



## Injustice and delusion

Isaiah 5.<sup>18-19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> What a tragic warning! There are those who drag along injustice with ropes of deceit, and wrongdoing with the lead rope of a wagon;

<sup>19</sup> those who say, "He should act now.

He should quickly do what He's going to do  
so that we can observe it.

The decision of Israel's Holy One should arrive and happen  
that we believe it" (author's translation).

Isaiah 5 begins with a love song (5.<sup>1-2</sup>) commemorating God's love for His vineyard and the disappointment He felt when it yielded poor quality grapes (5.<sup>1-4</sup>). Isaiah then describes the ravishing and destructive consequences that would come upon the vineyard as a result of its poor yield (5.<sup>5-6</sup>). Isaiah then interprets the song. God is the vineyard's owner, Israel is the vineyard, and the poor yield represents the social injustices of which the nation is guilty (5.<sup>7</sup>). With this, Isaiah launches into six blistering warnings. Each warning should not only be read in light of the injustice lamented in 5.<sup>7</sup>

"He hoped for justice. But, look! Violence!

He hoped for the rule of law. But, look! Shouts of distress!"

Each warning should not only be read in light of the injustice lamented in 5.<sup>7</sup>, but each warning should also be read in light of the others, each related to and building on the others.

The first warning is found in 5.<sup>8-10</sup>. Here, Isaiah condemns the predatory practices of those who fraudulently buy up land and form large estates to increase profit margins. The second warning is found in 5.<sup>11-17</sup>. Here Isaiah condemns the luxurious lifestyle of the wealthy landowners who live

on the same estates described in the first warning.<sup>1</sup> With this, we come to the third warning. It is addressed to

“Those who drag along injustice with ropes of deceit,  
and wrongdoing with the lead rope of a wagon...”

Translations and interpretation of these two lines vary greatly, so one must not be dogmatic about either. But it is clear that the warning is addressed to those who drag or draw forward injustice and wrongdoing. Some suggest that the dragging of injustice and wrongdoing is meant to suggest the burden that they represent. Injustice and wrongdoing burden the victims and, eventually, they will burden the perpetrators, as they are made to suffer the consequences of their injustice and wrongdoing mentioned in the first two warnings. This reading is not without merit.

Then again, the idea of drawing injustice and wrongdoing with a rope as one might do with a wagon, sheep, or other animal suggests the idea of momentum and direction. Pulling an object with a rope gives it momentum and dictates the direction that the momentum takes. Thus, we might understand Isaiah to be warning those who give momentum and direction to injustice and wrongdoing—the inventors and instigators of the injustice and wrongdoing mentioned in the first two warnings.

Whatever interpretation one gives to the metaphor, we understand that the warning is directed toward those who are perpetrating the injustice and wrongdoing described in the first two warnings. This is consistent with our previous observation that each warning is related to the others.

We understand, then, that it is those who fraudulently bought up large tracts of land, built expansive estates, and lived leisurely and luxurious lives—all at the expense of others—as described in the first two warnings, who utter the challenge of the following lines.

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<sup>1</sup> See my meditations on these two warnings for additional details.

“He [God] should act now.

He should quickly do what He’s going to do  
so that we can observe it.

The decision of Israel’s Holy One should arrive and happen  
that we believe it.”

These lines represent a challenge to Isaiah’s prophetic claim to divine insight. Worse yet, these lines represent a challenge to God, Himself. But, what divine decisions and actions is it that the speakers challenge God to do quickly, immediately? We understand them to be the consequences announced in the first two warnings. Isaiah and his God should, the unjust reply to Isaiah’s threatened consequences, either put up or shut up.

“O.K., Isaiah. If our deeds are really unjust and wrong, let the consequences with which you threaten us come to pass. Now. Immediately.”

As a reminder, here are the threatened consequences. Landowners will experience diminished profits, business losses, ruin and loss of estates, depopulation (5.<sup>9-10</sup>), starvation, thirst, humiliation, exile, and death (5.<sup>13-17</sup>).

How delusionally certain must those be who fraudulently grab up lands, establish estates, and live luxuriously be believe that they have done nothing wrong and will not suffer any negative consequences for their actions? How stupid and foolhardy must one be to issue such a challenge and invite the threatened negative consequences?

As we consider their delusional foolhardiness, we think of the infamous Korihor from the Book of Mormon. He believed, as those who fraudulently acquired large, landed estates and lived a life of luxury and ease almost certainly did, that “every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength.”<sup>2</sup> Financial and worldly successes justified one’s actions, however depraved they might be. “Whatsoever a man did was no crime” as long as he

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<sup>2</sup> Alma 30.<sup>17</sup>

was a success through his life management skills.

And Korihor, like the unjust of Isaiah's day, willfully refused to believe anything that he could not see; anything that was not present—whether it happened in the past or would happen in the future. So he, like those addressed in Isaiah's third warning, demanded proof. "Except ye show me a sign, I will not believe," Korihor spat, like his counterparts in Isaiah's time.<sup>3</sup>

Korihor would get the sign he so foolheartedly demanded.

"Now Alma said unto him: 'This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance.' Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma."<sup>4</sup>

As for those to whom Isaiah issued his warning, history demonstrates just how stupid, foolhardy, and delusional they were, for they did indeed pay for their willful intransigence and suffered the threatened consequences at the hands of Assyria and then Babylon.

Unlike the first two warnings, Isaiah's third warning possesses no threat of consequence. This is because it is the consequences threatened in the first two warnings that are the subject of the challenge issued by the unjust and wrongdoers of the first two warnings. The fraudulent landgrabbers who lived a life of ease and luxury on their landed estates, did not believe they were doing anything wrong—rather like modern day elite "capitalist" who believe their successes are due to their superior life management skills and justify the economic inequality that provides them a life of luxury while billions suffer across the globe. Thus, they did not believe they deserved or would experienced the threatened consequences. So delusional were they about their own innocence and God's inaction that they invited God to bring it on.

We are certainly justified in thinking them fools for their false sense of security. They have had

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<sup>3</sup> Alma 30.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Alma 30.<sup>49-50</sup>

lots of company over the centuries. They have lots of company today.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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