



*"...The heart of the sons of men  
is full of evil,  
and madness is in their heart  
while they live..."  
(Ecclesiastes 9:3)*

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before the high God?  
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;  
and what doth the LORD require of thee,  
but to do justly, and to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with thy God?  
(Micah 6:6, 8)*

homily series on just society and our mad state of rebellion  
healing our brokenness inadequately

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## Part 1: customers as prey—cpap’s, ventilators, and mammon

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

### i Introduction to the series

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Judicial inequality and injustice. Economic inequality and injustice. Rampant greed and fraud on the part of wealthy individuals and essential institutions. Bribery and corruption of government officials. Inordinate influence of the wealthy of laws and public policy. Unjust laws and policies favoring the powerful and influential while disadvantaging the less powerful and influential. The infliction of the vulnerable with hunger, homelessness, sickness, and anxiety. Self-righteous justification of the mad state of rebellion. Stubborn refusal to acknowledge these and a host of other societal ills.

No, I am not talking about America of 2024. However, if the shoe fits...

I am talking about late 6<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Judah. These, and many other evils undermined the temporal, moral, and spiritual health of the nation. All the signs were there. The nation was on the verge of collapse. It was in desperate need of truth, however sour it might be to the national palate. But the nation’s shepherds fed the populace an empty diet of propagandistic myths of nationalism. Many of Israel’s prophets joined the fray. Israel’s watchmen, Jeremiah charged,

“Heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:

‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’”

“But nothing,” Jeremiah replies, “is OK!”

Does this, too, sound familiar? Strike close to home? It should. Too often, today’s religious leaders—whether they go by the name, “prophet,” “priest,” or “pastor”— seem to lack both discernment and courage. They seem utterly blind to and mute about sin and evil, unless, of course, it involves some form of real or imagined sexual deviance. If they do speak out, it is often with muted, vague, delicate, and generalized voices and statements. These shepherds seem not up to the challenging task of bold and clear truth telling of the sort that our society so desperately needs. Now is not the time for delicacy and caution.

This homily is the first in an ongoing series entitled, “Healing Our Brokenness Inadequately,” based on Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup> In this series, we explore specific examples of individual and societal sins about which political and religious leaders all too often remain willfully blind or, if sighted, stubbornly mute... and therefore complicit. Tragically, sometimes their complicity is even active and enthusiastic. With these examples in mind, we will often call upon the classic Hebrew prophets as well as other ancient and not so ancient prophets to speak as if from the dust. We read these discerning writings in light of the societal ills and injustices that abound in our modern world. Sometimes we even imagine and take a stab at replicating what a Hebrew prophet might have to say if he were to come to us from the past.

In today’s homily, we offer an example of our brokenness about which too many remain silent and worse, in which too many engage themselves. Such moments as ours desperately cry out for the type of discernment, boldness, and truth-telling so characteristic of the Hebrew prophets.

CPAPs, ventilators, and mammon

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Although Philips Respironics, a major provider of CPAP and ventilator machines, received thousands of complaints and numerous warnings from the Food and Drug Administration, they continued to produce breathing machines for over 10 years that they knew possessed engineering flaws and posed serious health risks to users, including already sick children, the elderly, and veterans. Complaints and warnings spoke clearly and frequently of “black

particles,” “dirt,” and “dust,” possibly “toxic and carcinogenic,” inside the machines that could find their way into the “noses, mouths, throats, and lungs” of their vulnerable users. “All the while, people using Philips machines were suffering from illnesses that no one could explain: vomiting, dizziness and headaches, along with newly diagnosed cancers of the lungs, throat, sinuses and esophagus.”

While ignoring these complaints, warnings, and preventable health risks for ten years, Philips engaged in aggressive and global marketing of these machines, allowing company stock prices to soar “to the highest levels in decades.”

Consistent with the mores of our entire culture, money came first and above all things. Health and human life took a backseat to greed.

Now, what, pray tell, do our priests, pastors, and prophets have to say about such antisocial behavior that so clearly denies the worth of every soul, risks death, and is indicative of deep social, cultural, and spiritual transgression?

Nada. Zip. Zilch. Zero.

The uninformed and undiscerning might think that the issue addressed here is something that should not be brought under the rubric of “sin.” They might imagine that this example of corporate misanthropic behavior does not come under the purview of priests or pastors or prophets. But they would be wrong, as even the most casual of readings in the Hebrew prophets demonstrates. The Hebrew prophets were keen observers and vociferous critics of private business practices and public policy makers that acted in ways harmful to individuals and society.

As one reads of Philips’ inferior, defective, and harmful devices, and the search for profit through them, one thinks of analogous situations in ancient Israel as commented on and criticized by the Hebrew prophets. Here is but one of dozens of examples that could be plied.

“Hear this, those who weary the impoverished  
to the end that they ruin the land’s downtrodden—  
thinking: ‘when will the new moon sabbath be over  
so that we can sell grain;  
and the weekly sabbath  
so that we can make our produce available,  
while shrinking the size of the dry measure,  
increasing the weight of šeqel,  
and rigging fraudulent scales  
to buy the underprivileged with money  
and the impoverished at the cost of a pair of sandals.  
We will even sell worthless debris mixed in with the grain!’”<sup>1</sup>

The context of this passage is, of course, different than that found in relation to the Philips supplied breathing machines. However, there are principled similarities. First, Philips managers sold an inferior product just as ancient Israel’s wheat merchant did. Second, the inferior product was sold with the highest priority given to profits and profit margins. Third, profits were prioritized over other’s needs, including health impacts that their actions and products might have on consumers.

There is ample prophetic evidence that those engaged in such malevolently immoral business practices as those of the Israelite wheat merchants were never held to account by those who had responsibility for looking out for the public’s interest. Philips managers have not and will not be held accountable for their malevolently immoral business practices which put health and life at risk for millions all around the globe. Not by the priests, pastors, or prophets and not by the legal system. White collar business crimes go almost universally unpunished. Indeed, so thoroughly have laws become corrupted by malevolently immoral policy and law makers that such crimes are not even called crime. This too has its ancient precedent.

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 8.<sup>4-6</sup> (author’s translation). See our two-part homily series on this passage entitled, “Fraudulently selling bad product at inflated prices.”

“Warning! To those who issue oppressive statutes  
and continuously write laws that afflict;  
that put redress out of the reach of the underprivileged  
and rob the poor among my people of justice,  
making prey of widows  
and plundering orphans.”<sup>2</sup>

Laws are corrupted for filthy lucre. Those who put mammon above people are empowered and idolized. People suffer and die. Society becomes a hornet’s nest of sociopaths. And the priests, pastors, and prophets see no evil, hear no evil, speak not of the evil.

#### Conclusion and benediction

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In our degenerate society, the sort of behavior in which Philips, or, more pointedly, its managers were engaged is simply chalked up to the cost of doing business. All is forgiven and justified as long as profits flow and stockholders are enriched. The victims of this warping and woofing of what is good and decent are martyrs, sacrificial victims of the materialistic fertility god, whom we name, “capitalistic greed.”

This is not OK. There is nothing OK about it, notwithstanding the mute silence of the prophetic voice in the face of such wickedness. There is no doubt that if any one of the Hebrew prophets returned today, they would have something, much of something to say about Philips’ business practices along with those of all the other global conglomerates that so often seek profits at the public’s expense, health, and even life.

Any priest, any pastor, any prophet worth their salt cannot remain silent. They must stand above the depravity. They can have no vested or invested interest in corporate profits, for these, surely, blind and debilitate them from fully engaging the ministry to which they are called—to be watchmen on the tower. Unfortunately, they are, themselves, all too often up to

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 10.<sup>1-2</sup>.

their eyeballs in their own private and corporate investment portfolios and money management firms.

I am no prophet. Nor am I anywhere near as gifted a poet as those discerning and bold Hebrew prophets of yesteryear. Nevertheless, I cannot remain silent. And I *can* imagine what they might say were they to reappear today. It might go something like this.

A cause of lamentation and warning!<sup>3</sup>  
They build machines for gasping sleepers;  
ventilators for the sick and dying.  
But their inventions pump shards of black foam and fuzz;  
spew filth and grime into deprived, damaged, and dying lungs.  
Thousands of complaints year after year after year  
and corporate knowledge of defects hidden  
yield global campaigns for increased sales  
and send profits soaring to unsurpassed heights  
while innocents wheeze to breath life into corporate greed.

Let the bank accounts of the deceptive and lustful  
match their moral bankruptcy.  
Let deceivers sleep the sleep of sulfurous hell.  
Let those greedy for mammon breath the putrid air of Hades  
until their lungs turn black with muck and mold and mildew,  
and their souls choke on poisonous goop and goo  
the sickly green of the color of mammon.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

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<sup>3</sup> This is my rendering of the traditional, “Woe!”

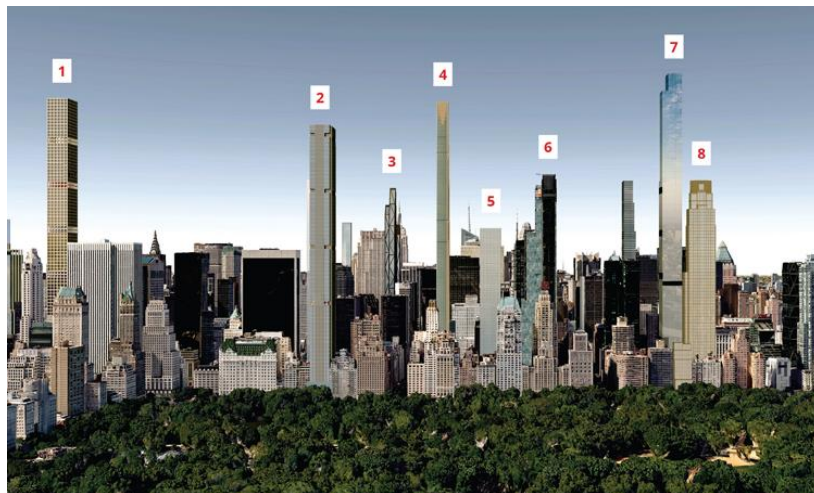
## Part 2: billionaire's row

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

### billionaire row and housing insecurity

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In an article by Liz Theoharis on the site, *TomDispatch*, entitled, “The US Government Has Abandoned the Nation’s Poor,” Theoharis reminds us of the existence of a grouping of tall ultra-luxury residential towers known as “Billionaires’ Row” that can be found at the southern end of New York City’s Central Park.



