell, being prepared for those who “ignore” the poor and remain unsympathetic when the hopes of the poor are “dashed”?
- ? Why is it just for God to allow nations to suffer the same evils that they perpetrate upon individuals and other nations?

**Psalm 10.**<sup>2-3</sup>— just scripture

<sup>2</sup>Haughtily, the wicked vehemently pursues those already down and out.

The poor are snared by the plans the wicked conceives.

<sup>3</sup>For the wicked finds joy only in satisfying his appetites,  
and calls blessed, one accumulating unjust profits—  
one who holds YHWH in contempt!

## Questionary

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Today's is the second of six readings from Psalm 10. In this psalm, the Psalmist meditates upon the nature of wicked and prideful individuals of wealth and power. For those who would like, here is the KJV's translation.

<sup>2</sup>The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor:

let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.

<sup>3</sup>For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire,  
and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.

In complaining that the wicked oppress the poor, the Psalmist may be complaining of the oppression that he himself experiences at the hand of the wicked. The Psalmist's "poorness," or "oppression" may refer not to his economic state, but reputation. His reputation may be under assault.

The Psalmist's "poverty" should probably be understood as "vulnerability." The economically poor, in addition to their lack of material resources, often see their character maligned and assassinated, as can be seen in current American and even Christian thought and culture.

1. In today's passage, the Psalmist identifies several attitudes and behaviors that characterize "the wicked."
  - ? What are those attitudes and behaviors?
  - ? How would you characterize, and what do you see when you contemplate the following wicked indicators?
    - Prideful oppression of the poor
    - Putting what one wants above all other considerations
    - Thinking well of, and considering blessed by God, the covetous
  - ? How are these related?
  - ? How does each feed the others?
2. "The wicked," says the Psalmist, "in his pride doth persecute the poor." It seems unlikely that "the wicked" is another *poor* man. "In saying that "the wicked... blesseth the covetous" it seems, again, unlikely that "the wicked" are the poor (why would the poor "blesseth" someone who is gobbling up resources?) Rather, "the wicked" seems to indicate the wealthy and powerful.
  - "The poor" certainly can think and feel and act wickedly. But for the Psalmist's purposes and focus in this psalm, he classifies and contrasts individuals as "wicked" or "poor." The powerful and wealthy are, then, thought of as "wicked."
  - ? How do you feel about this dichotomy... "wicked" verses "poor"?

While conceding that it is possible for the wealthy and powerful to avoid wickedness of the sort that the Psalmist names here, we would contend—with the Psalmist and all other scripture—that it is generally true that the wealthy and powerful act most often and as a rule, wickedly. This is especially true of "social behavior." We could speak of the wealthy as being "anti-social."

  - ? How do you feel about such assertions?
3. The Psalmist speaks of "the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth."
  - ? What does it mean to be "covetous"?



- ? How does the following passage enhance your understanding of covetousness?
- 4. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3.5).
  - ? What does it suggest to you, and how do you feel about the fact that “covetousness” is lumped together with some so commonly acknowledges as vile sin as “fornication”?
  - ? What does the Psalmist mean when he says that God “abhorreth” the covetous?
  - ? What does it suggest about God and his own divine character that “covetousness” is so contrary to his own desires?
  - ? What role (and how strongly) does “covetousness” and “insatiability” play in your own life?
  - ? What role (and how strongly) does “covetousness” and “insatiability” play in your own society?
  - ? What can you do to check such personal and societal covetousness?

**Psalm 10.**<sup>4-7</sup>— just scripture

<sup>4</sup>The wicked, consistent with his stubborn arrogance, is unreflective.

All his plans are made with no thought of 'ēlōhîm.

<sup>5</sup>The wicked are distressed by God's ways.

The loftiness of God's judgements confront him.

Anything that would restraint him he blows off.

<sup>6</sup>He says to himself, "I cannot be toppled.

My future holds no misfortune."

<sup>7</sup>This, while his mouth is full of injurious lies;

while misery and abuse flow from his tongue (author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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Today's is the third of six readings from Psalm 10. In this psalm, the Psalmist meditates upon the nature of wicked and prideful individuals of wealth and power. For those who would like, here is the KJV's translation.

<sup>4</sup>The wicked, through the pride of his countenance,  
will not seek after God:

God is not in all his thoughts.

<sup>5</sup>His ways are always grievous;  
thy judgments are far above out of his sight:  
as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.

<sup>6</sup>He hath said in his heart, "I shall not be moved:  
for I shall never be in adversity."

<sup>7</sup>His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud:  
under his tongue is mischief and vanity.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist seeks to explain how the wicked wealthy and powerful can oppress the vulnerable with such impunity and deem those who profit from such oppression as exemplary.  
? What explanations for these wicked attitudes and behaviors do you find in this reading?
2. The Psalmist charges that the wicked wealthy and powerful behave as if God is of no account.  
? Which is more likely in this ancient society?
  - The wicked wealthy and powerful are athiests who do not believe in God.
  - The wicked wealthy and powerful believe in God but simply rebel against him.
  - The wicked wealthy and power believe in God but do not believe he is involved in human affairs in either providing moral guidance or holding trespassers to account, i.e., they have "redefined" God, limiting him to the "sacred" sphere, but denying him place in the "profane" or temporal sphere?
  - Other.  
? Why do you answer as you do?  
? Which would be more likely in today's world?  
? How does your society redefine God and his laws in such a way as to exempt itself from God's direction in profane matters—for example, how it conducts itself in everyday economic matters and how it treats the poor—and what it believes about the reality of consequences for such conduct?
3. The Psalmist says that godly principles "distress" the wicked wealthy and powerful, that the wicked feel confronted and constrained by godly principles, and that the wicked wealthy and powerful are contemptuous and dismissive of anything that would constraint them from accomplishing in their wicked desires.

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider this aspect of wickedness?
  - ? What signs do you see in your society that these attitudes are alive and well today?
  - ? What scripture passages come to mind when you consider the guidance that God has given concerning the treatment of the poor and vulnerable?
  - ? How well does your society observe them?
  - ? How does it ignore them through what it says and teaches about economic matters?
4. The Psalmist charges the wicked wealthy and powerful with believing that they will not suffer negative consequences for their wickedness (vs. 6), in particular in the matter central to this psalm's focus: their mistreatment of the poor and vulnerable.
- ? How and where do you see these beliefs manifest in society today—again, especially in matters related to economic injustice toward the poor?
5. Finally, in verse 7 the Psalmist marvels at the irrationality of the wicked wealthy and powerful.
- ? What is the nature of his wonder?
  - ? How could they perpetuate injustice against the poor and think there will be no consequences?
  - ? How do the words we speak and the thoughts we think shape our behavior?
  - ? How does lying enhance the ability of the wicked wealthy and powerful to carry out the wickedness that they plan against the poor and vulnerable?
  - ? What do such lies seem to play so well with so many members of society?

