



Deviant

Isaiah 32.¹⁻⁸

Author's translation

- ¹Know this:^a a king should reign^b by acting rightly,
and rulers by ruling justly—
²he^c should be one who acts as a hiding place from the wind;
as a shelter from a torrential rain;
as a water source in a parched landscape;
as the shade of an immense rock overhang.
³Would not the eyes of those who see such a thing^d lock^e
onto it;
the ears of those who hear such a thing perk^f up?
⁴The heart also of the harried,^g would be intent on
experiencing^h it,
and the tongue that spoke cautiouslyⁱ would speak with
fluent exuberance.^j
⁵The social deviant^k would never again be promoted^l as a
leader.^m
Nor would the scoundrelⁿ be considered worthy of
leadership.^o
⁶For the deviant can only utter perversions;
his intent^p is to do harm;^q
to create impiety;^r
and to speak falsely^s of YHWH
in order to void^t the hopes^u of the hungry
and deprive the thirsty of drink.
⁷Such a scoundrel uses wicked means.
He advices foul plans
to spoil^v the poor through deception
and deny the just claims of the needy,
⁸while the true leader^w advises generosity
and finds legitimacy^x through liberality.

King James, or Authorized translation

- ¹Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness,
and princes shall rule in judgment.
²And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind,
and a covert from the tempest;
as rivers of water in a dry place,
as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.
³And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim,
and the ears of them that hear shall hearken.
⁴The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge,
and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak
plainly.
⁵The vile person shall be no more called liberal,
nor the churl said to be bountiful.
⁶For the vile person will speak villany,
and his heart will work iniquity,
to practise hypocrisy,
and to utter error against the LORD,
to make empty the soul of the hungry,
and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.
⁷The instruments also of the churl are evil:
he deviseth wicked devices
to destroy the poor with lying words,
even when the needy speaketh right.
⁸But the liberal deviseth liberal things;
and by liberal things shall he stand

Introduction

Traditionally, translators and commentators have understood Isaiah 32.¹⁻⁸ as predictive of a future era—a Messianic era when Messiah will rule with equity and justice. Now, I am as enthusiastic as anyone about the prospects of a Messianic rule. I welcome an end to the

obscene reign of the rulers and governments of this present evil age—rulers and governments often and appropriately likened to a whore, Babylon by name. Further, I have no doubt of Messiah’s equity and justice. To say that such a rule will be welcome is a gargantuan understatement.

And yet, as is obvious from my translation, I am skeptical of this traditional reading of Isaiah 32. This reading of the text, it seems to me, has allowed governments and citizens to hide in and from the vile present. It has and continues to let tyrants and immoral/amoral governments off the hook. It allows for the creation of falsely complacent citizenries and guilt-free electorates.

I do not believe Isaiah would be happy with this state of affairs. He would be appalled that we have used his words to postpone moral and just governance into the future. He would demand that we hasten it into the present. I believe, in fact, that this was very likely his intention from the very beginning. This is how he meant his words to be understood and applied. His words were not meant to encourage waiting for a better future, but to demand action—action now, yesterday and today; to create a better present.

This homily, then, is my attempt to not only investigate, but renew his call for a new era, today rather than tomorrow. It is my attempt to rescue the present from the future. As much as we justifiably hope for the blessed Messianic rule, we must demand moral leadership in the here and now. This is Isaiah’s hope. This is Isaiah’s demand.

What a mood Isaiah is in

*Know this: a king should reign by acting rightly,
and rulers by ruling justly—*

The reader might be surprised at how radically my translation of this text departs from that of the King James, as well as many others. The departure begins with a change in one seemingly insignificant word.

A king *shall* reign...

A king *should* reign...

The first, of course, represents the King James Translation, and its handling of the Hebrew imperfect verb, *yimlok*, ‘reign’ or ‘rule.’ The second represents my translation of the same imperfect verb.

The King James, along with many others, takes the imperfect verb to be temporal, future, and, most importantly for our discussion, “indicative.” When referring to grammar and the nature of a verb, “indicative” refers to the “mood” of a verb. An indicative or *realis* verb relates to an action that is certain and takes place in the actual world... past, present or future. Understanding this verb to be indicative, translators have understood Isaiah to be speaking of an event, the Messiah’s rule, that is certain to take place in the future.

