

# The Biblical Case Against Counter-Social Justice: YHWH's Demand for Justice and Righteousness

Steven W. Boyd

**Abstract:** A question is being prominently raised today by evangelical Christians: “What responsibility does the local church have to the disadvantaged and oppressed?” The biblical evidence that YHWH demands justice and righteousness from his people is *irrefragable*. He metes swift, severe judgment to the nefarious recreants to his mandate. And that he holds even his choicest servants accountable to execute the same, strictly judging either directly or through circumstances any breech, is *indisputable*. And that he even included it as a perpetual expectation in the covenants, the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, the conditional Mosaic covenant, and the mixed Davidic covenant, is *undeniable*. We have our answer.

Key Words: Justice, Righteousness, Abrahamic Covenant, Mosaic Covenant, Davidic Covenant

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## Introduction

There is a movement afoot that contends that Christians have no obligation with respect to social justice: our responsibility is only to promulgate the gospel and edify the saints. Let sinners feed other sinners and make amends for egregious wrongs committed in the past on certain people groups. But is this what the Bible teaches? The proponents of this position maintain that it is. I argue, however, that this is not only *not* what the Bible teaches but in fact is *diametrically opposed* to the character of God; his expectations for his people in the

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Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants; and an explicitly stated goal of the Messianic mission.

## The Argument—the Evidence

### *Information*

We need to start by defining our terms. “Justice” is only one of the ways that **מִשְׁפָּט** can be rendered. In law contexts it refers to casuistic law as opposed to the apodictic laws of the Decalogue. In fact, in Psalm 119 it is used over and over again as one of eight terms within the semantic field of the Word of God. Some others are **תּוֹרָה**, “instruction,” **חֵק** (from **חָקַק**, “engrave”), “statute,” and **מִצְוָה**, “commandment.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, it refers to fair and honest adjudication in disputes. The usage in Genesis 40:12–13 is a bit different, the meaning of which we can determine *ad sensum*. Joseph told the chief of the cupbearers (lit. the one who gives drink) that pharaoh would restore him to his former position and “You will place the cup of pharaoh in his hand as was the former *custom* when you were his cupbearer.”

The root of **מִשְׁפָּט** is **שָׁפַט**, “judge,” but because that word invokes a certain context and the root applies to a much wider context than that, it is better to understand it as “make decisions.” As support for this understanding, consider the deliverers YHWH raised up to deal with the predacious neighbors of Israel. They are the **שֹׁפְטִים**. Their primary responsibility was military. After this, they became political leaders because of their military successes.<sup>3</sup> And finally because they were political leaders, they also assumed the concomitant responsibility of being adjudicators (as happened with Moses; see Exod 18:13–26). Moreover, the standard for making decisions is the other term in view, from the root **צָדַק**.

What of this other term **צְדִיקָה**, “righteousness,” and its congeners? When we think of a righteous person we might imagine an individual who is a paragon of virtue, one with

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<sup>2</sup> All translations are by the author.

<sup>3</sup> As happened with a number of our presidents, Washington, Jackson, Taylor, Grant, and Eisenhower, to name a few.

impeccable character. What then would we think of a woman who disguised herself in order to seduce her father-in-law who had refused to give her his third son and became pregnant by him? The patriarch Judah said of her, “She is more righteous than I.” Righteous? Would we use that word in this case? Obviously, we need to realign our thinking of this concept so that it is in line with that of the Bible.

We must ask, therefore, what did Tamar do that evoked such a pronouncement from Judah? She manipulated him into providing a son who would be credited to her deceased husband, Er. That is, she was so convinced that there must be a levirate marriage to give an heir to Er that she went through these elaborate machinations, lowering herself by pretending to be a prostitute and engaging in incest, risking what was almost done to her by Judah’s order to ensure that it would happen.

It did not make any difference that YHWH had executed Er for some unspecified evil deed.<sup>4</sup> It is not unlikely that she was not privy to the information we have as readers. Even if she did know, it did not make any difference to her. He must have his heir.