**Psalm 10.**<sup>8-11</sup> — just scripture

- <sup>8</sup>He sits in ambush outside villages.  
From concealed places he slays the unsuspecting innocent;  
his eyes peer out at his unfortunate victim.
- <sup>9</sup>Like a lion, he lies in wait from a concealed place in the brush.  
He lies in ambush to seize the poor—  
He seizes the poor, dragging him into his lair.
- <sup>10</sup>He crouches low, he hunches down  
and falls upon the bones of the vulnerable.
- <sup>11</sup>He says to himself, “God is oblivious.  
He’s absent. He sees nothing, ever” (author’s translation).

**Q**uestionary

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Today’s is the fourth of six readings from Psalm 10. In this psalm, the Psalmist meditates upon the nature of wicked and prideful individuals of wealth and power. But, more than this, the psalmist’s meditation on the wicked is as good a description of the very nature of wickedness as any found in scripture.

For those who would like, here is the KJV’s translation.

- <sup>7</sup>His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud:  
under his tongue is mischief and vanity.
- <sup>8</sup>He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages:  
in the secret places doth he murder the innocent:  
his eyes are privily set against the poor.
- <sup>9</sup>He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den:  
he lieth in wait to catch the poor:  
he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net.
- <sup>10</sup>He croucheth, and humbleth himself,  
that the poor may fall by his strong ones.
- <sup>11</sup>He hath said in his heart, “God hath forgotten:  
he hideth his face; he will never see it.”

1. The Psalmist began a meditation upon the nature of wicked and prideful individuals of wealth and power in verses 2-3. Here, the Psalmist describes the wicked of wealth and power as being so unwilling to check their own appetites that they willfully abuse the already vulnerable in order to feed those appetites. In verses 4-6, the Psalmist attributes the wicked’s unchecked appetite and willingness to abuse with their dismissal of God’s right to engage in “profane” matters, their rejection of his lofty values which stand opposed to theirs, and their rejection of all notions of accountability. In this reading, the Psalmist continues his meditation on the nature of the wicked individuals of wealth and power.
  - ? What more do you learn from this reading about the wicked and about the very nature of wickedness?
2. In today’s reading the Psalmist mentions “the poor” four times, each time as targets of “the wicked.”
  - ? How does this support our repeated assertion that the “wicked” are those of “wealth and power.”
  - ? Does it make sense to think of the “poor” as “wicked” within the context of this psalm?
  - ? Why do you think the Psalmist’s focus on “wickedness” is as it is in this psalm?
3. In two parallel lines, the Psalmist speaks of “the poor” and of “the innocent.”
  - ? Why does the Psalmist associate the poor with innocence?

- ? How do you feel about this?
  - ? How does this compare with society's—and often modern day "Christians'"—view of the poor?
  - ? If there is a dichotomy, what do you feel explains it?
4. In describing the contempt, aggression, and violence the wealthy and powerful wicked have for and practice against the vulnerable, the Psalmist resorts to imagery.
    - ? What is that imagery?
    - ? Close your eyes and recall those "nature shows" in which the camera captures a lion as it hunts its prey and then eats it. What do you see?
    - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's likening of the wicked wealthy and power to a ravenous lion as it hunts and eats its prey?
    - ? How do you feel about the wicked wealthy and powerful? What do you feel for the poor who are their prey?
  5. The Psalmist compares the violence of the wicked wealthy and powerful to an "ambush."
    - ? What comes to your mind when you think of ambushes?
    - ? What does the wicked's ambushing of the poor tell you about 1) the wicked and 2) the poor?
  6. In "hunting" the poor, the wealthy and powerful wicked conclude that "God hath forgotten," that "he hideth his face," and that God "will never see it."
    - ? How is it that the wealthy and powerful conclude that God is so dismissive of the poor and their plight that they, the powerful, will not be held accountable for the evil they do to the vulnerable?
    - ? Where is society today in regard to its belief concerning the relationship between God and the poor?
    - ? In what ways does modern society, often including Christian thought and practice, attack the reputation of the poor?
    - ? How are the poor oppressed economically and legally?

**Psalm 10.**<sup>12-15</sup>— just scripture

<sup>12</sup> Rise up, YHWH, my God!

Strike out with your hand.

Do not abandon the poor,

<sup>13</sup> on which basis the wicked could hold 'ēlōhîm in contempt,  
saying to himself, “God doesn’t care.”

<sup>14</sup> But, you do see.

You do acknowledge misfortune and vexation  
to take it in hand.

The helpless abandon themselves to you.

It is you that is a protector of the orphaned.

<sup>15</sup> Break the power of the wicked and evil.

Expose his wickedness that goes always unacknowledged (author’s translation).

**Q**uestionary

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For those who would like, here is the KJV’s translation.

<sup>12</sup> Arise, O LORD;

O God, lift up thine hand:

forget not the humble.

<sup>13</sup> Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?

he hath said in his heart,

“Thou wilt not require it.”

<sup>14</sup> Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite,

to requite it with thy hand:

the poor committeth himself unto thee;

thou art the helper of the fatherless.

<sup>15</sup> Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man:

seek out his wickedness till thou find none.

1. Today’s is the fifth of six readings from Psalm 10. In this psalm, the Psalmists meditates upon the nature of wicked and prideful individuals of wealth and power. But, more than this, the psalms’ meditation on the wicked is as good a description of the very nature of wickedness as any found in scripture.
  - ? With what additional proud and evil characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors does today’s reading credit the wealthy and powerful wicked?
2. Previously in psalm 10, society’s wicked and prideful wealthy and powerful have maintained that they would “not be moved” and that they would “never be in adversity.” In addition, they have asserted that “God hath forgotten” and that “he hideth his face; he will never see it.” In today’s reading, they continue to maintain that they are not accountable to anyone for their wicked assaults upon society’s vulnerable.
  - ? How do they express this unaccountability in today’s reading?
  - ? What experiences do the wealthy and powerful have in the course of their lives that leads them to feel unaccountable for their wicked treatment of society’s vulnerable populations and classes?
  - ? How accountable does our society hold the powerful wealthy for the way in which they treat vulnerable populations of society?
3. The vulnerable poor makes some requests of God in today’s reading.
  - ? What are those requests?
  - ? How do you feel about them?

- ? Given what you have learned about the wicked and proud wealthy and powerful, are such requests “just”?
- ? What suggestions does the vulnerable offer God as justifications for his, God’s intervention in his behalf?
- ? How do you feel about the vulnerable’s suggestion that the wicked would hold God in further contempt, considering him weak if he did not come to the vulnerable’s aid?

**Psalm 10.**<sup>16-18</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>16</sup> YHWH is king forever and always,  
While nations disappear from existence.
- <sup>17</sup> The desires of the poor, you do indeed hear, YHWH.  
You strengthen their resolve by your attentiveness.
- <sup>18</sup> In your defending orphan and oppressed  
never again will mere mortals seem intimidating.

