



Strange reservations, unrelenting enemies, and just execrations

## psalms

### Strange reservations

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I have, now, for many years, read from, sometimes prayed the Psalms almost every day. While I return more often to my favorite Psalms than some others, I have, by now, surely read the entire Psalter hundreds of times. I never leave without having been inspired, uplifted, encouraged, and comforted.

In sharing my love of psalms with others, I have had not a few who confess that they just don't get it; don't understand my attraction to the Book; don't understand what I find so captivating. I have asked many of them what it is about the Psalms that they would find my fascination and appreciation so odd.

The most common complaint I have heard is that the Book of Psalms is repetitious. It may not be a very good response, but I have suggested that they identify passages—few or many—that *do* speak to them, and then return to those regularly. My thinking is that as they return to those passages, over time their repertoire will grow. Knowing the psalms well enough to be able to go to them in various circumstances and needs is a key, I feel, to appreciating the psalms and the help they can provide.

Another common complaint is that the author/authors seem somewhat “wimpy,” subject to near constant whining. This complaint is a little more difficult to address. The Psalmist is honest with his God, sometimes brutally so, about the vulnerability he feels. I hope that I am

not being unfair, but this complaint suggests to me a sort of “tough guy” spirituality and absence of humility. Such “tough guy” spirituality is, I think, in all cases unwarranted. Foolish and ignorant, really. Oblivious. To say nothing of spiritually dangerous. While I think I understand the attitude, it is beyond my capacity to sympathize with. Certainly, I do not share it. Like the Psalmist, I frequently feel vulnerable. It may be a matter of personality and disposition, but I prefer to think it is a matter of wisdom; a matter of hearing scripture’s instruction: instruction, particularly on fall and atonement. It is pretty clear to me.... our vulnerability.

“And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name. And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth....”<sup>1</sup>

Or,

“For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.”<sup>2</sup>

And again,

“And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them. Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 22.<sup>13-14</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Alma 34.<sup>9</sup>

good thing...”<sup>3</sup>

It isn’t just inspired individuals who have said it. God, Himself, has spoken.

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”<sup>4</sup>

We come back around to the Psalmist, who adds his witness to this truth in his own poetic way.

“Except the LORD build the house,  
they labour in vain that build it:  
except the LORD keep the city,  
the watchman waketh but in vain.”<sup>5</sup>

“Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth;  
and mine age is as nothing before thee:  
verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

“Surely every man is vanity.”<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, when such clear and present instruction is insufficient or goes unheeded, nature sometimes reminds us our vulnerability in a fallen world through the administration of an unwelcome medicine such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another, and one of the more difficult complaints concerning the Book of Psalms is mostly unique to my fellow Latter-day Saints. It stems from some unfortunate judgements about

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<sup>3</sup> Moroni 7.<sup>24-25</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John 15.<sup>4-5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 127.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 39.<sup>5, 11</sup>

ancient King David and about the afterlife. Since David, according to their lore, “lost his exaltation” due to vile sin, any sentiments he might express or any devotion to God that he might proclaim in the psalms is, it seems, suspect. Therefore, these “saints” feel, many of the sentiments that David expresses are not appropriate or applicable to them. After all, they are not (and never will be, I suppose) in his same boat. This complaint is difficult because, as I see it, it is wrong on so many fronts.

Now, let me confess: for reasons that are very different than those expressed by others, I too personally struggle with the man, David. I distrust him and his motives almost the moment the text introduces him. I am most suspicious of his ever having been the paragon of virtue and devotion to God that the text would have us believe. To me, the odds of his having been nothing more than a very clever opportunist are better than even. How, then, do I still appreciate a Book that seems to have his fingerprints all over it?

Now is not the time to go into a long and winding tale. However, I will, as I usually do with those who allow their skepticism about David to effect their view of the psalms, limit myself to asking a few questions. I invite the reader give them serious thought, study, and even, perhaps, prayer. Each question comes at this reservation from a different direction. I will begin with what I think of as the most simple, and move by stages to what I deem to be the most difficult. However, I acknowledge that each question is, in its own right, a tall order.

QUESTION: How certain are you that the individual, David, who came to be king over Judah, is truly the author of the many psalms that bear his name in superscripts? What makes you so certain?

QUESTION: Are you so sure that you are so very different from the David of Biblical lore?