In these modern-day manors, the wealthy purchase luxurious condos and penthouses for 10’s of millions of dollars—some for well over 100 million dollars—or rent apartments for 10’s of thousands of dollars a month.





Several investigations and studies have revealed that many of the condos, penthouses, and apartments in these great and spacious buildings; these monuments to decadence remain unsold or unrented. Many of the condos, penthouses, and apartments that *have* been sold or rented remain without inhabitants. Many that have been sold, rented, and furnished remain unoccupied for all but a few weeks of the year, while others remain furnished and unoccupied year-round.

It is an open secret that for many developers and purchasers these condos and penthouses serve only as tax havens to hide money lest it be used for the public good and/or as laundry mats to clean dirty money. For the “less corrupt,” the condos, penthouses, and apartments are simply somewhere to put money that they have no earthly idea what else to do with.

Meanwhile, due to inadequate wages and predatory rent prices due—both, no doubt, championed by the very people buying space in the great and spacious buildings—on real planet earth and in New York City, 10’s of thousands of individuals and families are racked with anxiety and worry over the prospect of losing their homes, living in cars, tents, or cardboard boxes.

It is difficult to imagine how an actual Christian could countenance such corruption in a nation they claim as “Christian.” It is impossible to imagine an actual Christian participating in such corruption of individual integrity and public welfare. And it is the height of unfathomable grotesqueness that Christian leaders—prophet, priest, or pastors—should remain mute or refrain from just criticism of such immoral decadency and inhuman indecency.

To be sure, the Hebrew prophets would not be silenced by the intimidating arrogance of the self-promoting and self-justifying wealthy. Indeed, as we have commented elsewhere, Isaiah, for one, did address a kind of housing piracy not unlike this one.<sup>1</sup>

“A cause of lamentation and warning! There are those who merge homestead after homestead,  
combine property after property  
until there’s nothing left  
and you dwell by yourself in the heart of the property.”<sup>2</sup>

Though Isaiah does not mention it here, there can be little doubt that such ancient real estate practices did nothing to better the lives of vulnerable people, but only served to create additional insecurity and homelessness among them. But, here we are in New York, a few wealthy taking up enough resources and space to house thousands.

No, I don’t expect developers to invite the poor in to live in the palaces they built for the rarified. I expect, if not the developers, then those with conscience to build affordable living for the vulnerable. That’s what a real Christian nation would do. Jesus may have encouraged his disciples to be more anxious for their eternal soul than their temporal body, but he did not intend his disciples to live without physical shelter or to, themselves, direct a full-scale attack on the emotional peace or temporal existence of their fellow beings.

Yes, these rich New Yorkers are like those ancient rich Israelites.

“They covet tracts of farmland, and find a way to steal them.  
They covet houses, and seize them.  
Thus, they violently extort a property owner of their home,  
and an individual of their property.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See our meditations on Isaiah 5.<sup>8-10</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Issiah 5.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Micah 2.<sup>2</sup>, author’s translation

Yes, that's right. I accuse those rich New Yorkers and the society that condones and even lionizes their behavior of what is tantamount to violent extortion which robs others of the security of home. They are the modern-day equivalent of medieval barons living lavishly in their defended castles in complete disregard for the welfare of landless serfs. Yes, those rich New Yorkers would do well to answer the very pertinent question and heed the applicable warning issued by Jeremiah.

“Shalt thou reign,  
because thou closest thyself in cedar?  
Did not thy father eat and drink,  
and do judgment and justice,  
and then it was well with him?  
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;  
then it was well with him:  
was not this to know me?  
saith the LORD.  
But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for  
thy covetousness,  
and for to shed innocent blood,  
and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.”<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion and imprecation

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True followers of Jesus would see what has been happening on the south side of New York's most famous park—and many other places from sea to shining sea—for what it is. Theft and pillage committed by the wealthy against the disadvantaged, vulnerable, and powerless. True Christians would not actively participate in such theft and pillage, nor become complicit in it through inaction or silence. They would not elect politicians who legislate in such ways as to make such behavior possible, and certainly not “legal.” Furthermore, it is certain that brave, caring, and discerning prophets, priests, and pastors would speak up and denounce the

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 22.<sup>15-17</sup>

decadent covetousness that does violence against the disadvantaged—a violence that has certainly led to much anxiety, my a failed heart and even a few early deaths.

Yes, that's right. We see red when we look up at those monstrosities of covetousness and greed and hubris that line the south side of Central Park. We see the red of human blood dripping from the shimmering windows of New York City's Billionaire Row.

The cowardly silence of modern-day prophet's, priests, and pastors is profoundly shameful and unlike the vocal courage of the Hebrew prophets as well as that of Jesus of Nazareth. If they were around today, we can imagine that we might hear something like this:

A cause of lamentation and warning!

Glittering palaces march in line on Billionaire's Row.

Manors of lustful warlords.

Castles of entitled and privileged crusaders.

Plantations of merciless masters.

Idolatrous temples of human sacrifice.

Like shafts of biting steel,

shards of cutting glass

and long, jagged, and gnashing teeth,

they rend wind and sky,

and, worse, shred the flesh of everyday working people,

Declaring war on humanity.

Ordinary folks, seen as lesser,

lack capital, resources, and reserves,

and experience needless and unwarranted anxiety.

Will they lose what little they have, their humble abode?

Will the open sky become their only roof,

motor cars and cardboard boxes their bed?

But hard-hearted lords of the manors,  
masters of the high and haughty domains,  
high priests and priestesses of fertility,  
like those of babel's tower,  
build siege ramps to storm the heavens,  
challenge God's rule,  
and defy His best wishes and just counsel.

Consumed by greed and lust, insatiable appetite,  
hubris, pride, arrogance, self-centeredness, false self-importance,  
and contempt for fellow citizens—  
siblings for whom they have no care—  
they feed on their own unfortunate kin;  
engorge themselves with the flesh of the powerless.

May their mammon molder, their stocks slide,  
and their glittering gold turn to fine dust.  
May their edifices, monuments of ignominy,  
and symbols of human depravity,  
creak and crack, crumble and corrode;  
totter, wobble, tilt and implode.

May the builders and their clientele with whom they collude  
find no lasting abode  
but in dark, and damp dungeons of lower earth,  
patrolled by guards and jailers of like mind as they.  
May they gnash their teeth in bottomless pits,  
where light and sky ever allude their view.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

### Part 3: lies, lies, and more lies

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

The IRS, the national debt, and the GOP

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The Hill recently posted a piece authored by Tobias Burns and Aris Folley entitled, “GOP plan to ‘offset’ Israel aid with IRS cuts would backfire, budget experts warn.” In it, the authors report that the alleged purpose of recently proposed GOP budget cuts to the IRS was to reduce the federal deficit. The piece pointed out that, in fact, the deficit would increase by tens of billions of dollars over the coming years, partly because a reduction in the IRS’ would stymie its efforts to collect tax dollars from rich tax cheats.

Now, we do not doubt the author’s reporting. No doubt, GOP leaders have spoken as the authors report. However, we are galled by the continued gullibility of the press, which continues to report the lie that the GOP cares anything about reducing the national debt—surely the unjust tax breaks given to the wealthy during TFG’s administration should have put that lie to bed once and for all. In fact, the GOP’s interest in reducing the IRS budget is much more sinister.

First off, the right simply wants to poke their finger in the left’s eye. It’s a fetish for them, really. So insecure are they in their own skin, that whether any action makes sense or not, it makes them feel good to think they might have gotten under a lib’s skin. So, because the left gave more money to the IRS, the right wants to take it away. The GOP is a party of immature pettiness and profound and pitiful insecurity. Tragically for our nation, even its highest leaders seem to have never matured beyond a high school level of student leadership.

Second, and more seriously, the modern GOP, including the House' newest Speaker, does not believe in the federal government—imagine that! ... voters putting anti-government insurgents in government positions, a trend that began a generation ago with Ronald Regan. But then, those who vote such traitors into office are “a stiffnecked people, insomuch that they [can] not be governed by the law nor justice, save it [is] to their destruction” (Hel. 5.<sup>3</sup>).

Speaker Johnson of the congress and his GOP marauders are like Book of Mormon kingmen who wish to alter the laws “in a manner to overthrow the free government” and establish an oligarchy (See Al. 51.<sup>5</sup>)—in the present case a “Christian” Nationalist autocracy akin to Hitler’s “National Socialists.” Cutting the IRS budget is meant to further this unhallowed aim. Many in the modern GOP are simply agents of chaos.

Neutering the IRS is intended to starve the federal government and assist in the GOP insurgency against the federal government. But neutering the IRS has a third goal. By neutering the IRS, the GOP can severely curtail the discovery of tax cheats and the holding of them accountable. After the blasphemous doctrine of such wicked wizards as Milton Friedman, the GOP believes that wealthy individuals and corporations, notoriously adept tax cheats and thus cheaters of the public weal, have no obligation to society, let alone to the federal government. Their only obligation is to other rich people, i.e., shareholders, and corporations. In addition, by sheltering the wealthy from having their fraud discovered and assisting them in avoiding their just responsibilities to society, the GOP can continue to be beneficiaries of the bribery that wealthy individuals and corporations are all too willing to pay for the privilege of not paying into the welfare of society.

lies, lies, and more lies

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Now, we could howl about any one of the multiple sins found in the GOP's most recent attack on the IRS and the motives that inspire them. We could, for example, talk about how its love of money is the root of this and most other GOP evils. Or we could talk about the treachery of these modern-day king men and the danger they pose to American society and democracy. But, really, we have done all this many times over in the past. So, today, we

choose to address the simple fact of their lying—and no, as we have stopped trying to keep up with the party leader’s... you know TFG... legendary and too-numerous-to-count lies, we will not address them.