**Q**uestionary

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For those who would like, here is the KJV's translation.

- <sup>16</sup>The LORD is King for ever and ever:  
the heathen are perished out of his land.
- <sup>17</sup>LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble:  
thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear:
- <sup>18</sup>To judge the fatherless and the oppressed,  
that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

Today's is the sixth of six readings from Psalm 10. In this psalm, the Psalmist meditates upon the nature of wicked and prideful individuals of wealth and power, especially their inclination to oppress vulnerable members of their society without a sense of accountability or the experience of being held to account for their wickedness. This psalm's meditation on the wicked is as good a description of the very nature of wickedness as any found anywhere in scripture.

- ? How would you characterize today's finale to the Psalmist's meditations and prayer concerning society's wicked and prideful citizens of wealthy and power?
  - ? What is the finale's tone and mood?
1. Verse 17 speaks of God's hearing the "desire of the poor" or, in the KJV, "the desire of the humble."
    - ? What is the relationship between the "poor" and "humility"?
    - ? We have often suggested that humility should be connected to "humiliation." How do you feel about this suggestion?
    - ? What has been the nature of humiliation in this Psalm? Who has done the humiliating and who has been the target of the humiliating?
    - ? How do orphans and the "oppressed" experience humiliation?
    - ? How do you feel about thinking of "humility" to indicate the humiliation pressed against their will upon the oppressed rather than some type of self-willed and acquired virtue?
    - ? How does it impact your life and the way you treat others to know that God is the kind of king who is especially concerned about and anxious to serve those who are oppressed?
  2. The Psalmist speaks of Yahweh as "King for ever and ever:"
    - ? Given the content and emphasis of this psalm, what kind of king is Yahweh vis-a-vis the vulnerable?
    - ? What kind of king is he vis-a-vis the wicked and proud citizens of wealth and power?
    - ? After having your mind focused on the wealthy and powerful's oppression of the vulnerable throughout this psalm, how do you feel about Yahweh, his kingship, and his championing the cause of vulnerable individuals'?



**Psalm 12.**<sup>1-4</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>1</sup>Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth;  
for the faithful fail from among the children of men.
- <sup>2</sup>They speak vanity every one with his neighbour:  
with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.
- <sup>3</sup>The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips,  
and the tongue that speaketh proud things:
- <sup>4</sup>Who have said, “With our tongue will we prevail;  
our lips are our own: who is lord over us?”

**Q**uestionary

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Today’s reading is the first of two relating to Psalm 12.

1. Today’s reading describes a society in which individuals’, and likely even institutions’, words and commitments cannot be trusted. Jeremiah complained of such a society in his day.

“Take ye heed every one of his neighbour,  
and trust ye not in any brother:  
for every brother will utterly supplant,  
and every neighbour will walk with slanders.  
And they will deceive every one his neighbour,  
and will not speak the truth:  
they have taught their tongue to speak lies,  
and weary themselves to commit iniquity.  
Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit;  
through deceit they refuse to know me,  
saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9.<sup>4-6</sup>).

- ? What consequences flow throughout such societies?
  - ? Can you relate to such a society?
  - ? What specific things can you do to not become implicated in such behavior?
  - ? What are the objectives of such individual and societal deceit?
2. The Psalmist quotes the dishonest of society as saying “our lips are our own: who is lord over us?”
- ? Put the attitude reflected in these words in your own words.
  - ? How do these words reflect the feeling that they accept no one’s constraints, that they can do whatever they wish, and that they will not be held responsible for their deceit?

**Psalm 12.**<sup>5-8</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>5</sup>“For the oppression of the poor,  
for the sighing of the needy,  
now will I arise,” saith the LORD;  
“I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”
- <sup>6</sup>The words of the LORD are pure words:  
as silver tried in a furnace of earth,  
purified seven times.
- <sup>7</sup>Thou shalt keep them, O LORD,  
thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.
- <sup>8</sup>The wicked walk on every side,  
when the vilest men are exalted.”

**Q**uestionary

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1. In the previous reading from Psalm 12 (verses 1-4), we read of a society in which individuals', and likely even institutions', words and commitments cannot be trusted. Among the ponder questions that we suggested for consideration was this one: “What are the objectives of such individual and societal deceit?” Today’s reading from Psalm 12 will answer this question directly.
    - ? What does verse 5 say about the purposes of the deceit?
    - ? How do the deceits of modern day individuals and institutes oppress the poor?
    - ? As one concrete example, how did the to-this-day-unpunished unethical behavior of banks and other mortgage lenders/traders during the 2000’s hurt U.S. homeowners toward the end of the decade?
    - ? How do you feel about reading such verses as these in relation to the decade-long financial lies and dishonesty that ended up “oppressing” the poor, causing many to lose their homes?
  2. Verse 6 speaks of the dependability of the word of God.
    - ? What language and imagery does it utilize to do this?
    - ? What do you see when you read this imagery used to describe how radically dependable God’s word is?
    - ? We could generalize and understand verse 6 to teach about the dependability of the word of God as found in scripture. What experiences have you had with scripture that confirm its dependability?
  3. The Psalmist’s testimony concerning the dependability of what God says, however, has a very specific context and application within Psalm 12.
    - ? What is that context and application?
  4. The “word” that is so sure in Psalm 12 is God’s promise, found in verses 5 and 7, of looking after the oppressed poor, who have been taken advantage of in many ways by the crafty deception of the ruling and economic classes.
    - ? How do you feel about this specific application of the dependability of the word of God?
    - ? Does God’s promise of help for the oppressed poor thrill you? Perplex you? Irritate you?
  5. The final verse claims that the “wicked walk on every side” and that the “vilest men are exalted.”
    - ? How do you feel about this?
    - ? Does the Psalmist seem too pessimistic to you? A complaining malcontent?
    - ? How do you imagine he would feel about the situation of the poor today?
  
    - ? How do you imagine he would feel about the relationship between the advantaged and disadvantaged?
    - ? In what ways and settings are the “vilest men” being “exalted” in today’s society?
- ? How do you feel about the Lord’s interest in vulnerable populations and his determination to

deliver them from those who hold them in contempt?

- ? How do you demonstrate your solidarity with vulnerable populations and thus unity with God?

**Psalm 20.**<sup>7-8</sup>— just scripture

<sup>7</sup>Some trust in chariots, and some in horses:  
but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

<sup>8</sup>They are brought down and fallen:  
but we are risen, and stand upright.

**Q**uestionary

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1. Verse 7 is made up of two lines of poetry. The two lines are contrastive.
  - ? How is the trust in chariots and horses opposed to remembering God?
  - ? Chariots and horses can be seen as a metaphor in our society. What is the modern equivalent of chariots and horses?
  - ? *What does it look like to trust in a military and other national security agencies rather than God?*
2. Consider Yahweh's criticism of Israel as found in Isaiah 2.<sup>7-8</sup> and 31.<sup>1</sup>.