QUESTION: Would you take some time to reconsider what you think of David; what you think of his faithfulness, or the lack thereof; what you think of his ‘loss of exaltation;’ indeed, what you think of exaltation itself?

Well, have at it, and have fun.

## Unrelenting enemies

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I should, at this stage, apologize to the reader for my lack of discipline. I have written some 700 words and have not yet gotten to my principle subject. So, without further ado...

There are many themes that run through the Book of Psalms: praise, the character of God, the dependability of God, our need to trust God, the efficacy of heart-felt prayer, the temple, the power and importance of Zion, social justice, etc. Some who complain to me of the psalms complain about another theme. Many find the theme troubling and inappropriate to a work that is supposed to be inspired by God. That theme?

“The Enemy.”

Again, a personal confession. I am pretty easy going in my personal relationships with others. I certainly don't go around thinking of others as “enemies,” If asked, I would identify only one man out of the thousands of people I have personally encountered in my life that I would label as an enemy. And by this, I mean to say that, as far as I am aware, only one man truly meant me personal harm. This was many years ago, and I have had to engage in the very difficult task of coming to terms with him, his evil, my response to his enmity, and the evil that his enmity drew from me.

In addition, I now consider him whom I call, Caligula, as an enemy of all that is good and decent and holy. He is a threat that, having already overcome much of American “Christianity,” threatens all of America, its institutions, and its way of life. He is a threat to the entire globe. But, we will not let him intrude, just yet, into our homily.

“Just yet.”

Make no mistake about it. The “enemy” runs throughout the psalms and is indeed one of the principle themes of the Book. By my unofficial count, we hear of the “enemy” or ‘enemies’ well over 100 times in the KJV. And this is not counting the many times we read of the “foe,” “foes,” the “adversary,” “adversary,” and of other contrary and hostile forces and individuals that go unnamed.

We must, I suppose, pretend that all is well in order to survive psychologically. To obsess on the extent of our vulnerabilities and on potential “enemies” would be debilitating. And yet, danger, physical, emotionally, and spiritually abounds. The Psalmist understands this, and gives voice to it.

At the same time, the Psalmist also understands that the truth of our vulnerabilities to “enemies”—both internal and external--makes God’s activity in our lives all the more essential. And even more, knowing the multitudes of vulnerabilities that individuals face and the assistance that God so willingly discharges makes the saving activities of God all the more resplendent, nearly unfathomable so. God is so very, very capable!.

And so, the Psalmist tries to do through his prayers, what Paul would pray for in his.

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1.<sup>17-22</sup>

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

Through God, we are well equipped to face any enemy.

“As for God, his way is perfect:  
the word of the LORD is tried:  
he is a buckler  
to all those that trust in him.  
For who is God save the LORD?  
or who is a rock save our God?  
It is God that girdeth me with strength,  
and maketh my way perfect.  
He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet,  
and setteth me upon my high places.  
He teacheth my hands to war,  
so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.  
Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation:  
and thy right hand hath holden me up,  
and thy gentleness hath made me great.  
Thou hast enlarged my steps under me,  
that my feet did not slip....

For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle:  
thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me.”<sup>9</sup>

I will let the reader read and study the Psalter to discover for themselves what sorts of enemies the Psalmist faced. They are many and varied. I do believe that ultimately, the

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<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 3.<sup>20-21</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 18.<sup>30-36, 39</sup>

Psalmist would agree with Paul’s assessment concerning the enemies that we face. The battle is existential.

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”<sup>10</sup>

## **j**ust execrations

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Some who do not possess reservations about the Book of Psalms for any of the reasons that I have mentioned above, might have some reservations about the Psalmist’s attitude toward his enemies and his wishes for them. If, over the years, I have struggled with anything in relation to the Psalms, it has been this. To be sure, up until recently, I never utilized in my prayers those portions of the Psalter in which he pronounced execrations against and upon his enemies. After all, did not Jesus tell us to love and pray for our enemies?

UP. UNTIL. RECENTLY.

Now, these execrations against the vile enemy seem so appropriate, that I wonder at my past insensitive and blind reticence. In fact, as you will see, I’ve become quite an enthusiastic fan of them.

With this confession, we return, now, to him who I so appropriately, if too kindly, call, Caligula. If we take Paul’s admonition seriously to “think on” things that are “true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise;”<sup>11</sup> then we must see America’s Caligula for what he is: an enemy. Enemy to all that is honest and just and pure and lovely and good and virtuous and holy.