The author’s translation, on the other hand, understands the Hebrew imperfect verb, *yimlok*, to be “subjunctive” or *irrealis* in mood. Subjunctive verbs have to do with actions that are uncertainly possible, potential, or contingent. The subjunctive verb might reflect an action that is ordered, obligatory, or advisory. The subjunctive mood is often used to express a wish, a suggestion, a command, or a condition that is contrary to fact, hence *irrealis*. In English, subjunctive verbs are commonly accompanied by words such as ‘can,’ ‘could,’ ‘may,’ ‘might,’ ‘must,’ ‘will,’ ‘would,’ ‘shall,’ ‘should,’ ‘ought to,’ ‘had better,’ ‘have to,’ and sometimes ‘need’ or ‘dare.’

In my reading, then, Isaiah is admonishing attitudes and actions that are uncertain and potential rather than predicting attitudes and actions that are certain to be realized. Their potential depends on the present commitments and actions of humans exercising their agency rather than on divine intervention, though, we must always remember, those very humans exercising personal agency often require divine assistance.

The first two lines of Isaiah’s admonition act as a kind of thesis statement. They are aimed at rulers present before him, though they can and should, of course, be applied by any and every ruler. Rulers, whoever and wherever they are, are to govern rightly and justly, whatever the

future may hold. This is their mandate from heaven. In the remainder of the passage, Isaiah expands upon this thesis statement and describes what just governance looks like.

to serve and protect

*[A king] should be one who acts as a hiding place from the wind;
as a shelter from a torrential rain;
as a water source in a parched landscape;
as the shade of an immense rock overhang.*

In his challenging and status-quo-busting Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims himself unimpressed with the polite, respectful, and often partial treatment that individuals of like mind, heart, background, status, class, etc. show one another.

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?”¹

It is, in fact, Jesus’ testimony that one of the characteristics that makes God, God, is that he loves, serves, and blesses “the wicked” or those who are inimical to his character and interests—enemies, to use the Sermon’s language.²

If we combine Jesus’ expressed feelings and Isaiah’s thoughts about good and just governance, we would be justified, it seems to me, in maintaining that Jesus is unimpressed with rulers who only concern themselves with their “supporters,” or those who are like minded and/or similarly situated in life. The “elites” interested governance in behalf of their fellow “elites” counts for little to nothing. Indeed, God is far more concerned with how rulers administer to those who are not similarly situated, particularly the powerless and vulnerable.

Isaiah’s interest in the vulnerable, and what just governance over them looks like is clear in verses 6-7. We will come to that momentarily. But his interest in the governance over the

¹ Matthew 5.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷

² See Matthew 5.⁴³⁻⁴⁵

vulnerable is in evidence earlier in our passage. It is to be seen, first, in the four metaphors found in verse 2.

Here, individuals are vulnerable to strong winds, torrential rains, thirst, and heat stroke. These are all metaphors for the social vulnerabilities that face and challenge the poor. One of, if not the primary responsibilities of civic leaders is to offer vulnerable populations protection from and help in these challenges—challenges such as food insecurity, worries over affordable and safe housing, anxiety over access to health care resources, etc. For a civic leader to be consistent with God’s expectations of him or her, that civic leader must act as a shelter for the vulnerable populations under his or her stewardship.

Here we must ask a question, or two, or three. Oh heck, let’s risk overkill and make it thirteen; a baker’s dozen.

How are our leaders doing? Do they measure up to the Lord’s expectations of them? Are they sheltering the vulnerable populations under their stewardship? How, do you suppose, would the vulnerable themselves answer these questions? How would a hungry child answer? How would an uninsured laborer answer? How would someone working for something far short of a living wage who is worried about making their rent payment answer? How would a Guatemalan refugee sitting on the southern border of the U.S. answer? Does how the vulnerable feel and what they might say even matter? Does it matter to the state? Most importantly, does it matter to God? Aren’t the vulnerable simply self-interested? Is God interested in what happens to them?

I will, here, issue my own admonition and invite the reader to think seriously and Biblically on these questions. Obviously, it is my firm belief—testimony, really—that our national leaders are not measuring up to the Lord’s standards. They much more closely measure down to the standard of the “social deviant” about which we will learn in just a few minutes. Most of our nation’s poor would almost certainly agree with me.

