

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

**RCL Readings** – Amos 7:7–17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1–14; Luke 10:25–37

**ACNA Readings** – Deuteronomy 30:9–14; Psalm 25; Colossians 1:1–14; Luke 10:25–37

**Introduction.** As we continue in our Sundays after Pentecost, we are challenged regarding the true nature of the gospel and the effect it should have on the life of disciple-followers of Yeshua.

**Common Theme.** Our readings today challenge us to bear fruit in keeping with the word of truth and its impact on our spirituality and on the treatment of our “neighbours.”

**Amos 7:7–17. Amos, YHWH's Prophet, fearlessly declaring God's coming judgment.** The Hebrew word אֲנָחַ (anakh) occurs only in this passage (twice in v. 7 and in v. 8), and its meaning is uncertain. The NET takes it to mean “tin,” and so the tin wall of the vision, if it symbolizes Israel, may suggest weakness and vulnerability to judgment, but the symbolic significance of God holding tin in his hand and then placing tin among the people is still unclear. Possibly the term אֲנָחַ in verse 8b is a homonym meaning “grief” (this term is attested in postbiblical Hebrew). In this case there is a wordplay, the אֲנָחַ (tin) of the vision suggesting the אֲנָחַ (grief) that judgment will bring upon the land. Another option is to maintain the meaning “tin” and understand that the Lord has ripped off a piece of the tin wall and placed it in front of all to see. Their citadels, of which the nation was so proud and confident, are nothing more than tin fortresses.

The traditional interpretation of these verses (reflected in many English versions) understands the term אֲנָחַ to mean *lead*, and by extension, *plumb line*. According to this view, the plumb line symbolizes God's moral standards by which he will measure Israel to see if they are a straight or crooked wall (NET, note 15).

The “House of Jeroboam” in the passage refers to Jeroboam II, or specifically, the house of Jehu, the last stable dynasty of the Northern Kingdom, and also, by extension, to the Northern Kingdom of Israel as a whole (JSB).

The name *Gilgal* in verse 11 sounds in Hebrew like the verb גָּלַח (galah, to go into exile). The repetition of the ג (g) and ל (l) sounds draws attention to the announcement and suggests that Gilgal's destiny is inherent in its very name—exile! That the people of *Gilgal* would be taken into exile is ironic, for Gilgal was Israel's first campsite when the people entered the land under Joshua (Josh 4:19–24), and the city became a symbol of the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt and of Israel's possession of the promised land (NET, Amos 5:5, note 14).

The word for prophet (v. 12) is literally *seer*, but it may be being used by Amaziah in a derogatory manner, like calling him a visionary or a crackpot! Amos maintains he is not a professional prophet, who

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may be hired for his services (cf. 1 Sam 9:7) and thus bought. Rather God took him away from his job to perform a particular task (cf. 2 Sam 7:8). This being so, he has no alternative but to prophesy. Amos' reply enhances the authority associated with his message (JSB). The words of Amos (v. 14) are without a "to be" verb", literally: "Not a prophet I, and not a son of a prophet I." Different English translations opt for "was" or "is" and this can nuance the sense of what Amos is saying.

The phrase *son of a prophet* means to be trained in the prophetic guild (NET, note 30). It is possible that *herdsmen* agreed to care for *sycamore fig trees* in exchange for grazing rights. Since these trees do not grow around Tekoa but rather in the lowlands, another option is that Amos owned other property outside his hometown. In this case, this verse demonstrates his relative wealth and is his response to Amaziah; he did not depend on prophecy as a profession (NET, note 33).

The verb for *preach* (v. 16) literally means *to drip* and appears to be a synonym in the verse of *to prophesy*, but it might carry a derogatory tone here, perhaps alluding to the impassioned, frenzied way in which prophets sometimes delivered their messages. If so, one could translate it to *drivel; to foam at the mouth* (see HALOT 694 s.v. רָטַב) (NET, note 36).