AS we contemplate the stream of lies that come from the GOP, we think of the words spoken by the Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah.

“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.”<sup>1</sup>

So untrustworthy, so steeped in a lying spirit did individuals of ancient Israelite society become that Micah went so far as to warn citizens against trusting even the wife who laid in bed next to them (See Mic. 7.<sup>5</sup>)—one cannot doubt that the man laying in bed next to his wife was no more trustworthy. We live in such days of deceit. Alternative facts abound. Silly and irrational conspiracy theories proliferate. Lying is as natural as breathing. It seems, sometimes, to be the default position. The new national pastime.

Some lie because they are simply liars. More often, perhaps, others lie because they believe they are being lied to. Scripture is clear about the fate of the first class of liars: “all liars, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie... shall have their part in that lake which burneth with fire

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 9.<sup>4-6</sup>



and brimstone.”<sup>2</sup> The second class of liar is no better off as they have yielded to the satanic voice that says,

“Deceive and lie in wait to catch, that ye may destroy; behold, this is no harm.”

“Thus,” the Lord charges,

“He flattereth them, and telleth them that it is no sin to lie that they may catch a man in a lie, that they may destroy him. And thus he flattereth them, and leadeth them along until he draggeth their souls down to hell...”<sup>3</sup>

Now, to be clear, in the end, lying is not really about “alternative facts,” and “false data.” It is really less about speaking and more about doing. Lying is about doing harm. Those who knowingly lie possess a secret intent to harm other individuals and to disrupt society.

The Speaker of the House and his cronies mean to do harm when they lie about their motivation for cutting the IRS budget. They mean to harm the federal government. And they mean to harm our entire society, all for the sake of doing a favor for their wealthy bribers. Though I would disagree vehemently with them, I might respect them if they would tell the truth and own up to the true motivations for their proposed budget cuts—but, of course, they can’t tell the truth about their real motives because, though reasonably upset with it at times, most Americans believe the Federal government has an important role to play in society. Those Americans would run the liars out of town were they to tell the truth. The liars know this. Hence the lies.

So, what would the Hebrew prophets have to say about this were they to come back? Would they say anything? You bet they would. Any self-respecting prophet would. I am not prophet, but I can imagine it might sound something like this.

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<sup>2</sup> DC 63.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>3</sup> DC 10.<sup>25-26</sup>

A cause of lamentation and warning!  
Slaves to Master Mammon,  
colluders with wealthy bribers—  
for who can bribe but the monied?  
Slaves, colluders, and bribers, together,  
insurgent insiders,  
mutineers inside the halls of governance  
marauders inside American business  
stingy, tight-fisted, greedy, lust-driven  
plunder cherished institutions and structures  
slashing holes in the fabric of society  
razing protection of the defenseless,  
creating chaos with their lies  
and anarchy for the root of all evil.

Masters of lying lips,  
virtuosos of the deceitful tongue  
dress themselves in the garb of patriot,  
cloak their mutiny in virtue,  
their lying lips, poison,  
their deceitful tongue, daggers,  
their garb, camouflage,  
cloaks to hide their vice.

May they be ripped, and razed;  
plundered as they have plundered.  
May the poison of their lips flow inward;  
their daggers of deceit slash backwards.  
May Lying Mammon abandon them;  
leave them penniless and poor paupers  
shackled in darkness, cloaked in obscurity,

victims of the chaos they created.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

## Part 4: season's greetings from your state legislatures

*"They heal my people's brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
'It's OK! It's OK!'  
But nothing is OK!" (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author's translation).*

### Season's greetings from your state legislatures

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Christmas Season 2023 is off to a rip roaring and jolly good start. America's state legislatures and officials are bound and determined to prove the genius and discernment of Hebrew prophets. Isaiah wasn't happy with law makers of his day.

"Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees,  
and that write grievousness which they have prescribed."<sup>1</sup>

With that in mind, we recommend for your consideration the Ohio state legislature and its unreasoned rejection of the basic laws of physics. The more molecules in a fixed space, the more often they collide. The more cars on the road, the more accidents. The more guns in the state, the more shootings and deaths. Elementary math.

But after passing a new pro-gun law about every 15 minutes for the past ten years, the Ohio legislature has determined that gun ownership is still insufficiently protected in the wild, wild, rootin' tootin' state of Ohio. Hence its latest foray into madness—the highfalutin sounding "Second Amendment Preservation Act."

As any good Hebrew prophet might say,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 10.<sup>1</sup>

Unsatisfied to have merely placed targets on the backs of its citizens  
that can only be seen in the light of day,  
the legislature wishes to slap glow in the dark targets on the backs of its citizens  
so that they can be shot to death in the dark of night as easily as in the light of day.

It is madness.

Irrational beyond description.

A sickness of the heart.

A cancer on the American soul.

May those who act so cynically as to create and pass such murderous laws find no preservation.

No, not for a second of any moment.

Meanwhile, a quick 15-minute magical sleigh ride to the southwest brings us to a land of make-believe pro-lifers whose laws force a mother of two, who very much wishes to be a mother of three, to carry a fetus that has no chance at life and threatens the health of the mother as well as her future prospects of having that much desired third child. And, of course, the jolly little elf of a State Attorney General who is so intent on enforcing the state's godforsaken abortion laws that he would criminalize anyone who has the audacity to seek or practice healthcare that secures the health of women is, himself, a criminal of the first order.

You can't make this stuff up.

It is madness.

Irrational beyond description.

A sickness of the heart.

A cancer on the American soul.

May these power hungry

exercisers of unrighteousness dominion over woman

be made to carry their heavy burden of wickedness to full term

only then to have heaven abort them

into the dark underbelly of hell.

But, of course, as is par for the course, prophet, priest, and pastor remain as silent about these

abuses of human dignity as the silent night on which the One they claim to represent was born. They do and say nothing to heal the brokenness. Far from joining the angelic choirs in signing “peace on earth, good will to men,” too often, when they do open their mouths on such topics they only add to the disease, assist the cancer to grow.

So, already, barely half-way through the advent season, I can hardly sleep, so anxious am I to see what other gifts America’s wacko state legislators, governors, and supreme courts will bring us this Holiday Season.

Ho. Ho. Ho, everyone. And a Merry Christmas!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

## Part 5: america's pessimistic addiction to consumerism

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

### Pessimistic consumption

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Recent weeks have seen a number of headlines such as the following.

“Us Consumer Confidence Fell Again in October”<sup>1</sup>

“Consumers Remain Pessimistic About the Future—Even as They Continued to Spend”<sup>2</sup>

“Us consumers keep spending despite high prices and their own gloomy outlook. Can it last?”<sup>3</sup>

“Why Americans feel gloomy about the economy despite falling inflation and low unemployment”<sup>4</sup>

“Black Friday shoppers spent a record \$9.8 billion in U.S. online sales, up 7.5% from last year”<sup>5</sup>

“Cyber Monday rings in 12.4 billion in sales as consumers hunt for bargains”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Conference Board

<sup>2</sup> The Conference Board

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Rugaber and Anne D’Innocenzio, Associated Press

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Rugaber, Associated Press

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Picciotto, CNBC

<sup>6</sup> Brooke DiPalma, Yahoo

The American public—they are called “consumers,” for good reason, rather than, say, “citizens,” by those who prey on their insatiable appetite for more, more, more—are “pessimistic,” have low “confidence” in the economy and the future, “feel gloomy,” and possess a “gloomy outlook.” The *Consumer Confidence Index* is down. The *Present Situation Index* is in decline, still.

But, spending is up! UP. UP. In two 24-hour periods, Friday, November 24 and Monday, November 27, 2023, Americans, or consumers, spent \$22.2 billion. Purportedly, spending during these two days was in no small part credited to consumers looking for bargains. But, of course, the percentage of those purchasing on credit is way up—higher interest rates wiping out the meager savings from sale prices. As the Christmas Season continues and the year ebbs away, spending trends show no signs of letting up even as pessimism persists.

With the inflation rate at the lowest point in two and one-half years, unemployment below 4% for the longest stretch since the 1960s, new hiring up, many wages up, and consumers spending like there’s no tomorrow, economists are befuddled by the pessimistic surveys and the rabid spending habits of American consumers. The two seem irrationally contradictory.

The befuddlement is somewhat comical. For, as the name implies, Americans have become by nature “consumers.” Probably, their consumption is to be credited as much to habit as to any other factor, such as sale prices. Indeed, their habit of consumption looks very much like an addiction—out of control and irrational.

### Consuming addiction

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We have all heard, by now, that the brain has a “pleasure center”—the “nucleus accumbens” it is called. This “reward circuit” lets us know when something is enjoyable and reinforces the desire for us to perform the same pleasurable action again, and again, and again. We all also know, by now, that a brain stimulated by pornography releases pleasure-giving endorphins and dopamine. Individuals often become addicted to the euphoria that this



chemical cocktail produces, irresistibly coming back to pornographic over, and over, and over again. We know, too, that similar processes are at work with the use of drugs—street or prescription—and drug addiction.

Modern research suggests that the brain releases the same euphoric chemical cocktail in our brain’s “pleasure center” during shopping, purchasing, acquiring, accumulating, and consuming that it does in drinking, gambling, taking drugs, and viewing pornography for pornography or substance abuse. The neurotransmitter, dopamine, surges when we even consider buying something new.

Our American society, with its consumer economy, is, increasingly, built upon consumerism—as even those who see no harm, but only virtue in such an economy, admit. The economy, which has become, essentially, an idolatrous god, goes up and down, depending upon how diligently we obey materialistic laws and impulses to acquire. Watching our society’s enthusiastic struggle to acquire, we might be forgiven for wondering whether our entire society and many of us, its citizenry, are, in fact, addicted to the principle of acquiring, victims of euphoria producing and addictive endorphins and dopamine. We see nothing in it unhealthy, don’t recognize it as an addiction, because we are all in the same doped up state, addicted to the same drug. If we are all addicted, then it must not be addiction.