“Their land also is full of silver and gold,  
neither is there any end of their treasures;  
their land is also full of horses,  
neither is there any end of their chariots:  
Their land also is full of idols;  
they worship the work of their own hands,  
that which their own fingers have made...”

“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help;  
and stay on horses,  
and trust in chariots, because they are many;  
and in horsemen, because they are very strong;  
but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel,  
neither seek the LORD!”

  - ? How do you feel about Isaiah's describing trust in military security as a form of idolatry?
3. The Psalmist warns that “they are brought down and fallen.”
  - ? Who is the “they”?
  - ? How do you imagine it working out that those who look for security in their national military are most likely to be “brought down and fall”?
  - ? How does an individual and a nation avoid falling into this trap of false security, abandonment of God, and the practice of idolatry?

**Psalm 33.**<sup>16-18</sup>— just scripture

<sup>16</sup>There is no king saved by the multitude of an host:  
a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.

<sup>17</sup>An horse is a vain thing for safety:  
neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.

<sup>18</sup>Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him,  
upon them that hope in his mercy...

**Q**uestionary

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1. Today's reading mentions two sources upon which nations can place their hope and trust for security.
  - ? What are those sources?
  - ? How can trust in the first—the greatest and latest in military technological innovations—reflect infidelity to the second—God Himself?
  - ? How are modern nations likely to respond to the assertions made in today's reading about the true source of national security?
  - ? How do you respond?
2. During the period when this psalm was composed, horse and chariot were the latest and greatest in military technological innovation.
  - ? What is today's weaponry upon which nations place false hope for peace and security?
3. We recently posted the following quote to the "just quotes" page of this site. "In 2010, at \$687 billion, military spending made up 4.9 percent of the GDP of the United States. In comparison, Russia spent just over fifty billion dollars. But it's bigger than that. You see, the US military budget accounts for approximately 40 percent of total global arms spending and is over six times larger than the military budget of China, and is greater than the next twenty largest military spenders combined" (Michael Swanson, War State, Chapter 1).
  - ? How does today's reading relate to this reality of U.S. military spending?
  - ? Ask yourself, "Does all of this spending really make the planet a safer place?"
  - ? What does this spending suggest about the U.S.'s response to the assertions made in today's reading?
  - ? What does this spending suggest about where we place our trust for national security?

**Psalm 35.**<sup>9-10</sup>— just scripture

<sup>9</sup>And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD:  
it shall rejoice in his salvation.

<sup>10</sup>All my bones shall say,  
“LORD, who is like unto thee,  
which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him,  
yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?”

### Questionary

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1. We often think of “salvation” strictly in terms of the afterlife. But, with its meaning of “deliverance” or “rescue, it also has application to life experiences in the here and now.  
? In the context of this psalm, who is being “rescued” and from what or whom are they being rescued?
2. The Psalmist speaks of God’s rescue of the poor and needy from the stronger classes of society that are intent on “spoiling” the poor and needy?  
? Do you find yourself conscience of the poor and needy’s need for divine rescue?  
? How do you feel about God’s interest in the poor and needy, even to the extent of working against the stronger elements of society?  
? What would this look like?
3. The Psalmist exalts in God’s rescue and emancipation of the poor and needy with “all his bones.”  
? What does this mean to you?  
? Do you find God’s rescue of the poor and needy from the wealthy and strong to be one of the reasons you glorify him?
4. It is a, if not the central claim of the Old Testament that God is an emancipator. He helps and rescues those in trouble. And, of course, much, in not most of the trouble humans experience is of their own making, as was ancient Israel’s.  
? How do these truths impact the way you feel about and treat the poor and needy, however they got there, and however skillfully they manage their lives in their impoverished circumstances?  
? Are your attitudes toward the poor and need consistent with those of God?  
? What can you do to assist God in the rescue, the emancipation of the poor and needy, especially from those who are stronger than they and take advantage of them?

**Psalm 37.** <sup>14-15, 35-36</sup>— just scripture

<sup>14</sup>The wicked have drawn out the sword,  
and have bent their bow,  
to cast down the poor and needy,  
and to slay such as be of upright conversation.

<sup>15</sup>Their sword shall enter into their own heart,  
and their bows shall be broken.

<sup>35</sup>I have seen the wicked in great power,  
and spreading himself like a green bay tree.

<sup>36</sup>Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:  
yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What does it mean to “cast down” the “poor and needy”?
- ? How does society today “cast down” the “poor and needy”?
- ? What can you do, not only privately and individually, but publicly, as a citizen of a larger whole to right wrongs committed against the “poor and needy”?
- ? The psalmist might have selected any number of evils that the wicked commit. Why did he select this evil—as he most often does—of “casing down the poor and needy?” What does this suggest to you about this evil?
- ? Why is how an individual and society treats the “poor and needy” such a good predictor of the spiritual state of the individual and society?

**P**salm 40.<sup>12</sup>— just scripture

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted,  
and the right of the poor.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? How do you feel when you read this type of testimony concerning God's character?
- ? are its implications for America and its current treatment of the vulnerable poor—both domestic, foreign, and refugees?



**Psalm 41.**<sup>1-3</sup>— just scripture

<sup>1</sup>Blessed is he that considereth the poor:

the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive;

and he shall be blessed upon the earth:

and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing:

thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What do you learn about the Lord and his interests that he comes to the assistance of those who assist the poor and vulnerable?
- ? What is the implication for those individuals and nations that do not provide assistance to the poor and vulnerable?

**P**salm 44.<sup>3,6-7</sup>— just scripture

<sup>3</sup>For they got not the land in possession by their own sword,  
neither did their own arm save them:  
but thy right hand, and thine arm,  
and the light of thy countenance,  
because thou hadst a favour unto them.

<sup>6</sup>For I will not trust in my bow,  
neither shall my sword save me.

<sup>7</sup>But thou hast saved us from our enemies,  
and hast put them to shame that hated us.

**Q**uestionary

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? In what sort of language and actions do we engage that suggest we trust in the strength of our national security apparatuses rather than in God?

**Psalm 46.**<sup>8-9</sup>— just scripture

<sup>8</sup>Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
what desolations he hath made in the earth.

<sup>9</sup>He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth;  
he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder;  
he burneth the chariot in the fire.

## Q

uestionary

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Today's reading is the third of four from Psalm 46. In the first two readings (verses 1-7), the Psalmist testified of God's sovereignty—his faithfulness and power—in the lives of individuals and nations that put their trust in him. He also suggested that the nations of the world are habitually in open rebellion against God.