**Psalm 82. Agonising over those who show twisted judgment and favour the wicked.** This short Psalm seems to divide into two stanzas, with five sub-parts (Fokkelman): vv.1–2/ 3–4 and then vv. 5a–c/ 6–7/ 8. The psalm continues the collection attributed to Asaph (Ps 50, and Ps 73–83), a Levite who headed a guild of temple singers established in the time of David (1 Chron 16:7; 25:1–31) and which came back with the exiles to be part of the Second Temple worship (Neh 7:44). In 2 Chron 29:30, it calls Asaph a *seer*, suggesting that his writing was, like David's, divinely inspired (JSB, Ps 50 and Ps 73 notes). Many of these psalms refer to past historical events, and also have prophetic echoes. The term God/Elohim is the preferred term, rather than YHWH.

This psalm could be taken as a glimpse into the heavenly courtroom or as a glimpse of the heavenly Judge's view of earthly judges. The god, El, was the head of the Ugaritic pantheon, but in the Bible, as here, it is used for Israel's God, YHWH. The psalm could therefore be read as a polemic against the Canaanite pantheon, the assembly of El.

The play on terms for God and angels is shown in the opening verse:

Elohim stands (himself)	in the assembly	of God (El),
	in the midst	of the elohim he judges.

Here, *elohim* is used in the first half of the verse for God himself, and then in the second half for the assembly of the angels. Such uses of *elohim* in the Psalms are sometimes translated as *divine beings* (see *angels/elohim* in Ps 8:5). The term is used extensively in later Jewish mysticism and apocalyptic

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literature of the heavenly council, but in the Bible and even in later texts, even though the term is implying they are glorious beings, they are only ever members of the hosts of heaven—God's heavenly armies, who serve him and worship him. There are contexts where the angels are seen to be engaged in the world on God's behalf in protecting, ruling or judging (Dan 12:1), but never in God's presence are they presented as if equal to him. As Psalm 89:5–8 says, none can compare with him, and he is held in awe by all around him. In our psalm, they are not seen as advising or counselling God, as God is the one who 'stands himself' (niph'al) in the assembly of God (*El*, singular), and it is he who judges, not them. The term "take one's stand," when used in a courtroom, suggests a judge rising to pronounce a verdict (see Is 3:13–14).

It does seem that the term *elohim* is occasionally used of earthly judges (e.g., Ex 21:6; 22:8–9, 27; Ps 45:6), and some argue for this meaning for *elohim* in this psalm. But, whether earthly judges or heavenly angelic servants of God, the truth of this psalm applies to them both!

Here we will take the psalm as criticizing unjust earthly judges. In this perspective, verse 1 firstly sets God as the heavenly judge over all of heaven's hosts, who serve God in his administration of the universe. He, therefore, has the absolute right to make judgments about failing earthly judges. This he does from verses 2 to 7. *Selah* (v. 2) is used at junctures in the Psalms, and also in the psalm in Habakkuk 2. It is of uncertain meaning but maybe a musical direction to singers meaning "with raised voice," coming from the Hebrew "to raise" (JSB, Ps 3:3). God challenges the unjust judgments of earthly judges and their favouritism towards the wicked. Instead, they should be showing concern for the poor, fatherless, oppressed and exploited. The job of judges is actually to rescue the oppressed from the hand of the wicked.

The subject of verse 5 is ambiguous, but it could refer to the wicked ones of v. 4, or of the earthly judges, who have no knowledge of what is good and right, and who walk about in the dark. The last clause suggests that such a wicked society, and such unjust justice from judges, undermines the very foundations of the world! The Bible insists that justice is fundamental to the stability of the cosmos (Jer 4:23–26)! As Alter says graphically: "The perversion of justice is the first step toward the apocalypse." In the context of this psalm, it is interesting that Jesus quoted verse 6 (John 10:34). Literally, in Hebrew, it says: "I said, *elohim* (are) you, and sons of the Most High (are) all of you." As we said above, some think this psalm is about God talking with the heavenly angels and calling them 'gods' or divine beings. But Jesus clearly uses it to refer to human beings. The Jews were accusing Jesus of blasphemy: he was "a man" but "making himself out to be God." So Jesus quotes God in this psalm as saying: "I said, gods you are." He argues that those to whom God spoke his word were called "gods," so surely even more so, arguing from the lesser to the greater, the one whom the Father set apart and sent into the world must be more so.