Onan, refusing to give his brother an heir, knowing the child would not be his, and whether at Tamar’s behest so that she would have a child or for his purposes, flagitiously used her over and over again with no intent to do what he was supposed to do, in fact performing coitus interruptus to ensure that this would not happen. And so YHWH put him to death as well. No heir.

Judah’s third son came of age, but his father refused to do the right thing and give him to his daughter-in-law, fearing that his third son would meet the same end as his two brothers, thinking that the problem was her, not his sons. No heir and an intractable father-in-law.

She was driven to desperation to do the right thing. Although not yet codified,<sup>5</sup> the law of levirate marriage must have been in place and in a supreme place at that. It is clear from where it is codified that a refusal to provide an heir was such a disgraceful

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<sup>4</sup> It is not particularly helpful to speculate on what Er did to incur the divine wrath. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of suggestions!

<sup>5</sup> The law of levirate marriage is given in Deuteronomy 25:5–10.

thing that the one who so demurred was to be spat upon by the widow. To do the right thing according to a standard, codified or not, then appears to be the kernel of the meaning of biblical righteousness.

Before wrapping up this section, we should say a word about the verb. It appears to be a denominative; that is, the noun “righteousness” is a primitive noun and the verb is derived from it.<sup>6</sup> The verb occurs in several stems, but our interest is in how it is used in the *Hiphil* stem. This stem is most often a causative, but here, along with the *Hiphil* of רשע (in the ground stem “ungodly” or “neglectful of God”), is declarative or delocutive in a forensic context: declare to be right (i.e., innocent) or say the word *righteous*, which in such a context would be saying “acquitted.”<sup>7</sup> This sense of the *Hiphil* is quite evident in Proverbs 17:15: “One who declares innocent the guilty or one who declares guilty the innocent—the two of them are an abomination to YHWH.”<sup>8</sup>

Putting these two brief discussions of “justice” and “righteousness” together, we arrive at the idea that “doing justice and righteousness” is making the right decisions by doing the right thing according to a standard. What standard? YHWH’s standard, which flows out of his character and manifests itself in mandates and expectations to which he holds the nation.

### *Characterization*

Before we look at explicit statements about YHWH’s attributes of justice and righteousness, we need to look at a

<sup>6</sup> In the Semitic languages the vast majority of nouns come from verbal roots. Each Semitic language, however, has a small number of primitive nouns which are not derived from verbal roots, which are often common to many, if not all, of the languages.

<sup>7</sup> Because Jerome misunderstood this use of the *Hiphil*, he translated it *justificare*, “to make righteous,” a mistranslation which informs the Roman Catholic understanding of justification.

<sup>8</sup> YHWH’s standard creates a “problem” for him, which pertains to our salvation: how can he justify guilty ones? Paul is referring to this in Romans 3:23–26, particularly in the phrase “that he might be *just* and the *justifier* of the one whose faith is from Jesus” (emphasis added).

couple of early narratives in Genesis 2 and 4, to see these attributes in action, so to speak. First of all, justice and righteousness is embodied in YHWH's pronouncement: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper corresponding to him." Let us look at this more closely. "Not good" is לֹא, "not" + טוֹב, 'good' (an adjective). The negative here is a denial of the descriptive category "good." Why did he say this? Because it would be the worst possible thing for Adam to disobey YHWH and in being alone he was vulnerable to do just that. So YHWH created the woman not just to address Adam's aloneness but to help him not sin against God. This is one of the reasons the serpent attacked Adam through the woman. In terms of justice and righteousness, YHWH made the right decision to create the woman for the reason to keep Adam from disobeying his Creator. And in contrast how bad was Adam's decision to disobey YHWH and how unjust to treat him who gave Adam existence and life in such a way!