1. The Psalmists speaks of the "works" of God in terms of "desolations."  
? What do you think this means and how does it make you feel?
2. It seems that the "desolations" with which God is credited cause "wars to cease" as he undermines the militarism of the nations. There may be several ways to understand this.  
? How do you understand the relationship between "desolations," the end of warfare, and his undermining of militarism?  
? The end of war and the undermining of militarism seem like good things. So why are they spoken of as a "desolation"?  
? What does this suggest about the attitudes of the kingdoms of this world about warfare?  
? How do you feel about living in a world, and being a citizen of a country that feels the end of warfare to be a "desolation"?  
? What evidence is there that the kingdoms of this world actually value warfare?
- ? How does today's reading contribute to the theme of God's sovereignty on earth that is the focus of this psalm?

As part of their work to "turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children, the Lord encourages latter-day disciples to "renounce war and proclaim peace" (DC 98.<sup>16</sup>).

- ? What does this encouragement suggest about the basic meaning of "the spirit of Elijah"?
- ? What do you do to be true to this charge?

**Psalm 49.**<sup>5-8</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>5</sup>Why should I be intimidated in evil times,  
when the deviant surround me—  
<sup>6</sup>those who rely on their own resources  
and promote themselves because of their great wealth;  
<sup>7</sup>individuals who can by no means deliver anyone,  
or provide <sup>8</sup>’lohîm the ransom price;  
<sup>8</sup>for the cost of delivering a life is too expensive,  
and is always out of reach (Author’s translation).

**Q**uestionary

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In the first reading (verses 1-4), the psalmist informed us that he had important wisdom to dispense. It represented wisdom difficult to grasp—perhaps less because it was intellectually challenging, and more because it was emotionally unwelcome and contrary to worldly traditions. The Psalmist offered this wisdom to all humanity, with the “low and high,” “rich and poor” specifically called out.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

- <sup>5</sup>Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil,  
when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?  
<sup>6</sup>They that trust in their wealth,  
and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;  
<sup>7</sup>None of them can by any means redeem his brother,  
nor give to God a ransom for him:  
<sup>8</sup>(For the redemption of their soul is precious,  
and it ceaseth for ever:)

1. In today’s reading, the Psalmist points to the inadequacy of wealth and even a “multitude of riches.” It also speaks to the foolishness of trusting in wealth or feeling confidence through riches.
  - ? How do the wealthy use their resources to “intimidate”?
  - ? What are the inadequacies of wealth and riches that the Psalmist enumerates?
  - ? What is the relationship between wealth and riches and eternity?
  - ? Why do many seek assurance and self-worth through material wealth?
  - ? How are the Psalmist’s expressions of “wisdom” concerning wealth and riches applicable in your life?
  - ? How are the Psalmist’s expressions of “wisdom” concerning wealth and riches applicable to today’s society?
  - ? How is such wisdom as the Psalmist offers concerning wealth and riches a “dark,” “difficult saying,” or, as I translated a “conundrum”?
2. Consider the following narrative from Matthew 19.<sup>16-26</sup>.

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?’

And he said unto him, ‘Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’

He saith unto him, ‘Which?’

Jesus said, ‘Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’

The young man saith unto him, ‘All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?’

Jesus said unto him, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.'

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, 'Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'

When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, 'Who then can be saved?'

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, 'With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible'" (verses 16-26).

- ? How does this account relate to the Psalmist's "wisdom" concerning wealth and riches?
  - ? How does the rich man's reaction reinforce the Psalmist's contention that the wisdom he shares concerning wealth and riches is a "difficult saying"?
  - ? Why are the disciples taken back by Jesus' contention that it is nearly impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?
  - ? How does the disciples' startled and incredulous reaction support the Psalmist's contention that the wisdom he shares concerning wealth and riches is a "difficult saying"?
  - ? Why is it so difficult to believe that the wealthy are unlikely to enter the kingdom of God?
  - ? Why do the disciples seemingly take for granted that the wealthy are likely to enter the kingdom of God?
- ? How does modern society's focus on wealth and its frequent assumption that it is the wealthy who "have done something right" and are therefore "blessed" demonstrate the Psalmist's truth that his wisdom concerning wealth and riches is a "difficult saying," not understood or applied?

**Psalm 49.**<sup>9-15</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>9</sup>Do they think they will live forever;  
not experience the Pit?
- <sup>10</sup>Surely, one can observe that the astute die;  
that they perish right along with the ignorant and stupid,  
and leave their wealth to those after them.
- <sup>11</sup>In their mind, their houses are enduring;  
their abodes, passing from one generation to another.  
They even name lands after themselves!
- <sup>12</sup>But even the most prestigious don't last long;  
exactly like senseless animals.
- <sup>13</sup>This is their way of life, madness owns them,  
and those who follow them accept what comes from their mouth!
- <sup>14</sup>Like sheep, they are destined for Še'ôl.  
Death shepherds them,  
and leads them down daily into flat plains.  
Še'ôl consumes their body;  
consumes what dignity they possess.
- <sup>15</sup>But 'elohîm will deliver me from Še'ôl's grasp,  
for he will take me to himself (Author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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Today's reading is the third from psalm 49.

In the first reading (verses 1-4), the psalmist informed us that he had important wisdom to dispense. It represented wisdom difficult to grasp—perhaps less because it was intellectually challenging, and more because it was emotionally unwelcome. The Psalmist offered this wisdom to all humanity, with the “low and high,” “rich and poor” specifically called out.

In the second reading (verses 5-8), the Psalmist pointed to the inadequacy of wealth and even a “multitude of riches.” He also spoke to the foolishness of trusting in wealth or feeling confidence through riches.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

In today's reading, the Psalmist continues his meditation on the foolishness of spending life in anxious contemplation of and labor for wealth and riches.

- <sup>9</sup>That he should still live for ever,  
and not see corruption.
- <sup>10</sup>For he seeth that wise men die,  
likewise the fool and the brutish person perish,  
and leave their wealth to others.
- <sup>11</sup>Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever,  
and their dwelling places to all generations;  
they call their lands after their own names.
- <sup>12</sup>Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not:  
he is like the beasts that perish.
- <sup>13</sup>This their way is their folly:  
yet their posterity approve their sayings.
- <sup>14</sup>Like sheep they are laid in the grave;  
death shall feed on them;

and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;  
and their beauty shall consume in the grave  
from their dwelling.

<sup>15</sup>But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave:  
for he shall receive me.

1. My translation attempts to capture the point and the mood of the Psalmist's difficult saying concerning the vanity behind the search for economic security.
  - ? What insights did you glean from the author's translation that you might have missed in reading the KJV?
  - ? What foolish attitudes and actions possessed by those who seek wealth does the Psalmist point out?
  - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's pointing out the foolishness in "naming" lands and possessions after themselves as an attempt to gain "immortality"?
2. The apostle Paul shares much the same "difficult wisdom" concerning wealth that the Psalmist shares in this psalm.

"...Supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Timothy 6.<sup>5-9</sup>).