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The psalm closes with a prayer, an appeal to the true God to execute his justice on the earth because he is the one who owns all nations. They are his by right. In the ancient world, people thought that each nation had its own patron god (e.g., Judg 11:23–24), but here the psalmist states that the true God is the one who owns the universe and the nations and will ultimately demonstrate he is committed to justice. The God of Israel alone holds all nations in estate, and he will hurl all false gods into Sheol for hubris (e.g., Is 14:12–15). The verb *own* or *inherit* is imperfect, so could mean a general truth, *you own*, or a future truth, *so you will take possession of all nations*.

**Colossians 1:1–14. God's Image will bear fruit in all the world.** The reading begins this letter to the church, as usual, with a greeting (1–2), a thanksgiving (3–8), and a prayer, based on the thanksgiving (9–14). The greeting is changed from the colloquial term *Greetings* (*charein*) to the similar-sounding Christian term *Grace* (*charis*) together with the Jewish greeting *Shalom* (peace, using the Greek: *eirēnē*). What a greeting—grace and shalom!

The thanksgiving for the saints at Colosse is one long sentence in the Greek, from verse 3 to 8! Paul thanks God for their faith and love, based on hope. It is worth reflecting on the beauty of this trilogy of virtues, called forth in the church (see also 1 Thes 1:3; 5:8; 1Cor 13:13). They had heard about these virtues in “the word of truth, the gospel.” Again, how beautiful is this, that the gospel that God has brought to us in Yeshua is not only good news, but also the word of *truth*, and it brings into fruit virtues such as faith, love and hope!

The use of expressions about bearing fruit and increasing in all the world in verses 6 and 10 reflect the terms used in Genesis (Gen 1:26–28 LXX), suggesting that what was true of the physical creation is true too of the spiritual creation, and not just in inner fruit, but in multiplication of such people in all the world, all those who are identified with Christ! Adam and Eve were given a mandate to reflect God's image in the world. As Beale says: “Thus, Adam and Eve and their progeny were to be vice-regents who were to act as God's obedient children, reflecting God's ultimate glorious kingship over the earth.” Obedience to God's word was crucial to carrying out the task and overcoming the deceptive word of the serpent. With Adam's failure, the mandate was passed on to others, Abraham, the Patriarchs, Abraham's seed and even included “all the nations of the earth being blessed.” This mandate, to increase and multiply throughout all the earth, continued through the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Gen 17:8; 26:4; Ps 8:9; Isa 54:2–5; Jer 23:3; 1 Chron 29:10–12). But, as the NT shows, the fulfilment was only possible through Christ, the second Man, the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45, 47), as he is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), and believers are now identified with him.

Christ is the firstborn of the new creation, and so those identified with him are born into the new creation. They have laid aside the old man and have put on the new man (Col 3:9–10). The believers are part of the inaugurated new creation and are beginning to fulfil in Christ what has been left unfulfilled in the original mandate and throughout the ages.

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The literal commission about progeny is interpreted in the new age as the increase of the reception of God's word in new believers and the multiplication of believers. Acts uses this theme of increasing and multiplying from Genesis 1:28, together with "the word of God," at key stepping points through the book (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20).

Paul's prayer for spiritual wisdom resonates with the gifted craftsmen in the tabernacle (Exod 31:3; 35:31), where the *Spirit* and *filling* are linked with *wisdom* and *understanding*. God filled them so they could have the skills to build the tabernacle and fashion its beautiful furniture. Accordingly, Paul sees God filling Christians with his Spirit so they can live skilfully godly lives (Beale). The term is also used in Isaiah 11:2 of the coming Messiah, and Judaism regularly used this passage in consideration of the end times (*T. Levi* 18.7, 11; *1 En.* 49.1–4; 61.11). Paul goes further than Isaiah here, applying it not to *one*, but to *all* God's people who participate in the new creation.