Such unwillingness to admit that we have a problem is, of course, typical. The addict always thinks they have things under control. But, once in a while, there is a moment of unusual honesty.

“How can you say,  
‘I am not defiled;  
I have not run after the Baals’?  
See how you behaved in the valley;  
consider what you have done.

You are a swift she-camel  
running here and there,  
a wild donkey accustomed to the desert,  
sniffing the wind in her craving—  
in her heat who can restrain her?  
Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves;  
at mating time they will find her.  
Do not run until your feet are bare  
and your throat is dry.  
But you said,  
‘It’s no use!  
I love foreign gods,  
and I must go after them.’”<sup>7</sup>

Here, then, is the prophet’s take on ancient fertility, its modern equivalent being the modern materialistic and consumptive drive.

Yes, the inconsistent and befuddling behavior of the American consumer can reasonably be chalked up to addiction. We are a culture of shopping addicts. And just as with any addiction, it takes more and more of the stimulant to maintain the desired highs. Dissatisfaction with the current fix and the need and demand for even more stimulation are inevitable. Hence, one reason the American consumer’s gloomy outlook and pessimistic perspective in the face of bounty that surpasses anything human society has ever seen.

All things are become slippery

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As I hear and read of consumers’ pessimistic grumblings about the economy, my mind naturally turns to the Book of Mormon and the consumers of Helaman 13. I have discussed these consumers and their consumption in detail elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> But, here, I liken their

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 2.<sup>23-25</sup>, NIV

<sup>8</sup> See my homily on Helaman 13, entitled, “Society’s Slippery Slope” in the archive found on our Homilies and Just Society pages of this site.

experiences and feelings to those of the American consumer.

Samuel the Lamanite foresees, or “forehears” the consumers of his day. He hears them “weep and howl.” He hears them “lament” that their “riches... have become slippery” and “are gone from us.” “Behold,” they lament, “we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land.”

One hears in the American consumer’s pessimism an echo of this ancient and sad refrain,

“All things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.”<sup>9</sup>

Samuel informs them of the real reason for the unhappiness and pessimism.

“Ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.”<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

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So it is with the American consumer. The consumption, having become in many cases a sinful addiction, cannot produce happiness—indeed, the consumption itself, with its deleterious impacts on the environment and the world’s poor, is sinful and bound to bring unhappiness through natural disasters, the devaluing and dehumanization of others, and human conflict. Anytime the consumer’s consumptive and consuming addiction is in anyway hampered, slowed, or reduced pessimism quite naturally ensues. It feels like things are slipping away from us.

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<sup>9</sup> See Helaman 13.<sup>32-37</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Hel. 13.<sup>38</sup>

Prophets, priests, and pastors have been asleep at the switch when it comes to addressing this most pervasive addiction in human history. They have no hesitation in screaming bloody murder about a few hundreds of thousands that might be addicted to pornography or a handful of substances, but they remain strangely silent about an addiction that afflicts billions of the globe's inhabitants—an addiction that creates far, far more suffering than all the other addictions combined. Do they not see the addiction and its harmful effects on society? Or are they, perhaps, themselves caught up in the addiction to one degree or another?

“His watchmen are blind:  
they are all ignorant,  
they are all dumb dogs,  
they cannot bark;  
sleeping, lying down,  
loving to slumber.  
Yea, they are greedy dogs  
which can never have enough,  
and they are shepherds that cannot understand:  
they all look to their own way,  
every one for his gain, from his quarter.”<sup>11</sup>

These recalcitrant and silent modern prophets, priests, and pastors could learn a thing or two from the Hebrew prophets about the evils of idolatrous consumption and how to address it. Here, is a sampling.

“You are they who lie upon ivory divans,  
sprawl out on your settees,  
eat lambs from flocks,  
and specially fed calves,  
pluck on the harp  
as Dāwid, invent for themselves musical instruments,

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<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 56.<sup>10-11</sup>

drink wine by the bowl full,  
apply the best of perfumes,  
while remaining unaffected by the nation's collapse."<sup>12</sup>

"That saith,  
'I will build me a wide house  
and large chambers,'  
And cutteth him out windows;  
and it is cieled with cedar,  
and painted with vermilion."<sup>13</sup>

"I will tear down the winter house  
along with the summer house;  
the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed  
and the mansions will be demolished,"  
declares the LORD."<sup>14</sup>

We could use such voices. No, they would not be welcome any more than Samuel the Lamanite was. But the call is clear, and the need is great. Warnings about the addictive nature of consumerism could squelch a host of accompanying evils. Warnings about the addictive nature of consumerism could bring happiness, true happiness that far surpasses all the transitory dopamine highs that money and its purchasing power can buy.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

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<sup>12</sup> Amos 6.<sup>4-6</sup>, author's translation

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah 22.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Amos 3.<sup>15</sup>

## Part 6: us law and more weapons, more war, more retribution, more death

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

the character of this world

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In homily and meditation, we have discussed scripture’s characterization of this planet as a place of violence; of “wars and rumors of wars.”<sup>1</sup> If possible, this characterization is even more true of the “latter days” than former days. Observing the rebelliousness of America’s southern states in his lifetime, Joseph Smith could see that, sooner or later, “the rebellion of South Carolina [would] eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls.”<sup>2</sup> But this was but the tip of the iceberg. Joseph’s discernment went far beyond the tragedy of the American civil war. “The time will come,” Joseph saw, “that *war will be poured out upon all nations*, beginning at this place.”<sup>3</sup> Joseph discerned that the latter-days were to be an era of war and rumor of war. Time has vindicated this ugly and unwelcome insight.

So common is war and rumor of war that we have become immune to their horrors. Many, not immune, are infected with the supposed heroism of war and rumors of wars. Many simply stick their head in the sand and pretend that things are normal and inevitable. I thought of this world’s characterization and the many responses to it when I read this recent headline, “Congress Is Poised to Cede Even More of Its Oversight of Foreign Weapons Sales.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, my meditation on 1 Nephi 12.<sup>1-3</sup>, my five meditations on Psalm 46, my five homilies on Revelation 6.<sup>1-8</sup>, entitled, “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.”

<sup>2</sup> DC 87.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>3</sup> DC 87.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Lora Lumpe and William D. Hartung, *Responsible Statecraft*, Feb. 3, 2024.

According to U.S. law, the executive branch of the U.S. government must clear all arms sales above a certain amount with congress—we have to ask why all sales, whatever their dollar amount, do not come under this law. A new proposed law—written and backed, surprise, surprise, by the arms industry—raises by 66 percent the dollar amount of an arms sale before the executive branch must inform congress of the sale. “In short,” the authors of the article observe, “this proposed legislation would speed up the delivery of deadly weapons while scaling back the ability of our elected representatives to assess the security implications of such transfers”—and it isn’t as though those elected representatives have acted responsibly in the past.

Not only, then, would this proposed law keep congress ignorant of much of the mayhem that the American executive branch, in collusion with profiteering American arms dealers, unleashes the world over, but the American people would remain ignorant of the diabolical and murderous mayhem of their own government.

As bad as this is for governance, accountability, the equal separation of powers, and the health of American democracy, it is even worse for the planet. There can be no doubt that the planet, already flooded with violence and murderous weaponry, would be further deluged if such a law was enacted. Neither can there be any doubt that more weapons means more use of those weapons—just as Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, a supposed “progressive,” once asked in all seriousness, “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about, if we can’t use it?”

More weapons means more use of weapons, more violence, more war, and more death. This bill is most certainly not pro-life. It is anti-life. It is pro-death. It is satanic. It is utterly consistent with the satanic spirit and intent to “buy up armies and navies and reign with blood and horror on earth,” as Satan promised to do according to the LDS temple endowment.

Discerning religious leaders—whether they go by the name, “prophet,” “priest,” “pope,” or “pastor”—would speak out against such satanic deviancy. To be sure, those who have sat in the LDS temple and been forewarned would, you would think, have something to say about such satanic deviancy being conducted in a nation that claims to be Christian.

Indeed, speaking out against this satanic deviancy is not simply wise and prudent. It is a commandment.

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me.

Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; and again, the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me.”<sup>5</sup>

One must ask if those who refuse to “renounce war and proclaim peace”—which must certainly extend to the grotesquely massive arms sales in which the U.S., the world’s largest weapons dealer, is engaged—are, in fact, guilty of being afraid of their enemies, may not be abiding in the Lord’s covenant, and may not be worthy of him. Neither do they seem true to the central aspect of the “spirit of Elijah,” about which the LDS church likes so much to speak. For, as the preceding passage makes clear, the linkage that the spirit of Elijah seeks to form goes far beyond moms and dads, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, etc. The spirit of Elijah seeks to form linkages between all human beings of whatever nation or era. The spirit of Elijah is intended to end war and bring peace between nations.<sup>6</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> DC 98.<sup>14-17</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I have spoken at length of an expanded view of the spirit of Elijah. See my homily based on Malachi 4.<sup>5-6</sup>, entitled, “The spirit of Elijah: An Expanded View.”



world-wide peace inspired by the spirit of Elijah is at the very heart of the temple's message. Speaking of the temple, Isaiah discerned,

“All nations will come streaming to it;  
many peoples will come, saying:  
‘Come! Let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain;  
to the temple of the God of Ya‘qōḇ.  
He will teach us his ways,  
and we shall walk in his paths.  
For Torah will come out of Şîyôn,  
and the word of Yahweh from Y<sup>e</sup>rûšālāyim.’  
Then will He mediate between nations;  
He will reconcile many peoples,  
so that they will retool their swords into plow blades  
and their spears into pruning instruments.  
One nation will no longer lift the sword against another,  
nor will they any longer train for warfare” (Is. 2.<sup>2-4</sup>).

#### Conclusion and imprecation

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While the proposed law discussed here is utterly consistent with this world's characterization as a place of wars and rumors of wars as well as the satanic spirit foreshadowed in the LDS temple, it most certainly stands in stark and belligerent opposition to all that is godly—to the spirit of Elijah, to the message of the temple, and to God, Himself, and His wishes for humankind. It is yet one more step in a long line of steps toward the fulfillment of Malachi's warning.