But does it matter... what the poor feel and say? Does it matter to God? The answer to these questions is so clearly, ‘yes,’ that they might seem like rhetorical questions. And yet, our society goes steaming along as if these questions don’t matter or are uncertain or can simply

be ignored without consequence. Well, these questions and our response to them do matter. The answers are not uncertain. And how we answer does have consequences.

If we didn't learn anything else from the Hebrew Bible about the nature of God, we should have learned that God does hear the complaints of vulnerable populations. He hears them. He gives credence and weight to their complaints. He responds to their complaints. In fact, we would likely not possess a scrap of the Bible that Americans so hypocritically claim to love so much if it weren't for the fact that God heard, honored, and responded to the mistreatment of a vulnerable population.

“And the Lord said,
‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt,
and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters;
for I know their sorrows;
and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians,
and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large,
unto a land flowing with milk and honey...
Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me:
and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.’”³

If we only possessed the story of Exodus and the testimony of the Psalmist, we would have more than enough witness that what the poor think does very much matter to God.

“For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth;
the poor also, and him that hath no helper.
He shall spare the poor and needy,
and shall save the souls of the needy.
He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence:
and precious shall their blood be in his sight.”⁴

³ Exodus 3.⁷⁻⁹

⁴ Psalm 72.¹²

“For the oppression of the poor,
for the sighing of the needy,
now will I arise,’ saith the LORD;
“I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”⁵

Yet and still, Americans continue to countenance public policies toward the poor that justify the complaints of the poor. To name just one of myriad crimes against the poor: in just one year, 2019, the oppressive American administration under the direction or demonic inspiration of its emperor, Caligula, has reduced food stamps to the poor—not once, not twice, but three times. This, after giving huge tax breaks to the wealthy! Do Americans who support such treachery think that God is asleep at the switch? Do they imagine that he has changed?

Well, we can say for sure that he was still awake and alert to the poor’s complaint as late as January 2, 1831.

“And for your salvation I give unto you a commandment, for I have heard your prayers, and the poor have complained before me, and the rich have I made, and all flesh is mine, and I am no respecter of persons.”⁶

There can be little doubt of God’s warning here. The latter days will be no different than former days, including the hay day of Egypt’s 18th and 19th dynasties. God will hear the complaint of the latter-day poor. He intends to act in response to that complaint.

“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!’”⁷

⁵ Psalm 12.⁵

⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 38.¹⁶

⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 56.¹⁶

Those who govern, along with their wealthy, like-minded associates, are under a strict mandate. They are to do as God does. They are to govern as he governs. In regard to the vulnerable, Isaiah has already stipulated the sort of governance God practices in their life.

“For thou hast been a strength to the poor,
a strength to the needy in his distress,
a refuge from the storm,
a shadow from the heat,
when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.”⁸

This language is strikingly similar to that found in the passage now under investigation. Civic leaders are to hear and respond to the vulnerable segments of their population as God would. They are to shelter and serve and protect the vulnerable as God does.

Oh, what a relief it is!

*Would not the eyes of those who see such a thing lock onto it;
the ears of those who hear such a thing perk up?
The heart also of the harried, would be intent on experiencing it,
and the tongue that spoke cautiously would speak with fluent exuberance.*

After metaphorically describing the inescapable responsibility that the ruling classes have to protect the poor through just governance, administration, and policy, Isaiah allows himself to

In quoting this, I am sometimes accused of picking and choosing. “Why don’t you reference the next verse: ‘Wo unto you poor men, whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men’s goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, and who will not labor with your own hands!’” To which, I reply. I am half suspicious that God is here being ironic when he refers to “poor men.” Is the “rich man,” such as the one working in our American investment banks, not as inclined as anyone to “lay their hands upon other men’s goods”? Just have a look at what they did in the late 2000s. How many people’s homes did they steal right out from under them through their greedy and immoral financial parlor tricks? Don’t even try to tell me that the eyes of America’s wealthy class are not “full of greediness.” And talk about “laboring with their own hands”! They haven’t a clue about what it is to “labor.” The wealthy put all their ill-gotten capital to work for them. Since when has a one of them said, “Oh, I am “satisfied.” I have enough. It is the height of willful ignorance and wickedness to suggest that this verse applies to the “poor” and not the “rich.” No, it seems entirely possible that “poor men” is sarcastically referencing the rich who can never harvest enough, but must keep stuffing their barn more and more full of the wages of sinful theft.