Following on from the reference to Genesis 1:28 above, all of the last Adam's progeny have the wisdom and spiritual understanding needed to walk worthily of the Lord and to bear fruit in every good work in the new creation. The Colossian believers can grow in these attributes only as they continue to hear and heed God's word of truth (1:5), which Adam should have heeded, and which their true Adamic forerunner, Jesus, did heed (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 3:38–4:12). Thus, when saints identify with Christ by faith, they begin to possess the attributes of their Messiah, because "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3).

Verses 12 to 14 seem to have in mind the themes of the Exodus, with redemption, deliverance from bondage, and sharing in the inheritance. Judaism tends not to use redemption with ideas of sin, but with exodus, and they do not associate it with any doctrine of inborn or original sin. However, the term redemption is later used in the Hebrew Scriptures of salvation from exile, from Babylon's captivity, and in this context, it is also equated with wiping out Israel's sins (Isa 44:22 and 40:2), as here in Colossians 1:14. In Isaiah 11, we can also see the connection of the Messiah (v. 2) with the restoration of Israel from their sin and exile (vv. 3–16). There may also be a connection here in Colossians with Paul's own testimony, when he heard the voice of Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 26:15–18).

In referring to "the kingdom of the Son he loves," Paul may have in mind 2 Samuel 7:8–16, about God's prophecy to David about his beloved son and an eternal kingdom! This prophecy has its fulfilment in the Messiah, as the passage immediately after our reading confirms (vv. 15–20)!

**Luke 10:25–37. Who is my neighbour? or Who becomes a neighbour?** The man who stood up to challenge Jesus was an expert in the interpretation of the Mosaic law and seemed to be looking to *test* Jesus' ability in legal matters (also 11:16). It is the same word used of Satan in Luke 4:2, where he was *testing* Jesus regarding the scriptures and obedience to them. The lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. This is strange, as eternal life, or having "a share in the world to come," was understood by

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Jews as part of Israel's covenant, based on scriptures such as Isaiah 60:21 (see *m.Sanh.* 10.1). Jesus answers his question with another question, and the lawyer replies with the quotation from two scriptures, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. There are parallels to the use of these two texts in Mark 12:28–31 and Matthew 22:34–40, but it seems there it is a different context in Jesus' ministry and also there the debate is on “the greatest commandment,” but here it is on how to inherit eternal life.

Deuteronomy 6:5 is a response to the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4, the pillar of Israel's faith and quoted twice daily to this day in the Jewish liturgy. Israel is commanded to love God within the covenantal context because love is understood as faithfulness and loyalty to God's covenant. Exclusive devotion to YHWH, the one true God, and the command to love God, rest on God's faithful acts on behalf of his people Deuteronomy 7:6–9. Luke follows the LXX of Deut 6:5 here, but it adds “with all your mind,” motivated maybe by the clarification of the sense of the word *kardia*, heart, which is to be understood as referring primarily to the intellect rather than to emotions (Beale). The wider context of Deuteronomy 6 seems to support the connection with inheriting eternal life—6:1 refers to “the land you are crossing over to inherit” and verse 18 says: “that it may go well with you when you enter and inherit the good land.” Also, verse 24 says obedience to God's statutes will be “for our good all the days of our life.”

Leviticus 19:18, to love your neighbour, builds on the *imitatio Dei* command of 19:2 (Be holy because I am holy). There are two sub-sections in parallel in the chapter: firstly, 19:1–10 addresses private or individual religious matters, and secondly, 19:11–18 give commandments that focus on community matters, relationships with, and responsibilities to, fellow citizens. The “neighbour” in the context seems to be “one of your people,” so a fellow Israelite, but, later in the chapter (vv. 32–37), there is another set of community commandments, which include loving the stranger who resides amongst you (vv. 33–34). According to Rabbi Akiva (50–135 CE), this commandment is “the greatest principle in the Law” (*Sifra Kedoshim ch 4* on Lev 19.18). Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 have also been combined in Jewish thought (*Testament of Iss.* 5.2; *Testament of Dan* 5.3; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.63), though the dating for these texts is not certain in relation to Jesus.

Jesus confirms the validity of the lawyer's answer saying: “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” Here, Jesus seems to be quoting from the previous chapter in Leviticus, where God says about those who keep his statutes and judgments “the person who does them will live by them” (Lev 18:5).