- ? What similar teachings do you find in these two passages?
- ? What insights concerning "foolish and hurtful lusts" does Psalm 49 suggest?
- ? Certainly, the wealthy hope to eat well through their means. How do you feel about the Psalmist turning the tables to discuss how "death feeds on them"?
- ? How do you feel about the "rudeness" of the Psalmist in pointing all this foolishness and vanity out? (this might be thought of as part of his "difficult" or unwelcome wisdom?)
- ? How does the world in general respond to the "rudeness" of the Psalmist's "difficult wisdom"?

**Psalm 49.**<sup>16-20</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>16</sup>So don't be overawed when someone grows wealthy;  
as their house grows more impressive.
- <sup>17</sup>Because, when they die, they can't take a thing;  
their grandeur won't follow along.
- <sup>18</sup>Though they might celebrate their life while living,  
others praising them because they do well for themselves,
- <sup>19</sup>they will end up right where their fathers did.  
From then on, they'll see no light.
- <sup>20</sup>Individuals who have prestige, but lack insight  
are exactly like senseless animals (Author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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Today's reading is the last of four from psalm 49.

In the first reading (verses 1-4), the psalmist informed us that he had important wisdom to dispense. It represented wisdom difficult to grasp—perhaps less because it was intellectually challenging, and more because it was emotionally unwelcome. The Psalmist offered this wisdom to all humanity, with the “low and high,” “rich and poor” specifically called out.

In the second reading (verses 5-8), the Psalmist pointed to the inadequacy of wealth and even a “multitude of riches.” The Psalmist also spoke to the foolishness of trusting in wealth or feeling confidence through riches.

In the third reading (verses 9-15), the Psalmist continued his meditation on the foolishness of spending life in anxious contemplation of, labor for, and confidence in wealth and riches.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

- <sup>16</sup>Be not thou afraid when one is made rich,  
when the glory of his house is increased;
- <sup>17</sup>For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away:  
his glory shall not descend after him.
- <sup>18</sup>Though while he lived he blessed his soul:  
and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.
- <sup>19</sup>He shall go to the generation of his fathers;  
they shall never see light.
- <sup>20</sup>Man that is in honour, and understandeth not,  
is like the beasts that perish.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist discourages his readers from being overly impressed “when one is made rich” or when the possessions of the wealthy inevitably expand more and more.  
? How are you at following this counsel?  
? How does our society do at following this counsel?
2. In the final verse of today's reading, the Psalmist levels a charge against those who do not understand that the honor that comes to them because of their material successes are little more than animals that die an unremarkable death.  
? How do you feel about this uncompromising, and, perhaps, offensive charge?  
? How might our society feel and respond to such a charge if it was well publicized and had a significant population that maintained it boldly?
3. In this psalm, as is not uncommon in Old Testament poetry, the wealthy—those who nearly inevitably place false trust in material success—are contrasted with “the upright (verse 14).”  
? How do you feel about the wealthy being contrasted with the “upright”?



- ? How does this compare with the modern “doctrine” of the righteous being materially blessed?
- ? How would society be different if it took the Psalmist’s warnings about attitudes toward wealth and riches more seriously and attempted to apply those warnings, both at the individual and the societal level?

**Psalm 52.**<sup>1-4,7</sup>— just scripture

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

<sup>2</sup>Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs;  
like a sharp razor,  
working deceitfully.

<sup>3</sup>Thou lovest evil more than good;  
and lying rather than to speak righteousness.

<sup>4</sup>Thou lovest all devouring words,  
O thou deceitful tongue.

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

**Q**uestionary

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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?

**P**salm 72.<sup>4, 12-14</sup>— just scripture

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

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

<sup>13</sup>He shall spare the poor and needy,  
and shall save the souls of the needy.

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

**Q**uestionary

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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 73.**<sup>1-3</sup> — just scripture

<sup>1</sup>How good <sup>ĕ</sup>lohîm is to Yiśrā'ēl,  
to those of pure heart!

<sup>2</sup>But I, for a time, lost my footing;  
lost my balance.

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

**Q**uestionary

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup>For 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.**<sup>4-12</sup>— just scripture

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

**Q**uestionary

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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.

- <sup>4</sup>For there are no bands in their death:  
but their strength is firm.
- <sup>5</sup>They are not in trouble as other men;  
neither are they plagued like other men.
- <sup>6</sup>Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;  
violence covereth them as a garment.
- <sup>7</sup>Their eyes stand out with fatness:  
they have more than heart could wish.
- <sup>8</sup>They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression:  
they speak loftily.
- <sup>9</sup>They set their mouth against the heavens,  
and their tongue walketh through the earth.
- <sup>10</sup>Therefore his people return hither:  
and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.
- <sup>11</sup>And they say, “How doth God know?  
and is there knowledge in the most High?”
- <sup>12</sup>Behold, 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.**<sup>13-16</sup> — just scripture

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

**Q**uestionary

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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.

- <sup>13</sup>Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain,  
and washed my hands in innocency.  
<sup>14</sup>For all the day long have I been plagued,  
and chastened every morning.  
<sup>15</sup>If I say, I will speak thus;  
behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.  
<sup>16</sup>When 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.**<sup>17-20</sup>— just scripture

<sup>17</sup>Until, that is, I entered the holy place of God,  
there to discern what awaits the impious.

<sup>18</sup>Rather, you subject them to delusions.  
You let them fall prey to lies.

<sup>19</sup>How suddenly they become accursed;  
come to a complete end through multiple catastrophes!

<sup>20</sup>They are as a dream from which one awakens.

My Lord, upon waking up, their illusionary form is deemed hateful.

**Q**uestionary

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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.

<sup>17</sup>Until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
then understood I their end.

<sup>18</sup>Surely thou didst set them in slippery places:  
thou castedst them down into destruction.

<sup>19</sup>How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!  
they are utterly consumed with terrors.

<sup>20</sup>As 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 82.**<sup>2-5</sup>— just scripture

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

**Q**uestionary

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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.<sup>3-9</sup>, 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.<sup>33</sup>).

- ? 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 94.**<sup>4-7</sup>— just scripture

- <sup>4</sup>How long shall they utter and speak hard things?  
and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?  
<sup>5</sup>They break in pieces thy people, O LORD,  
and afflict thine heritage.  
<sup>6</sup>They slay the widow and the stranger,  
and murder the fatherless.  
<sup>7</sup>Yet they say, “The LORD shall not see,  
neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.”

**Q**uestionary

---

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.<sup>1-3</sup>).

- ? 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.**<sup>8-11</sup>— just scripture

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

**Q**uestionary

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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?

**Psalm 94.**<sup>20-23</sup>— just scripture

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

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

<sup>22</sup>But the LORD is my defence;  
and my God is the rock of my refuge.

<sup>23</sup>And 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.

## Q

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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 101.**<sup>1-4</sup>— just scripture

<sup>1</sup>Permit me to laud fidelity and good governance.

Let me, YHWH, sing what is music to your ears.

<sup>2</sup>I intend to devote myself to sound policy.