⁸ Isaiah 25.⁴

bask briefly in a glorious dream and invites those who govern to share in his dream. In his dream, he sees the happy, smiling faces of the poor as they experience the most unusual of occurrences: civic leadership that takes as one of its principle *raison d'être* the care and protection of the poor.

The poor watch this new thing under the sun with wonder. It is too good to be true. They listen earnestly to make sure they have not misheard what their government is telling them and doing for them. The weary put aside their conditioned skepticism, and allow themselves to hope. They announce themselves “poor” believing they will no longer be denigrated or taken advantage of. Their confidence and sense of personal worth increases exponentially. “So, this is what it means to be a valued human being!”

Yes, Messiah will have this impact upon the vulnerable. When he appears, they will know their worth, intrinsically to be sure, but, more importantly, they will know the value they have in the eyes of God, the Greatest of all.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God... Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”⁹

But, I submit, this is not Isaiah’s message here. Rather, Isaiah holds out a glorious promise to every civic leader. “You, by fulfilling your obligations to God through your service to the poor, can know the joy of fulfilling the expectations of the poor. You can know the joy that comes with seeing the look of ecstatic joy and contentment on the faces of those who had given up all hope of knowing such joy and contentment.”

Is this not a blessing, you rulers of the world—to be, in the very likeness of Abraham, a blessing to all the nations, and especially to all the nations’ vulnerable? And more, to know you are following Jesus, the Redeemer of the world, in being a Savior on mount Zion?

⁹ 1 John 3.¹⁻²

“And these are they who have published peace,
who have brought good tidings of good,
who have published salvation;
and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!
And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!
And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!
And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall
 hereafter publish peace,
yea, from this time henceforth and forever!”¹⁰

Just think of it! This could be you, you rulers of this world. So declares God through his faithful servant and prophet, Isaiah. It is invitation to be sure. But it is an invitation that, if not accepted, carries dire consequences. If you don't believe me, believe Egypt's Pharaoh.

deviant

*The social deviant would never again be promoted as a leader.
Nor would the scoundrel be considered worthy of leadership.
For the deviant can only utter perversions;
his intent is to do harm;
to create impiety;
and to speak falsely of YHWH
in order to void the hopes of the hungry
and deprive the thirsty of drink.
Such a scoundrel uses wicked means.
He advices foul plans*

*to spoil the poor through deception
and deny the just claims of the needy,*

Our heading to this portion of our homily could be a movie title—perhaps there is a movie entitled “Deviant” for all I know. But here, in the present homily it is a different sort of title. It is the title given to all those who govern contrary to the admonition that Isaiah has issued in the first four verses of Isaiah 32.

¹⁰ Mosiah 15.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

Isaiah's social deviant represents civic leaders who act exactly opposite of the just ruler. The deviant leader utters attractive propaganda and proposes false ideologies intent on undermining God's authority over human governance in general, and his right to establish standards for just governance in particular. This desire to undermine God's authority stems from the deviant's need to justify the oppression of vulnerable populations; oppression that serves to further aggrandize the deviant and his or her like-minded deviants. Such deviants, devoid of all but self-aggrandizement, cannot or will not see the broken minds, the frail bodies, or the shattered looks of disappointment and want on the face of the vulnerable.

Such deviants, with their vile goals and inhuman hearts would never be countenanced in or by a just government or ruling class. No electorate would find them praiseworthy, let alone worthy of their vote.

Unfortunately, America, its ruling class and electorate together, is ignoring Isaiah's warning. "Deviant" is the all-too-accurate and appropriate title for the individual whom the American electorate has most recently ensconced in a now defiled White House. "Deviant" is an all too accurate and appropriate description of so many whom the electorate has allowed to represent it in the noisy halls of congress. "Deviant" is an all too accurate and appropriate description of those who sit on America's judicial benches.