“Understand: I am going to send ’ēliyâ, the prophet, to you before the coming, totally awe-inspiring day of YHWH. He is to restore the love of parents for children and the love of children for parents so that when I arrive, I need not strike the earth with

annihilation.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, at the rate we’re going, God will have no need to strike the earth with annihilation. We are on our way to doing it just fine all by ourselves.

Let us make new and better laws  
say the invisible mammon loving puppeteers  
of murderous weapons and mayhem  
to their well-paid puppets in corrupted Washington.  
Laws that hide, conceal, shroud, bury  
our murderous mayhem  
from politician, from patrician, from plebe.  
Let us deliver death faster,  
more efficiently,  
and more profitable,  
in selling our instruments of death and murderous mayhem.  
More violent death  
means more hatred,  
More hatred  
means more calls for “justice” and retribution.  
More calls for “justice” and retribution  
means more arms sales.  
More deaths, yes,  
but shush,  
keep your eyes on the ball:  
more Mammon, the world’s adored god.  
  
But hear this tragic warning,  
you masters of death and mayhem.  
You cannot hide, conceal, shroud, or bury

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<sup>7</sup> Malachi 4.<sup>5-6</sup>

your murderous mayhem  
from the One, True God.  
He sees all—all the more, more, more  
You crave;  
the death you create  
in your boardrooms, your factories, your hangers,  
your congressional offices, your senate chambers,  
and your oval offices.  
You will come to know,  
Fear, and loath  
the true meaning of justice and retribution.  
Though you make your home with dirt-dwelling rodents  
and plead for mountains to cover and hide  
you from the all-seeing God,  
you will be seen and named, as was your father,  
“Master Mahan,” the master of this great secret:  
“I may murder and get gain;”  
with your end being to dwell in a deeper hole,  
a bottomless pit,  
with something far worse and more devouring  
than the dirt-dwelling rodents to whom you are kin.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

## Part 7: crimes against humanity, and the renunciation of war

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

### Renouncing war

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rə' nouns.

According to the Online Etymological Dictionary, this word comes from Latin, *renuntiare*, “bring back word; proclaim; protest against,” from *re-* “against” + *nuntiare*, “to report, announce.” *Nuntiare* is related to *nuntius*, “messenger.” In the late Middle Ages, the word also came to mean “give up, resign, surrender, cede.”

We highlight this word and its meaning because in this homily, and consistent with the current Lent Season, we will engage in a bit of renunciation. Our renunciation is consistent with obligations that scripture places upon disciples of Christ. We have utilized this passage before.<sup>1</sup> Here, we wish to have a closer look at it than we have done in the past. First, here is the passage.

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me.

Therefore, *renounce war* and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; and again, the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, “Healing our Brokenness Inadequately (part 6): US Law and More Weapons, More War, More Retribution, More Death.”

hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me.”<sup>2</sup>

In considering the many principles found in this passage, we first note the command: “renounce war and proclaim peace.” If this command is to be fulfilled, it is not enough for individuals to offer “thoughts and prayers” for peace. It is not enough for institutions to issue vague, delicate, or generalized media statements about their desire for peace. It is not even enough to issue generalized calls—individual or institutional—for peace. We must “renounce war” clearly and specifically.

Certainly, in renouncing war we, ourselves, give up war and surrender the idea that war serves as a means of achieving peace or any kind of human endurance and advancement. But the call to renounce war is more comprehensive than this. Our words and actions must take on the aspect of clear, bold, and specific protest against war.

“Second, we note that our renunciation of war and our calls for society to renounce war is a firm and Divine test of our faithfulness. It is a standard against which our worthiness to think of ourselves as disciples of Christ, to be thought of by others as disciples of Christ, and, most importantly, to be thought of by Christ himself as his disciples is set.

“I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that *I will prove you* in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. *Therefore*, renounce war and proclaim peace...”

Those who refuse to renounce war fail a Divine test. They do not abide in the Lord’s covenant. They are not worthy. They are not worthy of Christ, being, in their silent refusal to renounce war, unlike the Savior.

Third, we note that the call to renounce war is linked to and consistent with the “Spirit of

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<sup>2</sup> DC 98.<sup>14-17</sup>

Elijah.” It is the Spirit of Elijah that inspires individuals and institutions to renounce war.

“Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace, *and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children.*”

This admonition harkens back to the well-known final two verses of the Hebrew Bible.

“Understand: I am going to send ’Ēlîyâ, the prophet, to you before the coming, totally awe-inspiring day of YHWH. He is to restore the love of parents for children and the love of children for parents so that when I arrive, I need not strike the earth with annihilation (author’s translation).<sup>3</sup>

If we did not already know that the “Spirit of Elijah” goes far, far beyond our too narrow interpretation of it to include far more than generationally united and linked families through temple instruction and ordinances, DC 98.<sup>14-17</sup> educates us to that spirit’s expanded meaning, intentions, and labors. The Spirit of Elijah calls to those who partake of it to “renounce war and proclaim peace” not simply between moms and dads and children, but between whole populations, societies, and nations. The Spirit informs all individuals, populations, societies, and nations—past, present, and future—that there is existential endurance only through acknowledging that we are bound together and must live as one or die. The labors that the Spirit of Elijah enjoins is not for the eternities only, but for the here and now. The end of war is how the globe with its billions survives in the cosmos. If war is not renounced, but allowed to continue, it can only eventually bring the annihilation of the human race.

Fourth, laboring in the Spirit of Elijah is not limited to comfortable chairs and relaxed, air conditioned sacred spaces. The renunciation of war is not easy or without cost. Such renunciation takes place in the wide open world where it is highly unpopular. The renunciation of war will be considered unpatriotic. It will be thought evil. True to the satanic sentiment and spirit as expressed in the LDS temple, those who renounce war and proclaim peace as God requires, will be thought of, as all truth-tellers are, as “molesters.” The

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, our homily on Malachi 4.<sup>5-6</sup> entitled, “The Spirit of Elijah: An Expanded View.”

renunciation of war will incite intimidation, threats, and violence.

For all these reasons and more, the Lord's call to renounce war and proclaim peace is prefaced with the admonition/ encouragement that we "be not afraid of [our] enemies... even unto death." Jesus died being true to this admonition against fear. He did not allow fear to keep him from truth-telling, no matter the cost. Those who abide in the Lord's covenant and are worthy of him will not be intimidated into silence but will renounce of war and proclaim peace.

Finally, we note that the "Spirit of Elijah" not only turns hearts one to another. It turns "the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews." It is requisite according to the Lord's understanding of the Spirit of Elijah that the Jewish people accept, give heed to, and act upon prophetic insights. Then, contrary to the criticism that the Hebrew prophets have always leveled against their own people, the prophets can finally, without incurring the disapproval of God, boldly advocate for the Jewish people.<sup>4</sup>

a series of crimes against humanity

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Now then. This talk of the call to renounce war and of the Jewish people brings us back to where we began in our introduction: the Hebrew prophets. The Hebrew prophets were certainly and specifically called to minister to their own people. All too often the prophets' Jewish audiences refused to turn their hearts to the prophet who delivered an unwelcome message. However, the prophets also kept a discerning eye on the world stage and often felt compelled to comment on it. They often leveled the same kind of criticism against other nations' wickedness that they leveled against Israel and Judah—often for the same evils.

Isaiah, for example, devotes an entire section of his Book, chapters 13-23, to imprecation

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<sup>4</sup> God commanded Jeremiah not to advocate for the people (See, for example, Jeremiah 14.<sup>11</sup>). Jeremiah disregarded this command and did it anyway (See, for example, 14.<sup>17-22</sup>). The Lord responded to Jeremiah's disobedience (See, for example, Jer. 15.<sup>1</sup>).

against Israel’s neighboring nations.<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel does the same, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, and Seir/ Idumea all coming under his purview and condemnation.<sup>6</sup>

Before either of these two great Hebrew prophets, Amos informed himself of international affairs and took it in hand to critique and utter imprecations against the nations that neighbored Israel, including its sister nation, Judah. And, lest we forget, this herdsman of Tekoa followed his critique and imprecations against Israel’s neighbors with critiques and imprecations against his own people, Israel, filling a whole Book in cataloguing a whole host of Israelite crimes—crimes not only against humanity but against God. But this catalogue of Israelite sins and imprecations will have to await another time for our attention. For now, we will slow down and have a detailed look at Amos’ observations about Israel’s neighboring nations and their crimes—crimes, as we will see, that were crimes against humanity.

Amos begins with Israel’s neighbor to the northeast, Syria.

“This is what YHWH says:

‘Because of a series of Dammeśeq’s crimes,  
topped off with this last one,

I will not relent:

because of their threshing Gil’ād with iron threshers.”<sup>7</sup>

As God indicates, He could have settled on any one of many national crimes of which Syria was guilty. But He settled on this crime: “their threshing Gil’ād with iron threshers.” Syria was guilty of attacking Israel’s northern territories and murdering its inhabitants. There can be little doubt that most victims were innocent noncombatants. The choice of threshing as imagery for this attack is meant to emphasize the brutal and vicious nature of the attack. It was a crime against humanity. While the Syrian crime upon which the Lord settles was one perpetrated against Israel, not all the crimes mentioned in the following survey were. Syria’s

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<sup>5</sup> Babylon (13.<sup>1</sup>-14.<sup>23</sup> and 21.<sup>1-10</sup>), Assyrian (14.<sup>24-27</sup>), Philistia (14.<sup>28-32</sup>), Moab (15.<sup>1</sup>-16.<sup>14</sup>), Syria (17.<sup>1-14</sup>), Cush (18.<sup>1-7</sup>), Egypt (19.<sup>1</sup>-20.<sup>6</sup>), Edom (20.<sup>11-12</sup>), Arabia (21.<sup>13-17</sup>), Judah! (22.<sup>1-25</sup>), and Tyre (23.<sup>1-18</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> See Ezekiel 25.<sup>1</sup>-32.<sup>32</sup> and 35.<sup>1-15</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> 1.<sup>3</sup>



sin would have been a crime against humanity and God no matter the nation targeted.