Jesus may have been evoking a little-known story in 2 Chronicles 28:8–15, late on in Israel's history, when the northern 10 tribes of “Israel” were separate from the southern tribe of “Judah.” Judah's corruption was judged by God through civil war with neighbouring Israel and Israel took captive many women and children from Judah, back to Samaria. A prophet of the LORD called Oded challenged Israel's wicked behaviour towards their “brothers” and they repented and decided to return the captives. It says in the NIV: “They provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm (lit:

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‘and poured oil on them’). All those who were weak, they put on donkeys. So they took them back to their fellow Israelites at Jericho, the City of Palms, and returned to Samaria.” And now, here, in the parable of Jesus, a man from Samaria is acting with compassion towards a half-dead Israelite and with similar terms.

“The journey *from Jerusalem to Jericho* was 17 miles (27 km), descending some 1,800 ft (540 m) in altitude. It was known for its danger because the road ran through areas of desert and caves where the robbers hid” (NET, note 97). In texts of the period, there was a common recognition of three classes in Israel: the priests, the Levites, and the people. Here in this story, the mention of priest and Levite leads the reader to expect next an ordinary Israelite but is surprised to hear it is a Samaritan, generally viewed as outcasts by Jews at that time! (JANT: read article p. 123).

The text suggests that the priest went out of his way (*on the other side*) not to get too close to the scene (NET, note 106). Hosea 6:6 may be an influence—God desires *chesed/eleos/mercy* more than sacrifice. The clause (with the aorist active participle) suggests that the Levite came up to the place, took a look, and then moved on (NET, note 108). Samaritan is at the beginning of the clause, in emphatic position in the Greek text, (NET note 110). Interestingly, the verb *have compassion for* occurs only ever used of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Only this once is it used in a parable, which, of course, has frequently been applied to Jesus.

Notice the way Jesus turns the question asked by the lawyer. He asks (v. 29): “And who *is* my neighbour?” His question was directed outwards, away from himself, to try to come up with a narrowing definition of the ones he had to count as “neighbours.” But Jesus, at the end of the parable, turns the question inwards (v. 36 literally), “Which of these three, a neighbour does it seem to you, to have *become*, to the one who fell among robbers.” The first question could be defined by law, the legal definition of one’s “neighbour.” But the second question is defined by love, “who *becomes* a neighbour” to someone in need. Notice too Jesus makes it very personal (literally): “which one of the three does *it seem to you* became a neighbour.” The lawyer is used to asking the questions and finds such penetrating questions difficult. His response is also telling—he does not say the obvious answer, “the Samaritan,” but “the one who showed mercy to him.” He could not bring himself to mouth the word *Samaritan!* Note too Jesus said after the lawyer quoted the two commandments: “This do and you will live”, and now, after the recognition of merciful action, about becoming a neighbour to someone in need, Jesus says: “You go and **you** do likewise.”

Kenneth Bailey has done the church a great service in showing the gospels in their cultural and literary setting. It would be great to read his chapter on this passage (Bailey, 284–97).

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; 7:13; 10:33; 15:20

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**ACNA Readings**

**Deuteronomy 30:9–14.** The blessings promised on return from exile are those that were promised at the entry (28:4). This book of the teaching may refer to Deuteronomy itself, which replaces the live speech of Moses (12:28; 13:1), or his prophetic speech (18:18–19), as he was the authoritative revealer of God’s word.

As Alter says: “The Deuteronomist [rejects] the older mythological notion of the secrets or wisdom of the gods. It is the daring hero of the pagan epic who, unlike ordinary men, makes bold to climb the sky or cross the great sea to bring back the hidden treasures of the divine realm—as Gilgamesh crosses the sea in an effort to bring back the secret of immortality. “This mythological and heroic era, the Deuteronomist now proclaims, is at an end, for God’s word is inscribed in a book, and has become the intimate property of every person!” (Alter).

In antiquity written texts were normally read, taught and recited aloud (“in your mouth” v. 14), not silently (see also 6:7; 31:19, 21; Josh 1:8).