All of these deviants conspire against God and the vulnerable who are the subjects of his special care. They offer no shade to the vulnerable. Rather, they shatter and undermine the hopes and dreams of the poor. They brush away the just claims the vulnerable poor have on the wealthiest nation to ever inhabit planet earth.¹¹ No, "Deviant" is not too harsh a title for what America has so quickly become.

¹¹ Just today, days after abandoning the vulnerable Kurds of northern Syria because he wanted to "end America's wars," America's Caligula has announced he will send military personnel and arms to the dictatorial and deviant government of Saudi Arabia." One DEVIANT serving the deviant needs of another.

*while the true leaderⁿ advises generosity
and finds legitimacy^z through liberality.*

Isaiah ends this section of his oracle by circling back to the beginning—back to the just ruler. In doing so, of course, he once again draws a contrast between the just leader and the one who deviates from both humane and divine principles, policies, and practices of just governance. Just leaders, “righteous” leaders, divinely sanctioned civic leaders are those that advocate and legislate policies that are “generous” and “liberal.”

We have outlined such just and generous policies in the past. We have, for example, reviewed the Lord’s policy against lending money at interest as found in passages such as Leviticus 25.³⁵⁻³⁷ and Deuteronomy 23.¹⁹. As if this were not liberal enough, we have seen in passages such as Deuteronomy 15.¹⁻¹¹ that the Lord goes even further, obligating one who lends without interest to cancel any remaining debt a debtor may own him at the end of seven years. Further, he is to do so without reservation or hesitation. We have seen in a passage such as Deuteronomy 15.¹²⁻¹⁶ that individuals who had become enslaved by debt were to be set free at the end of seven years, and that in setting them free, the previous master was to send them off with some of his own goods so as to provide a better chance of independent success on the part of the recently released. In passages such as Leviticus 23.²², 19.⁹⁻¹⁰, and Deuteronomy 24.¹⁹⁻²¹, we have witnessed the just and generous prescription that producers of food leave a portion of their produce unharvested and unprocessed for the use and benefit of the poor.¹²

In all of this we have seen the Lord’s interest in societal economic well-being and his disinterest in personal profit and wealth. In addressing the latter-day saint’s tendency to act covetously as a result of having adopted worldly attitudes and actions toward material wealth, God asked, “What is property unto me?”¹³

¹² A discussion of these passages with the generous principles they teach can be found in my homily, “Biblical Economics 101”

¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 117.⁴

It is clear as clear can be that the just ruler will adopt and put into practice policies that prioritize the financial well-being of society as a whole rather than of a privileged few. It is also clear as clear can be that there can be no societal economic well-being in the midst of extreme economic inequality that puts the poor at disadvantage and causes them to suffer, both temporal and emotional.

Conclusion and benediction

We cannot escape it. In reading scripture, we cannot content ourselves with history. In reading Isaiah, we cannot content ourselves only with cleverly understanding Isaiah's message in its historical and cultural context, as gratifying as that may be. No! We must—we positively must—hold the scriptural mirror up close to our face and take a good, hard look at ourselves.

As we hold Isaiah 32.¹⁻⁸ up to our face there can be no doubt. America has become a deviant nation, its leaders elected to do deviant things by a deviant electorate. Its current socially deviant leader has taken the deviancy to whole new heights, or depths, if you prefer. While this deviancy has many manifestations, none are more manifest than that of denying divinely mandated shelter to the globe's many vulnerable populations. There is hardly a poor, thirsty, insecure, endangered, bereft child of God on earth that would disagree with this estimation. There is hardly a poor, thirsty, insecure, endangered, bereft child of God on earth that would dare commend the nation to a high and holy God. It is for sure that I would not so dare.

I take seriously the near certain negative estimation of and withdrawal of commendation of the world's vulnerable populations from the deviant nation. But I don't really matter. All I can do is shout out warnings. But rest assured, there is Another to whom the estimations and commendations of the vulnerable does very much matter. And He does matter. And there is no escaping it: there will be payback.

And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and

vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations; that the cry of the saints, and of the blood of the saints, shall cease to come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies. Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, saith the Lord. Amen.”¹⁴

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

^a Heb., *hēn*. Often translated as “behold,” or “look.” One might say, “Look, I don’t like that.” What they mean is, “I’m serious, I don’t...” or “I really don’t...” or “I need you to understand, I don’t...” The “look,” or *hēn*, then, expresses a certain seriousness or emphasis concerning what is to follow.