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<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 6.<sup>11-12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Philippians 4.<sup>8</sup>



I will not pretend to be something other than I am. I will not lie, as he does. I do not love this man. Nor do I hate him. But I do despise his demented behavior and the corrupting influence he has upon people I love, the nation, and, indeed the entire globe. Notwithstanding his obvious moral depravity, manifest over decades, I would never have wasted one drop of ink, or one prayerful word on him. He could have gone merrily on in his putrid lifestyle without any comment on my part. I would have left it to those who had to endure his sociopathy to say and do whatever was needed to stymie whatever influence he might have had.

But, he was not content to pollute a little stream, lake, or sea. He will not be happy until he has polluted every one of earth's oceans. Poisoned every drop of drinkable water.

With all due respect for, and apologies to Jesus there is no reason to pray *for* this polluter. Certainly, we cannot pray for his success, as his success would only yield greater, more widespread and putrid pollution. The very best we could do is pray for him to change. But, after seven decades, plus, of continuous, habitual ravaging behavior, there is no reason to believe that any intercession we might make to God for him to change is anything other than vain. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that like Korihor of Book of Mormon fame, he will not and cannot change. Any relaxation of our resistance would be seen by him as weakness on our part, and an invitation to greater evil on his.

“If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people.”<sup>12</sup>

It is, therefore, right and holy that we pray for Caligula's corrosive influence to be ended. Thus, if Caligula is to gain entrance to our prayers, it must take the form of execration. Just to be clear, an execration is a denouncement or curse, usually but not always accompanied with anger. If tRUMP, is to escape our lips in prayer, it must be for the purposes of denouncing him to God. As he so often does, the Psalmist comes to our aid. Shows us the way. If Caligula has any hope, it is that God is asleep or slumbering or away on vacation so that he does not hear our complaint. Our execration. For we will not relent in opposing his poisonous evil.

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<sup>12</sup> Alma 30.<sup>55</sup>

But, if you *are* listening, O God, hear! Hear my prayer. Hear my witness about Caligula's ever present despicable character. Hear my wishes for his future. Hear, O God, my execration.

O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?  
shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?<sup>13</sup>

*Behold, he travaileth with iniquity,  
and hath conceived mischief,  
and brought forth falsehood.*<sup>14</sup>

*He flattereth himself in his own eyes,  
until his iniquity be found to be hateful.  
The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit:  
he hath left off to be wise, and to do good.  
He deviseth mischief upon his bed;  
he setteth himself in a way that is not good;  
he abhorreth not evil.*<sup>15</sup>

*For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire,  
and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.  
The wicked, through the pride of his countenance,  
will not seek after God:  
God is not in all his thoughts.  
His ways are always grievous;  
thy judgments are far above out of his sight:  
as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.  
He hath said in his heart, "I shall not be moved:  
for I shall never be in adversity."  
His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud:  
under his tongue is mischief and vanity.  
Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man:  
seek out his wickedness till thou find none.*<sup>16</sup>

*There is no faithfulness in his mouth;  
his inward part is very wickedness;*

*his throat is an open sepulchre;  
he flatters with his tongue.*

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<sup>13</sup> Psalm 74.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 7.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 36.<sup>2-4</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 10.<sup>3-7</sup>

*Destroy thou him, O God;  
let him fall by his own counsels;  
cast him out in the multitude of his transgressions;  
for he has rebelled against thee.<sup>17</sup>*

*Break his teeth, O God, in his mouth:  
break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.*

*As a snail which melteth, let him pass away:  
like the untimely birth of a woman, that he may not see the sun.<sup>18</sup>*

*Let him be as chaff before the wind:  
and let the angel of the LORD chase him.  
Let his way be dark and slippery:  
and let the angel of the LORD persecute him.<sup>19</sup>*

*As smoke is driven away,  
so drive him away:  
as wax melteth before the fire,  
so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.<sup>20</sup>*

Therefore, may I soon rejoice with the Psalmist's joy:

*I have seen the wicked in great power,  
and spreading himself like a green bay tree.  
Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:  
yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.<sup>21</sup>*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>17</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>9-10, 15</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 58.<sup>6, 8</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 35.<sup>5-6</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 68.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 37.<sup>35-36</sup>