God next turns to Gaza, Israel's enemy to the west.

“This is what YHWH says:

‘Because of a series of ‘Azzâ’s crimes,  
topped off with this last one,

I will not relent:

because of their stripping deportees buck naked,  
and delivering them over to ’E<sub>d</sub>ôm.’”<sup>8</sup>

In considering Gaza's crimes, the Lord settled on a common practice found throughout the ancient world of the Near East. With the military defeat of a region, the victor often rounded up the surviving non-combatant population, stripped individuals naked and beat them, and then publicly paraded the naked, bleeding, bruised, and terrified victims for others to see. This served as an effective form of propaganda and intimidation; a warning that resistance was futile and would be met with maximum punishment, pain, and humiliation.

But the cruelty did not end there. Those humiliated and treated like parade animals were then sold into slavery for profit. This was a crime against humanity. We should probably understand Gaza's crime to be related to Syria's and to build upon it. Violent butchery of innocent noncombatants was often followed by humiliation of survivors. We might assume the captives of whom Amos speaks here were Israelites, but the text does not say this. We cannot be certain which nation Gaza so victimized in this instance.

The Lord now sets His sights on Tyre, a neighbor to the northwest of Israel.

“This is what YHWH says:

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<sup>8</sup> 1.<sup>6</sup>

‘Because of a series of Şōr’s crimes,  
topped off with this last one,

I will not relent:

because of their delivering deportees buck naked to <sup>’E</sup>dôm,  
and not honoring the covenant of alliance.’”<sup>9</sup>

Tyre’s crime is essentially the same as Gaza’s. However, the Lord adds one element to the crime. Tyre’s criminal mistreatment and sale into slavery of captives was perpetrated against those with whom it had previously entered into alliance. Not only was the nation guilty of crimes against humanity, but of breach of treaty and “international law” as well. Again, this crime should be viewed as building upon and clarifying the nature of the previous crimes. Again, Amos does not specify Israel as the victim of Tyre’s inhumanity. The fact is that every one of the nations mentioned in Amos’s survey had at one time or another entered into treaties with every one of the other nations. So, each stipulated crime was perpetrated in spite of previous agreements, treaties, and alliances. These nations were not only cruel, they were unfaithful and untrustworthy partners in international affairs.

Edom, Israel’s neighboring nation to the south of Judah is next on the Lord’s survey of nations and their crimes against humanity.

“This is what YHWH says:

‘Because of a series of <sup>’E</sup>dôm’s crimes,  
topped off with this last one,

I will not relent:

because of its pursuit of an ally with a sword.

It flouted compassion,

perpetually fed its anger,

and maintained its rage continually.’”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 1.<sup>9</sup>

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

Again, Israel is not specified as the target of Edom's excesses. Like the nations before it, Edom was guilty of violent war against and cruel treatment of other nations: crimes against humanity. We should certainly understand this violence and cruelty in terms previously described: brutal as threshing, humiliating as striping and parading, and for profit. Like Tyre, Edom was guilty of breach of treaties and alliances: it pursued "an ally with a sword."

But the Lord adds another element to the crimes: the purposeful and calculated harboring of hatred, anger, and rage. Any suggestion of compassion or balance in response to threats and aggression was consciously rejected. Crimes against humanity were not simply committed in the heat of the moment. They were thought out, planned, and ruthlessly executed.

Next, Ammon, Israel's eastern neighbor, comes under the divine microscope.

"This is what YHWH says:

'Because of a series of B<sup>c</sup>nê- 'Ammôn's crimes,  
topped off with this last one,

I will not relent:

because of their splitting open pregnant Gil'ādean women  
in order to expand their territory.'"<sup>11</sup>

Here, we are back to Gilead and crimes that the Ammonites committed against Israel. Few are more innocent or more vulnerable to attack than pregnant women. They represent no threat to an opposing and invading army. Yet, Ammon brutally killed them and their unborn babies. This is a crime against humanity. And, like those before them who sold captives into slavery for profit, Ammon perpetrated its brutality against innocent women and unborn children for profit. The profit came not in the form of payment for slaves, but in additional land. It can seem at times that the nations of this world compete to see who can be the most despicable in their behavior toward their enemies. The Ammon that Amos targets with his criticisms certainly earns a ribbon.

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<sup>11</sup> 1.<sup>13</sup>

We now come to the last of Israel's neighbors that come under Amos' criticism—we will take up his criticism of Judah at another time. Moab was Israel's neighbor to the southeast. It too was guilty of crimes against humanity.

“This is what YHWH says:

‘Because of a series of Mō’āb’s crimes,  
topped off with this last one,

I will not relent:

because of its burning to ash the bones of ’Eḏōm’s king.’”<sup>12</sup>

We do not know the history behind this crime, but we can make several observations. First, neither the nation of Israel nor any Israelite citizen is the target of this atrocity. This should direct us away from any thought that Amos surveyed the crimes that he did because they were perpetrated against Israel or that it was the targeting of Israel that caused God to act against the criminal states. The historical record is clear. Even Syria's and Ammon's brutal crimes, mentioned in 1.<sup>3</sup> and 2.<sup>1</sup> respectively, as having been committed in and against Gilead were most certainly committed by other nations against nations other than Israel. Assyria, for example, perfected the national pastime of crimes against humanity—and we can find them committing crimes such as Amos' surveyed.

Second, we have the matter of Moab's cremation of Edom's king. Cremation was not a widely accepted or used method of disposing of the dead. Physical burial was an important aspect of the deceased's afterlife. In ancient Near Eastern culture, cremating a defeated enemy's remains was as high a form of contempt, disrespect, and humiliation as any—akin to the beheading and otherwise mutilation of the body of a defeated enemy and then hanging them in public. Burning the body was the height of disrespect for the humanity of another. Not only had Edom's king lost his life, most likely violently, but in cremating him, Moab threatened his very eternal existence. This act shows a degree of hatred, wage, and vengeance that is gratuitous and excessive. It goes beyond the pale.

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<sup>12</sup> 2.<sup>1</sup>

We might add, here, that cremating a human body so that it is reduced to mostly ash requires high temperatures and is, in an ancient culture such as Moab's, labor intensive. This, expenditure in resources and time too, shows the Moabite commitment to harboring anger, resentment, and malice just as Edom was portrayed as doing in 1.<sup>11</sup>.

Amos' oracles against Israel's neighboring nations paints quite the picture, no? Nations attack each other in the most brutal fashion. Even if the violent death of warriors and soldiers could be shrugged off as natural and inevitable, not so the death and torture of innocent non-combatants and the mistreatment of survivors. The violent death and mutilation of innocent non-combatants in war is unacceptable and inhumane. The helpless enslavement of one's defeated enemies is unacceptable and inhumane. The brutalization of defeated enemies for propaganda and intimidation is unacceptable and inhumane. The use of war to profit and expand is unacceptable and inhumane. The harboring of and basking in resentment, anger, and rage against one's enemies is unacceptable and inhumane. The use and manipulation of resentment, anger, and rage to inspire militancy is unacceptable and inhumane. The willful breaking of treaties and alliances is unacceptable and inhumane.

All this is humane, Amos would have it, no matter the perpetrator or the target of the inhumanity. The one showing inhumanity to another is inhumane. The inhumanity against another diminishes the humanity of the other. And all this, God sees. All this, God sees, has consequences. All this, God sees, brings yet more inhumanity, more brutality, more wrath, more destruction, more death. Left unchecked, God knows, all this brings annihilation.

No doubt the picture that Amos paints of his day could be painted of every era of human history—certainly the crimes against humanity committed between nations during the Middle Ages can stand toe to toe with those committed by Israel's neighbors against each other. Unfortunately, humanity has not outgrown such inhumanity even to this day. Sadly, and in keeping with our commitment to avoid speaking in parables but to speak with clarity, specificity, and boldness, it is to modern humanity's inhumanity that we must now turn.

<sup>†</sup>Today in israel, syria, gaza, tyre, edom, ammon, moab, et al

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We are all familiar with the tragic events of October 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israel, killing some 1500 mostly civilian non-combatants. The attack was accompanied by heinous acts of violence, hatred, rage, and brutality not unlike those that Amos describes in his survey of national crimes committed by Israel's neighbors against one another.

What are we to do? What are we to think? What are we to say when we hear reports of brutality against civilians: against old men and women, against children, against teenagers, against expectant mothers, against mothers, against fathers? How can we not think of ancient Syria's threshing of Gilead or of ancient Ammon's splitting open pregnant women of the same region? How can Amos' Edom of long ago not come to mind—that Edom that “flouted compassion, perpetually fed its anger, and maintained its rage continually”?

Some things never change. We must condemn such brutality in the strongest possible terms. Those who perpetrated this hateful and heinous brutality must be held to account. We cannot be too harsh on such brutality and those who perpetrate it. Or can we?

What are we to do? What are we to think? What are we to say when the response to such brutality is the same brutality multiplied many times over?<sup>13</sup> What are we to do, think, say when that single day of heinous terror perpetrated against the people of Israel is followed by month after month of equally heinous terror perpetrated against the Palestinian people—civilians, 60% of whom are under 18? What are we to do, think, and say when a nation requires the payment of 30,000 civilian Palestinian lives—4 in 10 of them children, that's 12,000 dead children— for 1,500 Israeli civilian lives? What are we to do, think, and say when, increasingly, Israel inflicts suffering and death upon the Palestinian people in the most cowardly fashion.

It has become increasingly clear that, as one observer put it, “Israel is intentionally starving Palestinians... The speed of malnourishment of young children is also astounding. The

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<sup>13</sup> We discussed this multiplication of brutality on the part of the Israeli government in a homily based on 1 Kings 12.<sup>1-16</sup>, entitled, *Of Pinky Fingers, Thighs, and Eyes for an Eye*.

bombing and people being killed directly is brutal, but this starvation – and the wasting and stunting of children – is torturous and vile. It will have a long-term impact on the population physically, cognitively and morally ... All things indicate that this has been intentional... We have never seen a civilian population made to go so hungry so quickly and so completely, that is the consensus among starvation experts...” Israel is not just targeting civilians, it is trying to damn the future of the Palestinian people by harming their children.”