^b The verb is imperfect, often translated as if it were temporally future. But here, I take the imperfect to be modal rather than temporal. A modal verb is one that distinguishes between the actual world (*indicative/realis*) and the possible, potential, or contingent. It reflects likelihood, ability, permission, request, capacity, suggestion, conditional, willed. It might indicate something that is ordered, an obligation, or advice (*subjunctive/irrealis*). The subjunctive mood is often used to express a wish, a suggestion, a command, or a condition that is contrary to fact. In English, the modal verbs commonly used are ‘can,’ ‘could,’ ‘may,’ ‘might,’ ‘must,’ ‘will,’ ‘would,’ ‘shall,’ ‘should,’ ‘ought to,’ ‘had better,’ ‘have to,’ and sometimes ‘need’ or ‘dare.’

^c Hebrew reads, “a man,” but it seems clear that the text is speaking of a man who rules.

^d A king ruling justly and serving as protector rather than oppressor.

^e TDOT states that “The vb. *šā’ā* denotes a concentrated, intense, and sometimes apprehensive act of looking. The *qal* occurs 12 times, with the meaning ‘stare at, pay attention to, take care of, regard.’” Here, the individual almost can’t believe what they are hearing and seeing.

^f “The lexicons give the meaning of the Hebrew root *qšb* as ‘pay attention; attentive; attention.’” (TDOT)

^g Heb., *māhar I*.

^h Heb., *yābîn lādo ‘at*. Of *yāda* ‘, NIDOOT states, “The meanings of *יָדָה* are difficult to relate to one another. They range from sensory perception to intellectual process to practical skill to careful attention to close relationship to physical intimacy.... It is probable that precision in nuancing is not to be sought in such words in isolation; only the context enables some distinctions to emerge. In the broadest sense, *יָדָה* means to take various aspects of the world of one’s experience into the self, including the resultant relationship with that which is known.

ⁱ Heb., *illēg*. Usually thought of as “stammer,” or “stutter.” It is, then, speech that is in some way inarticulate or halting. The speech of one who speaks with uncertainty or with feelings of being intimidated, it seems to me, could be heard as hesitant, halting, repetitive... a bit stammering. The individual, previously intimidated, can now speak his mind.

¹⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 87.⁶⁻⁸

^j Literally, “hurry to speak radiant.” The reign of a king is so out-of-the-ordinary that the newly freed can’t be silent but speaks of the unusual circumstances in the most glorifying terms.

^k Hebrew *nābāl*. This root seems well attested only in Hebrew, making its meaning difficult to ascertain. Etymological studies have turned out to be inconclusive and unsatisfactory. That said, we are intrigued by a few suggestions. For example, André Caquot “reintroduced Akk. *nabālu/napālu* into the discussion. Assuming a basic meaning “break forth, destroy,” he considers likely a direct connection with the two Hebrew word groups *nābēl/nebēlâ*, “separate from life/corpse,” and *nābāl/nebālâ*, “separate from the community” (*TDOT*, Vol. IX, p.159).

The best approach to understanding the meaning of *nābāl* seems to lie in examining the specific literary contexts in which it is found. The contextual reading of the word and consideration of the modern-day use of English “fool,” convinces one that translating *nābāl* as “fool” does not do justice to the Hebrew concept.

Consider, for example, Judges 20.⁶ Here, the related noun, *nēbālâ*, is used to describe the gang rape and murder of a Levite’s concubine. The Levite subsequently dismembered her and sent her body parts throughout Israel to reveal the crime and call for retribution against the offenders, guilty of *nēbālâ*. Obviously, to call a gang rapist and murderer a “fool” simply will not do. Something far more sinister than “foolishness” has taken place. In a similar vein, upon hearing her half-brother’s confessed intention to rape her, Tamar pled with Amnon to not engage in such *nēbālâ* and thereby reveal himself to be a *nābāl* (2 Samuel 13.¹²⁻¹³). Again, something far more sinister than “foolishness” is at play here.

In Micah 7.⁶, the prophet uses the participle to describe the breakdown of family relationships. Jeremiah describes the man who becomes insecurely rich through fraudulent and immoral means as a *nābāl* (Jeremiah 17.¹¹).