So, when will you come to me?

I will act out of a pure motive

toward those under my governance.

<sup>3</sup>I will never allow harmful counsel

to have a settled place in my administration.

I will refuse to act out of deception.

Such conduct will never be associated with me.

<sup>4</sup>Perverse desires will be absent from me.

I will countenance no evilly harmful thing (Author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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Today's reading is the first of two from Psalm 101. For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

<sup>1</sup>I will sing of mercy and judgment:

unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.

<sup>2</sup>I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.

O when wilt thou come unto me?

I will walk within my house

with a perfect heart.

<sup>3</sup>I will set no wicked thing

before mine eyes:

I hate the work of them that turn aside;

it shall not cleave to me.

<sup>4</sup>A froward heart shall depart from me:

I will not know a wicked person.

1. Though it is less clear in the KJV, Psalm 101 represents the song of an ancient Jewish King, likely in some ritual setting. In this song, the king commits himself to a just reign.
  - ? How does this observation alter the way you read and understand this psalm?
  - ? How does the commitment of this ancient king to reign justly compare with how those who govern in your own nation, state, community govern?
2. In verses 1-4, the Psalmist affirms that soundness of mind, pure motives, discernment in counsel, honesty, temperance in desire, and a strong aversion to harming the citizenry are all personal characteristics of a secular leader that is acceptable to God.
  - ? Based on these characteristics, how good for the nation and acceptable before God is the current occupant of the U.S. White House—the man I refuse to call by any name other than Caligula?

**Psalm 101.**<sup>5-8</sup>— just scripture

<sup>5</sup>He who covertly slanders his fellow citizen,  
I will totally silence.

The arrogant and over-confident,  
I will never empower.

<sup>6</sup>I will keep an eye out for honest citizens;  
they it is who will govern with me.

He who acts honestly;  
he it is who will serve with me.

<sup>7</sup>They will not remain in my administration,  
who act deceitfully.

One who counsels deceptions  
will never be allowed a place in my governance.

<sup>8</sup>First thing, I will put an end to all unjust citizens;  
eradicate from YHWH's city  
all who exercise power wrongfully (Author's translation).

**Q**uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

<sup>5</sup>Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour,  
him will I cut off:  
him that hath an high look and a proud heart  
will not I suffer.

<sup>6</sup>Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land,  
that they may dwell with me:  
he that walketh in a perfect way,  
he shall serve me.

<sup>7</sup>He that worketh deceit  
shall not dwell within my house:  
he that telleth lies  
shall not tarry in my sight.

<sup>8</sup>I will early destroy  
all the wicked of the land;  
that I may cut off all wicked doers  
from the city of the LORD.

In verses 5-8, the Psalmist affirms that a leader who is acceptable to God searches out the most honest citizens to serve in his administration. He expects and demands that those who serve in his administration govern justly. Administrative officials avoid all slander of others, deceitfulness, arrogance, injustice, and every unrighteous exercise of power.

- ? Based on these characteristics, how has Caligula done in filling government positions with the most honest citizens?
- ? How well have officials in Caligula's administration measured up to the Lord's standard of good governance as the Psalmist outlines it in this Psalm?

**P**salm 106.<sup>3</sup>— just scripture

Happy are those who sustain proper governance,  
and, themselves, act justly at all times (Author's translation).

### **Q**uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

Blessed are they that keep judgment,  
and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

Today's reading reminds us that our joy in this life and the next is not only contingent on the private attitudinal and behavioral choices we make in our daily lives. Our joy now and later is also contingent on the public attitudes and behaviors that we adopt and practice.

- ? What do you do to "sustain proper governance"?
- ? What does the current "governance" of your nation suggest for its present and future joy and security?

**P**salm 109.<sup>31</sup>— just scripture

For [God] shall stand at the right hand of the poor,  
to save him from those that condemn his soul.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? How do individuals and societies “condemn” the soul of the poor?
- ? What do you do to protect them from such “condemnation”?

**Psalm 113.**<sup>4-9</sup>—just scripture

<sup>4</sup>The LORD is high above all nations,  
and his glory above the heavens.

<sup>5</sup>Who is like unto the LORD our God,  
who dwelleth on high,

<sup>6</sup>Who humbleth himself  
to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

<sup>7</sup>He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,  
and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

<sup>8</sup>That he may set him with princes,  
even with the princes of his people.

<sup>9</sup>He maketh the barren woman to keep house,  
and to be a joyful mother of children.

**Q**uestionary

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1. In verses 4-6, the Psalmist lauds the greatness of God.
  - ? What image comes to your mind when you read that God “humbleth” or “lowers,” “abases” himself to look upon the universe?
  - ? What does it suggest to your mind that God has to abase himself in order to look upon the expansive universe, the earth, and all the happenings upon earth?
2. In verses 7-9, the Psalmist turns his attention to what God observes when he does abase himself to look upon this world.
  - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read the Psalmist’s focused testimony that when God does condescend to behold the things on earth, he involves himself intimately and helpfully in the challenges of the vulnerable—specifically mentioning the impoverished and the barren?
  - ? What image comes into your mind when you consider the poor digging through trash heaps? What are they looking for? What does it tell you about the insecurities of their lives?
3. In our “family focused” church today, we might read verse nine as another indication of the importance of the family. Fair enough. However, upon lumping the barren wife together with the vulnerable poor, the Psalmist wishes us to consider her from a “just society” perspective. The barren woman is societally vulnerable.
  - ? How is she vulnerable?
  - ? Consider the plight of women in ancient cultures, and some modern, who do not bear children. They can be divorced, and expelled from their homes. Where do they go then? How do they sustain themselves?
  - ? In light of these cultural tendencies, what are your thoughts when you consider God’s intervention in the plight of barren women?
4. The Psalmist does not just assure us that God assists the poor and needy. Rather, he “raiseth up” and “lifteth” them “that he may set him with “princes.”
  - ? How do you feel about the extravagant way that God intends to compensate the poor and needy for their life of suffering?
  - ? What does it suggest about the Lord’s feelings about inequality?



**Psalm 113.**<sup>7-9</sup>— just scripture

<sup>7</sup>He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,  
and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

<sup>8</sup>That he may set him with princes,  
even with the princes of his people.

<sup>9</sup>He maketh the barren woman to keep house,  
and to be a joyful mother of children.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? In the 3 verses before these, the Psalmist lauds the surpassing greatness of God. At the same time, the Psalmist testified, God “condescends” to observe, familiarize, and involve himself in the affairs of men. What, do you think, is the Psalmist up to when, in listing the human affairs in which God involves himself, he mentions and limits himself to God’s advocacy for vulnerable people?
- ? How is a “barren woman” vulnerable? How is her vulnerability similar to that of the poor and needy? How secure was her legal status in ancient days and even in some modern non-western cultures?

**P**salm 118.<sup>8-9</sup>— just scripture

<sup>8</sup>It is better to trust in the LORD  
than to put confidence in man.