**Psalm 25.** The psalm may be divided into five stanzas, and 11 sub-parts (Fokkelman):  
1-3/ 4-5// 6-7/ 8-9// 10-11/ 12-13/ 14-15// 16-17/ 18-19// 20-21/ 22

The psalm is an individual petition set in acrostic form, with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet commencing each verse. It is one of nine such psalms, and an acrostic only occurs elsewhere in Lamentations. This kind of writing may have been used as an aide memory for liturgical use. The letter *Pēh* is repeated at the end of the sequence. This means the first letter is *Aleph*, the middle one is *Lamed*, and the end letter *Pēh*, so spelling the Hebrew word for *to learn* or *to teach* (*Lāmad*) and emphasising the instructional nature of the psalm (JSB). In detail, there are some other variations: v. 2 has *Bēt* in the second word; the sixth letter, *Vav* is missing; v. 18 misses out the nineteenth letter, *Qof*, and has *Rēsh* in this verse and in the following v. 19.

The psalm is also set out as alternating petitions and expressions of trust. It resembles wisdom literature in its concerns for learning and finding the right path, but also resembles the religious concerns of the Psalms, in its hope for forgiveness and for the deliverance from distress.

The psalm commences literally “To you, LORD, my soul I lift,” and clearly expresses the psalmist’s fervent prayer for help. Then, in verses 2–3, there is a parallel use of trust and hope, with v. 2 being singular and v. 3 plural.

My God, in you *I trust*,  
Let me not be shamed,



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Let not my enemies exult concerning me.  
Also, *all the ones hoping* in you,  
Let them not be shamed—  
let be ashamed the ones acting treacherously without reason.

Notice the repeated use of the verb “be shamed,” and in verse 3, the negative and positive is in inverted parallel: be not shamed ... be shamed, with the two groups of people at the two poles: “all the ones hoping in you ... the ones acting treacherously without reason.”

Again, verses 6–7 play on the verb “remember” (*zākar*).

Remember your compassions, LORD, and your loving-kindnesses,  
For they are from of old.  
The sins of my youth and my transgressions  
Do not remember.  
According to your loving-kindness,  
Remember thou me  
for the sake of your goodness, LORD.

The appeal is for God to remember his compassion dating from the beginning of time, but not to remember the psalmist’s sins dating from the beginning of his life, and finally to remember him personally based on divine lovingkindness and because of his goodness. What confidence we can have when we trust in such a God!

Alter says of verse 7, “the startling juxtaposition of ‘me’ (*li*) and you (*atah*) is striking in Hebrew, which otherwise would not idiomatically require introduction of the second-person pronoun after the imperative verb.” There may also be a play on the word for “sin” in verse 7 (*chattāt*), which means to miss the way or the mark, and also the verb for “instruct,” which can also mean “shoot.” The Lord shoots in the right direction those who tend to err in the wrong direction!

The psalmist then prays: “May he guide the humble in justice, and may he teach the humble his way.” The verb for “guide” (*dārach*) at the beginning is the same root as the noun for “way” (*derech*) at the end, so literally one could say: “may he cause the humble to-tread-the-path (*yadrēch*) in justice, and may he teach the humble his path (*dar-kō*).” The humble here are those who have responded to God’s conviction about their sin, and bowed in humble repentance, as Jesus called them, “the poor in spirit.”

The words “pardon my iniquity” (v. 11) echo the same words of Moses in Exodus 34:9, “pardon our iniquities and sins.” The reason is “for the sake of your name.” By forgiving the sinful psalmist, the LORD’s reputation as a merciful God will be enhanced (NET, note 17). The psalmist declares (v. 13

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literally): “His soul in goodness lodges.” He reposes at night in the light of all God’s goodness to him. He also prays for God to widen the narrowing distresses in his heart (v. 17), and “Widen my self-imposed constraints” may be a good prayer for many of us to pray! He goes on to pray for God to “lift up all my sins” and uses the same word as the opening verse. There the psalmist *lifts up his soul* to God in prayer and now prays for God to *lift up the sin* from his life and so to set him free from it. Finally, in the last verse, the individual prayer becomes a prayer for the community—praying that God will set Israel free from all its constraints and distresses.

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