“Intentionally starving civilians by ‘depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies’ is a war crime, according to the Rome statute of the international criminal court. Indispensable objects include food, water and shelter – which Israel is systematically denying Palestinians. Starvation is a war crime under the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute. It was also recognized as a war crime and general violation of international law by the UN security council in 2018....”<sup>14</sup>

How is Israel’s starving of infants, including the most vulnerable in neonatal hospital units, any different than ancient Ammon’s “splitting open pregnant Gil’ādean women”? It isn’t.

What are we to do, think, and say, then, when Israeli political and military leaders give way, as Edom did long ago, to the madness of blind and unyielding rage and excessive violence; when they too “flout compassion, perpetually feed their anger, and maintain their rage continually”?

No, things have not changed much since Amos’ day. The fact is, in this latest permutation of hatred, rage, and brutality one cannot tell the “good guys” from the “bad guys.” The region is an epidemic of inhumanity.

Conclusion and benediction

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<sup>14</sup> “Israel is deliberately starving Palestinians, UN rights expert says,” Nina Kakhani, The Guardian.

Truly and clearly, there are no good guys in this latest Near Eastern conflict. Truly, Israeli and Palestinian alike act as the nations of whom and to whom Amos spoke so long ago. Truly both commit the great crime that sent God to weeping in anticipation of the flood. God had great hopes that human beings would “love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father.” “But behold,” that Holy God lamented, “they are without affection, and they hate their own blood.”<sup>15</sup>

In this latest manifestation of generational hatred, rage, violence, and brutality, we do not take sides. We are not for Palestinians. We are not for Israelis. We are for God. We side with Him. However mute and muted the prophets, priests, and pastors are, we will not be silent or ambiguous. We accept God challenge, the proof of our covenant faithfulness, and our worthiness to consider ourselves and be considered by others as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace. For this reason, we, as commanded by the Prince of Peace, renounce war wherever we see it—from the snow-covered ground of Ukraine to the desert sands of Gaza.

Our commitment to accept this aspect of the call to discipleship is also inspired by the Spirit of Elijah. The nation of Israel must turn its heart to the prophets, especially, in this instance, to the prophet Amos and his all too relevant criticisms of nations that engage in crimes against humanity. Individuals and the nations they create must learn that God prizes every human being no matter their nationality, religion, race, gender, etc. Nations and their citizens must learn that we are all connected, linked through God’s intense love. We must learn that we cannot break the link with each other without breaking our link with God. And we cannot break our link with each other and with God without threatening our own existence in fulfillment of the Hebrew Bible’s final warning—annihilation.

“Lord, how long shall the wicked,

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<sup>15</sup> See Moses 7.<sup>33</sup>



how long shall the wicked triumph?”<sup>16</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

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<sup>16</sup> Psalm 94.<sup>3</sup>

## Part 8: three strikes and you're out

*"They heal my people's brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
'It's OK! It's OK!'  
But nothing is OK!" (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author's translation).*

How many strikes is that?

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The Washington Post recently reported that "Allen Weisselberg, the former longtime top financial officer of Donald Trump's company, pleaded guilty Monday to perjury, admitting that he lied under oath to the New York attorney general's office while it was investigating the former president." The piece reminded us that this is not the first time Weisselberg has been found lying to authorities. Indeed, he has in the past pled "guilty to multiple felonies in a different case." As a result, he served "months behind bars" and faced "stiff sanctions, including a \$1 million penalty, following a separate civil fraud trial."<sup>1</sup>

So, here we have a man who has been found guilty of multiple—that's *multiple* as in a whole bunch—felonies—that's *felonies* as in way worse than misdemeanors. In fact, in this latest case, Weisselberg was charged with five—that's five in just sort of half-a-dozen—counts of perjury in the *first* degree—that's perjury of the worse kind, committed with "intent and premeditation." "He is," according to the Post, "expected to receive a five-month sentence—that's (presumably) several months short of the rest of his life.

Sounds like justice was served. No?

Well... maybe. I mention a sentence that is "several months short of the rest of his life" because his sentence is so short compared to many poorer and less well represented repeat

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<sup>1</sup> "Longtime Trump Executive Pleads guilty again, this time to perjury charges," El M. Calabrese and Mark Berman.

offenders. Indeed, one recalls the now discredited “three-strikes-and-your-out” laws that many of the so-called “law and order” folks on the right want to resurrect. Perhaps you remember, as I do, the petty thief who ended up with life in prison because of a “third strike” in which the thief was guilty of the heinous crime of stealing a few videos from a video rental store. Or maybe, as a more contemporary example, you will consider the many repeat drug addicts who are currently serving long—sometimes life—prison sentences because they were caught in possession of a few measly ounces of some illegal drug one time too many.

But how many strikes has Weisselberg against him? So, let’s hear it, America. Let’s hear it, you true blue law-and-order cranks! Let’s hear you get fired up and demand that the repeat offender, the repetitious violator of just law, the habitual criminal, Alan Weisselberg, who has, in fact, struck out with three strikes against him more than once—Let’s hear you call him out on strikes. Let’s hear you call for a longer, maybe even life sentence.

But, I won’t hold my breath. No, neither these law-and-order pretenders nor the legal system that they have helped to craft and corrupt over the past several decades will call for such “extreme” treatment of rich white men. This would be fine, I guess, if America had an equal judicial system for rich and poor criminals alike. But it doesn’t. America has two legal systems: one for the haves and one for the have nots. One for the wealthy and influential and one for the poor, whose poverty denies them influence. One for those who buy the best and most unscrupulous attorneys money can buy and those who cannot afford counsel—indeed, those who are often not provided any legal counsel at all, contrary to constitutional principles.

the return of hebrew prophets

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How fortunate for the many repeat “white-collar” criminals that there are no Hebrew prophets around today. How very fortunate for them, too, that those who call themselves prophets, priests, and pastors stubbornly and cowardly remain mute about the white-collar criminal class. How fortunate for them that too many prophets, priests, and pastors are, themselves, engaged in the same greedy and unscrupulous business and legal practices,

making them a peculiar kind of “white-collar” criminal.

Just as justice and equity before the law is fundamental to the American judicial system, justice and equity was one of the foundational principles and expectations of Israel’s covenant relationship with God. Deuteronomy stipulated,

“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. 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...”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Leviticus says,

“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.”<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, these expectations were not met in Israel any better than they are in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Isaiah made the following complaint.

“Warning! To those who issue oppressive statutes  
and continuously write laws that afflict;  
that put redress out of the reach of the underprivileged  
and rob the poor among my people of justice,  
making prey of widows  
and plundering orphans”<sup>4</sup>

More than a century later, Jeremiah complained,

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<sup>2</sup> 1. 16-17

<sup>3</sup> 19. 15, author’s translation.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 10. 1-2, author’s translation.

“For there can be found among my people ungodly individuals.  
They keep watch, like bird catchers watching a trap.  
They place traps, they capture human beings.  
Just as a bird cage is full of birds,  
their houses are filled with deceit.  
This is how they have become powerful and wealthy.  
They have grown fat and plump,  
having gone beyond, even, the wicked words they speak.  
They will not hear a legal case—  
such as that of an orphan—and yet they enjoy success.  
Nor will they bring the cases of the impoverished to trial.  
Should I not level a charge against these?—  
an oracle of YHWH—  
Should I not take vengeance on a nation such as this?”<sup>5</sup>

The little-known prophet with the funny name, Habakkuk, lamented,

How long, LORD, must I call for help,  
but you do not listen?  
Or cry out to you, “Violence!”  
but you do not save?  
Why do you make me look at injustice?  
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
there is strife, and conflict abounds.  
Therefore the law is paralyzed,  
and justice never prevails.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 5.<sup>26-29</sup>, author’s translation

The wicked hem in the righteous,  
so that justice is perverted.”<sup>6</sup>

Such lamentation is heartbreaking. And all too familiar.

## Conclusion

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There are far, far too many examples of injustice in America’s judicial system and in society at large. Our example of Alan Weisselberg and the preferential treatment he has received at the bar of our courts is but one. There is simply no doubting that he, like so many wealthy and influential citizens, has been treated differently than so many less affluent and poorer represented defendants.

The Hebrew prophets did not brook any type of injustice in ancient Israel. Nor should we or our contemporary prophets, priests, or pastors. We need bold and clear renunciation of injustice, both private and institutional. We need our prophets, priests, and pastors to take their head out of the sand and see the injustices that inhabit every facet of our society. We need our prophets, priests, and pastors to unbind their tongue and speak truth to power.

Without justice and equity, America cannot stand. Without justice, America is guilty, its sin as scarlet as blood and as black as night. Only through justice can the stain of sin be removed from the belligerent nation. This, anyway, is Isaiah’s view.

“Wash yourselves!

Clear yourselves!

Remove your evil deeds from my sight.

Stop doing evil.

Learn to do good.

Seek after justice.

Set things right for those treated unjustly.

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<sup>6</sup> Habakkuk 1.<sup>2-4</sup>, NIV.

Take the side of the orphan.  
Plead for the widow.  
'Come! Let us reason together,' says Yahweh.  
    'Though your sins be as scarlet,  
        they shall be as white as snow.  
Though they are as red as scarlet died fabric,  
        they shall be as wool.  
If you are willing and listen,  
    you can eat the good of the land.  
If your refuse and rebel,  
    you will be consumed by sword.'  
This comes from Yahweh's own mouth."<sup>7</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 1.<sup>16-20</sup>

## Part 9: the sin of inequality... bigger, deeper, higher, grosser than ever

*“They heal my people’s brokenness inadequately, asserting:  
‘It’s OK! It’s OK!’  
But nothing is OK!” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>14</sup>, author’s translation).*

### Some fun facts

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I have shared this fun fact before, but it is simply too juicy to not be partaken of again and again.