<sup>9</sup>It is better to trust in the LORD  
than to put confidence in princes.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What does the evil of putting “confidence in man” and “princes” look like?
- ? How do political leaders tempt us to put “confidence” in them?

**Psalm 120.**<sup>1-7</sup>— just scripture

<sup>1</sup>It was YHWH that I, in my anguish, called upon.  
How he responded to me!

<sup>2</sup>“YHWH! Deliver me from deceitful lips;  
from a treacherous tongue.

<sup>3</sup>What will you procure for yourself?  
What will you gain for yourself, you with the treacherous tongue?

<sup>4</sup>A hero’s arrows, sharp pointed, burning hot.

<sup>5</sup>I was in despair because I lived, an alien, in Mešek;  
I lived a transient life in Qêdâr.

<sup>6</sup>Many a year did I live  
among them who distained peaceful coexistence—

<sup>7</sup>though I spoke up for camaraderie,  
they remained antagonistic (Author’s translation).

**Q**uestionary

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The fifteen psalms from 120 through 134 are often referred to as “Songs of Degrees,” “Song of Ascent,” “Songs of Steps,” or “Songs of Pilgrims.” It is thought that Jews utilized them during pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the three Jewish festivals. Some have suggested, further, that Priests and worshippers sang the 15 songs as they ascended the 15 steps that rose from street level to the temple platform.

Given the content of this particular psalm, it seems that this use would have been current during the second temple period after the Jewish return from Babylonian exile.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

<sup>1</sup>In my distress I cried unto the LORD,  
and he heard me.  
<sup>2</sup>Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips,  
and from a deceitful tongue.  
<sup>3</sup>What shall be given unto thee?  
or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?  
<sup>4</sup>Sharp arrows of the mighty,  
with coals of juniper.  
<sup>5</sup>Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech,  
that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!  
<sup>6</sup>My soul hath long dwelt  
with him that hateth peace.  
<sup>7</sup>I am for peace:  
but when I speak, they are for war.

1. In verse 1, the Psalmist speaks of his “anguish” from which Yahweh delivered him.  
? After reading the remaining verses, what do you understand the Psalmist’s “anguish” to be?
2. In verses 2 and 3, the Psalmist speaks of “deceitful lips” and “treacherous tongues.”  
? What is it about “lies” and “deceitfulness” that is so evil?  
? How are lies “treacherous”?

We must often think of lying in terms of “cognition” and in relation to “facts,” “truth,” “data.” But by connecting deceit with treachery, the Psalmist reminds us that lies inflict harm on much more than “facts.” They show contempt for others and betray relationships.

- ? How do lies harm others—other than leaving them vulnerable to “false data points”?

- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider that the primary evil in lies is found in the fact that they are most often intended to inflict harm on another?
  - ? Consider the current residence of the white house and his habit, nearly instinctual, of lying. If he is not merely abusing “the facts,” but intending harm, what harm/s is he intending?
  - ? Given that lies are not only, or even primarily about “abusing the facts” but about abusing relationships between individuals and between individuals and institutions, what are some effective strategies for resisting lies and the liar?
3. Previously, you read the entire psalm to determine the nature of the Psalmist’s “anguish.” In verses 5-7, we find that the Psalmist’s “anguish” was his status as a refugee/resident alien among a population that would not treat him humanly and justly.
- ? Should the resident alien expect humane and just treatment at the hands of citizens and their government?
  - ? How is your nation doing in regard to the humane and just treatment of refugees/resident aliens?
  - ? How do you feel about the fact that
    - 1) the Psalmist felt, appropriately, the need to report his inhumane and unjust treatment as a refugee to God with the expectation that God would do something about it?
    - 2) God heeded the Psalmist’s complaint and helpfully responded in some fashion, as suggested in verse 1?
  - ? How would you feel about a refugee/resident alien today calling upon God because of their inhumane and/or unjust treatment at the hand of Americans and their government?
  - ? How would you feel about God responding by way of protection or justice for the mistreated refugee or resident alien?
  - ? Would you be deemed a participant in the mistreatment or an advocate for the mistreated? Why do you answer as you do?
  - ? What role might you play in assisting God as he aids mistreated refugees?
- ? Today’s reading represents a complaint the Psalmist made to God during a period when he lived as a refugee in a foreign nation. How do you feel about the Psalmist presenting a complaint to God about the inhumane and unjust treatment he experiences as a refugee?
  - ? Earlier in the psalm, the Psalmist informed us that God responded to his plea for help. How do you feel about God coming to the aid of the mistreated refugees?
  - ? There have been and are mistreated refugees in and about the U.S. How would you feel about God coming to the aid of those refugees? What form would that aid take?
  - ? What role might you play in assisting God as he aids mistreated refugees?

**P**salm 140.<sup>12</sup>— just scripture

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted,  
and the right of the poor.

### **Q**uestionary

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- ? What “rights” do the poor have?
- ? Why is the legal status of the poor so often undermined, thus needing the Lord and his followers to advocate for them?
- ? What do you do as an individual and as a citizen to “maintain the cause” of those whom society humiliates”?

**P**salm 146.<sup>3</sup>— just scripture

Put not your trust in princes,  
nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

**Q**uestionary

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? In what ways is “there no help” in government institutions or officers?

**Psalm 146.**<sup>5-9</sup>— just scripture

<sup>5</sup>Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God:

<sup>6</sup>Which made heaven, and earth,  
the sea, and all that therein is:  
which keepeth truth for ever:

<sup>7</sup>Which executeth judgment for the oppressed:  
which giveth food to the hungry.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD looseth the prisoners:  
The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind:  
the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down:  
the LORD loveth the righteous:

<sup>9</sup>The LORD preserveth the strangers;  
he relieveth the fatherless and widow:  
but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What would the Psalmist have you consider when he testifies that the one who you have as a help is the creator of all things?
- ? In today's reading the "oppressed," "hungry," "prisoner," "blind," "bowed," "stranger," "fatherless," and "widow"—all of whom God looks after according to their various needs-- are all opposed by "the wicked," whom God therefore opposes. How do you feel about all those who oppose and refuse to help these various vulnerable classes being thought of as "wicked"?
- ? How are you and your society doing caring for these same vulnerable classes?

**Ecclesiastes 4.4**— just scripture

And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? It seems that many of those who have classically spoken and written on the subject of capitalism agree with the “preacher’s” sentiments that envy is the greatest motivator for acquisition and material gain. How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate this assertion?
- ? How free are you from envy?



**Ecclesiastes 5.**<sup>10, 13</sup>— just scripture

<sup>10</sup>Whoever loves money never has enough;  
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income....

<sup>13</sup>I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:  
wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners... (NIV)

### **Q**uestionary

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- ? What does it mean to “hoard” wealth? What is it about “hording wealth” that makes it such a “grievous evil”?
- ? When does one have “enough”?