In Psalm 74.^{18, 22}, the word is used for someone who has “blasphemed” or “spurned” God. Psalm 14.¹ goes further and speaks of the atheist as a *nābāl*. Ezekiel calls any false prophets a *nābāl* (Ezekiel 13.³).

Instructive are the six verses that contain the formula, *’āsâ nebālâ beyisrā’el* (Genesis 34.⁷; Deuteronomy 22.²¹; Joshua 7.¹⁵; Judges 20.^{6, 10}; and Jeremiah 29.²³). In each of these instances a serious transgression of societal norms has taken place. In addition, and importantly, the transgression is made, usually, spectacularly public. “The common and clearly decisive element of disqualification in all these offenses consists not just in the transgression of fundamental social or religious principles but in the consequent violation (*nebālâ*) of the Israelite community” (*TDOT*, Vol. IX, p.167).

Finally, we should not ignore the man who bore the name, *nābāl*, a man described as “ill-mannered and wicked” (1 Samuel 25.³). In the story, Nabal acts with complete disregard for the favors that the outlaw, David, has shown him in respecting, protecting, and preserving Nabal’s possessions, especially his livestock. Irritated, David decides to attack and kill him and his labor force. Nabal’s wife, Abigail, hearing of her husband’s “folly,” pleads with David to look past her husband’s behavior, reasoning that he deserves his name and is, in fact, a “man of *belîya’al*” (1 Samuel 25.²⁵).

In the end, the idea of “foolishness” seems to reflect persons or attitudes that openly refuse or are revealed to have openly refused to live by wise and acceptable norms of conduct. Such “abnormality” brings harm and destruction to individuals around them and is destructive to a well-ordered society.

It is interesting to note that our English word, fool, “comes via Old French *fol* from Latin *folis*, which originally meant ‘bellows’ (and may come ultimately from Indo-European **bhel-*, which produced English *bellows*)” (*Dictionary of Word Origins*, John Ayto, Arcade Press, NY, 1990). In light of this, we might think of the “fool” as one who is puffed up. Such over-estimation or evaluation of the self, it seems, necessarily produces a devaluation of others and allows for all sorts of transgression when it comes to societal norms.

One can think of the social deviant, here, as the normal immoral king. Or, one can think of a new moral code that is inspired by a just king.

^l Literally, “called.”

^m Heb., *nāḏîb*, commonly, “noble.” “The basic meaning of the root *ndb* can therefore be defined as ‘prove oneself freely willing.’ This meaning corresponds to the meaning of the verb *naduba* in North Arabic (‘be

willing, noble, generous’).” It has been postulated that the original meaning of this root after Arab. *nadaba* VIII, is “follow a call to service, follow willingly” (*TDOT*, Vol. , p.).

ⁿ Again, we are hampered by the lack of evidence for this word. The present passage is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible in which this noun (*kīlay*) is found. *BDG* associates it with *nācal*, ‘to beguile, be deceiving.’”

^o Hebrew, *šôa* ‘.

^p Literally, “heart.”

^q Hebrew, *’āwen*. This is often translated as “evil” or “wickedness.” This is not inappropriate. However, the “evil” is so closely related to the harm that is accomplished by the evil that “harm” or “destruction” is just as appropriate. One might think of the ultimate doer and perpetrator or “evil:” Satan. He does not do evil for evil’s sake. Rather, he does it to undermine and destroy. We could accurately call him “the evil doer.” However, “destroyer” seems to reflect his disposition—his heart—better.

^r Hebrew, *ḥōnep*.

^s Hebrew, *tô ‘â*.

^t Hebrew, *rēq*.

^u Hebrew, *nepēš*, most often “soul,” but often “neck.” It can also be understood as “appetite” which is related to how I translated it here.

^v Heb., *ḥābal*. We have taken the verb to be that of *ḥābal* II. But could we understand it to represent *ḥābal* I? Should we understand that social deviant seeks to bring the poor into greater and greater indebtedness?

^w Heb., *nāḏīb*. Also found in verse 5.

^x Hebrew, *qûm*.

^y Heb., *nāḏīb*. Also found in verse 5.

^z Hebrew, *qûm*.