“It would... take a typical worker two lifetimes to make their [CEO’s] annual pay.”

“The median pay for workers at companies included in the AP survey was \$77,178, up 1.3% from \$76,160 the previous year. That means it would take that worker 186 years to make what a CEO making the median [CEO] pay earned just last year.”<sup>1</sup>

Here’s another fun fact.

“The wealth of the five richest people in the world, they found, has more than doubled, from \$405bn (£320bn) in 2020 to \$869bn in late 2023. That’s an increase of about \$14m an hour...”<sup>2</sup>

What are the wealthy doing with all their wealth? Well, lots of fun stuff. But we’d be here for a lifetime if we enumerated all their waste. Here’s something, though, that they are *not* doing with their wealth.

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<sup>1</sup> By Alexandra Olson, May 31, 2023

<sup>2</sup> “The Big Idea: Should We Worry About Trillionaires?” *The Guardian*, Duncan Weldon.



“Thousands of high-income earners have not filed tax returns for several years, but the cash-strapped Internal Revenue Service did nothing to get them to pay what they owe....

“About 25,000 cases involve people whose income is known to the agency to be above \$1 million, IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel said...”<sup>3</sup>

These wealthy American bandits get away with it because America’s political right have strangled the IRS through funding cuts. These tight-fisted American cheats feel no responsibility to society. They do everything in their power to avoid contributing to society’s welfare. And when they do pay a little tax? They have rigged the system so that they pay the absolute minimum possible.

“The wealthiest Americans are reaping the most benefits from regressive tax codes. In 41 states, the report found, the top 1 percent richest households pay a lower proportion of their incomes than the rest of the population, despite having the most ability to part with their incomes; and in all but four states, the top 1 percent are taxed less than the middle 60 percent, a group often categorized as the ‘middle class’ by economists...

These upside-down tax rates have led to tax structures that worsen wealth inequality...

“...Those with the lowest 20 percent of incomes are taxed at an average rate that’s three times higher than the rate of the wealthiest earners in the states with the 10 most regressive tax codes — Florida, Washington, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas, Illinois, Arkansas and Louisiana...

“In Florida, which ranked the worst on ITEP’s inequality index, the top 1 percent pay only 2.7 percent of their incomes on taxes on average, while the lowest 20 percent pay 13.2 percent — nearly five times more.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Thousands of Millionaires Haven’t Filed Tax Returns For Years, IRS Says,” *Washington Post*, Julie Zausmer Weil.

<sup>4</sup> “In 41 States, Richest 1 Percent Pay Lowest Tax Rate of Any Group,” *Truthout*, Sharon Zhang.

“Taxation regimes have generally become less progressive. In 1979 the top marginal rate of income tax was 83% in the UK. In the US it was 70%. Nowadays, the rates are 45% and 37%, respectively. In summary, not only have the super-rich benefited from rising asset prices and higher profits, they are taxed at half the level they were two generations ago.”<sup>5</sup>

Many Americans “live” on a minimum wage. America’s wealthy class lives on minimum humanity.

And then there’s the companies for which America’s wealthy “work” and lead. The companies are no less rapacious or any less the moochers than their wealthy CEOs.

“Senior executives at 35 different firms – from Tesla to T-Mobile US – received compensation worth more than the net tax payments of their respective employers between 2018 and 2022, the research found. All the companies generated billions of dollars in profit over the same period.

“Analysis by Americans for Tax Fairness (ATF) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) found the collective net federal income tax bill of all 35 companies was negative \$1.72bn over the five-year stretch – meaning they collectively received more money back from the government in refunds than they paid.”<sup>6</sup>

Still, they are never satisfied with exorbitant profits. They must stick it to the consumer.

“The average global mark-up, the difference between the price of production and the sale price, rose from 7% in 1980 to 59% by 2020...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “The Big Idea: Should We Worry About Trillionaires?” *The Guardian*, Duncan Weldon.

<sup>6</sup> “Companies Paid Top Executives More Than They Paid In US Taxes – Report,” *The Guardian*, Callus Jones.

<sup>7</sup> “The Big Idea: Should We Worry About Trillionaires?” *The Guardian*, Duncan Weldon.

We could go on. And on. And on. There is no shortage of reportage of such social deviance. It's almost as if the press has taken the place of the prophets in revealing and decrying such wickedness.

the madness and absurdity of it all

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Call me crazy, but there is no way, none whatsoever, that one individual's efforts in one year are worth any other individual's efforts over 186 years—not one, but two lifetimes. No way. There is no way—no way at all, anywhere, ever—that any individual can work hard enough or produce such benefits to self or others as to justifiably earning 14 million dollars *an hour*—nearly one to two million times more than the minimum wage earner, depending on the state. No way! Impossible!

Such wealth is so utterly irrational, preposterous, and wasteful as to boggle the mind. Indeed, only a mind twisted by nightmarish and godless logic could condone or justify such gross sin. Only utter sociopaths could accumulate such wealth and then demand that laws be established that allow them to keep their wealth from contributing to society's welfare. Only social deviants would craft and pass laws that make such inequality possible and allow such inequality to flourish.

The fact is, no one needs more in their private life than another. A wealthy person does not need more caloric intake of food for health and survival than the poorest of the poor. No wealthy person requires cooler temperatures in heat or warmer temperatures in cold to survive the climatic variations of season weather. No individual requires more square footage of living space than another to be comfortable and happy. No ill person, wealthy or poor, is more deserving of access to a good doctor or life enhancing and preserving procedures and medications. To deny these and many other truths concerning the equalities of daily life is to deny the worth of souls—souls that are all of equal worth in the eyes of God. To deny the equal worth of souls in God's sight is to deny God, Himself.

Less genteel, Micah likened those who brought suffering on others through their own self-

centeredness to cannibals, who

“pluck off their skin from off them,  
and their flesh from off their bones;  
<sup>3</sup>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.”<sup>8</sup>

This seems more than apropos to 21<sup>st</sup> century American society.

laying in the harlots bed of sin

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Such inequality as America imbibes is indicative of a deep veil of sin and wickedness that darkens a world that has come to accept darkness as light. There is simply no way in heaven or on earth that God is in any way pleased with or condones such inequality as we have lightly touch upon or the behaviors and policies that make it possible—indeed, that institutionalize and lionize it. Such inequality and the behaviors and policies that make it possible are, however, utterly consistent with what is found, founded, and revered in hell, below. It is appropriate, then, that the practitioners of such inequality will open their eyes in hell.

“Wo unto you rich men, that will not give your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls; and this shall be your lamentation in the day of visitation, and of judgment, and of indignation: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved!”<sup>9</sup>

This is not me being angry. This is not me being political or partisan. This is me being

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<sup>8</sup> Micah 3.<sup>2-3</sup>

<sup>9</sup> DC 56.<sup>16</sup>

theological. This is me speaking truth as it always has been, as it is, and as it always will be, notwithstanding the insistent propaganda and false doctrines of America's economic sorcerers. This is me simply repeating what God, Himself, has so unmistakably and uncompromisingly stated. So, once more, here is the irrevocably word of God. Hear!

“It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin.”<sup>10</sup>

*“It is not given.”* American style inequality is not “given.” It is not inevitable. It is not irresistible. It is not permissible. And it is not acceptable. God does not approve of it. Never in his wildest dreams did God intended the sort of vile inequality to exist that exists in America today. It is a gross lie that the wealthy are self-made. It is a damnable lie that the wealthy are God-made. American style economic inequality is sin of the blackest hue, utterly inconsistent with everything God is and stands for. It carries in its blackness devastating and life-threatening consequences for its practitioners.

“Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld.”<sup>11</sup>

Equality is not something to be avoided. It is not to be sought grudgingly. It is to be energetically and gladly embraced, advocated, and labored for. It is not without its spiritual benefits. Economic equality brings an “abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit.” Conversely, God unequivocally affirms that inequality of any kind, and most certainly of the type of which a drunken America imbibes, decreases the Holy Spirit's influence and manifestations, making the discernment of reality and truth all the more difficult. A tragic and deadly loss.

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<sup>10</sup> DC 49.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> DC 70.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

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Inequality in America has reached absurd levels. It is not accidental or inevitable. It is a matter of wicked choice. It has been made possible through individual wickedness and unjust societal laws and policies. No society that chooses, allows, and propagates such absurd levels of inequality can be called sane. No society that chooses, allows, and propagates such absurd levels of inequality is safe. No society that chooses, allows, and propagates such absurd levels of inequality can endure. No society that chooses, allows, and propagates such absurd levels of inequality knows God, loves God, serves God, or can abide God. Any society that chooses, allows, and propagates such absurd levels of inequality is in the grasp of sin, the devil, and hell. Any society that chooses, allows, and propagates such absurd levels of inequality is in self-destructive rebellion against God.

But, you'd never know any of this from America's priests, prophets, or pastors. Such black wickedness goes largely unrecognized and uncensored by the watchmen on the tower whose calling it is to warn against just such gross wickedness. Their trumpets lie unused. Their voices mute. Their sheep scattered and slaughtered. This is consistent with the behavior of so many prophets in Jeremiah's day about whom he complained:

“They heal my people's brokenness inadequately, asserting:

‘It's OK! It's OK!’

But nothing is OK!”

Once more, Isaiah was less genteel in his complaint against the dereliction of duty on the part of Israel's watchmen of his day.

“His watchmen are blind.

All of them are unqualified watchmen.

All of them are mute dogs.

They cannot bark

as they are deep in dream, asleep,  
enjoying their slumber.

These dogs are inherently greedy.

They can never get enough.

They are unqualified shepherds.

All of them consider only their own interests.

Each of them considers their personal gain the be all and end all.”<sup>12</sup>

May they repent of their dereliction of duty. May their wondering sheep heed the call to repent and begin to feel, think, and act more consistent with the exemplary and divine character of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 5, 2024)*

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 56.<sup>10-11</sup>, author’s translation