The second example is not as pleasant—in fact—we must look at a dastardly deed, the contemplation of it and execution of it, and YHWH's interactions to that arch-perpetrator, the murderer of his brother, whom even YHWH could not convince to do the right thing, Cain. Our concern here is not on why "he was very angry" or why "his face fell," but rather on YHWH doing the right thing by trying to reason with Cain, enjoining him to do the good thing and then warning him of what a precarious position he would be in if he did not do the good thing and that he was in danger of doing something terrible. Unfortunately, Cain was bent on fratricide.

Now we turn to examine YHWH's reaction after the dark deed was done. One can almost hear his pain. What have you done? The voice of your brother's violently spilled blood is crying out for help to me from the ground. Oh how foul the deed! Oh how unjust! Oh how clear YHWH's outrage at this (and all others since) injustice done by man to man! Cursed be Cain, the first man cursed by YHWH.

Now we will look at explicit statements about these attributes. For the most part, we will look at those passages where both words are attested. There are fifty of them, but space will

not permit us to examine all of them. But on occasion we will look at a passage having only one of them. In fact, the first passage we will look at is such a one.

Abraham was convinced that YHWH was just: “Shall not the judge [שֹׁפֵט] of all the earth act justly [מִשְׁפָּט]?” Thus, he was emboldened to bargain with him about Sodom, about sparing the city were a certain number of righteous (צַדִּיק) found there.

According to Psalm 33:5, “YHWH loves righteousness and justice. We may ask towards whom? Apparently to all mankind, for the verse continues with “the earth is full of the grace [חֶסֶד] of YHWH.”

In Psalm 36:6–8 (5–7 in English), David extols the grace, faithfulness (אֱמֻנָה), righteousness, and justice of YHWH. “Grace” occurs first and again last in these verses, thus bracketing the other terms.

Psalm 99 speaks of the three-fold holiness of YHWH (קְדוּשָׁה): holy in his greatness, holy in his governance, and holy in his grace. As the psalmist speaks to YHWH, he refers to YHWH’s justice and righteousness as the strength of his rule.

Psalm 89:15 is an amazing verse in which David proclaims that the fundamental nature of YHWH’s rule is justice and righteousness: “Righteousness and justice is the foundation of your throne; grace and truth precede your presence (literally ‘face’).” Four attributes of YHWH are extolled in this verse: righteousness, justice, grace, and truth.<sup>9</sup>

In Psalm 103:6 David tells us in a general way towards whom YHWH’s justice and righteousness is directed: YHWH is the one who does righteousness and justice to the oppressed. Beginning with a hymnic participle, this statement is couched as an epithet—amongst a string of such—of YHWH. In addition, *righteousness* and *justice* are both plurals, referring to YHWH’s abundant acts of righteousness and justice.

In Lady Wisdom’s final address in Proverbs 1:8–9:18, in that she is the embodiment of divine wisdom, she states the

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<sup>9</sup> The last two are also the last two in YHWH’s declaration of his five-fold name (like the Egyptian *rn wr*, “great name,” for a pharaoh) to Moses (Exod 34:6).

following: “In the way of righteousness I walk all around (*Piel* indicating continual action); among the little paths of justice.”

Isaiah 5:16 is a remarkable verse speaking to the character of YHWH: “YHWH of the armies is exalted in justice; the Holy God becomes holy through righteousness.”

Messiah’s responsibility to his realm to come is characterized as follows in Isaiah 9:6: “to nourish it with justice and righteousness from now and for perpetuity. The zeal of YHWH of the armies will do this.”

“YHWH is exalted [שגב]. He dwells on high. He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness” (Isa 33:5).

YHWH’s words are just: “I speak justly—great to give victory” (63:1).

According to Jeremiah 4:2, YHWH swears by truth (אמת), justice, and righteousness and from 9:23 that a boaster should boast that he knows the character of YHWH who says, “I am YHWH who does grace, justice, and righteousness in the land [maybe ‘earth’]. In these I delight [חפץ].”

## *Expectation*

### **The Abrahamic Covenant**

Because YHWH, among all his other attributes, is characterized by justice and righteousness, he expects it from his people. We will look at perhaps what might seem to be a surprising place to find expectations—an unconditional covenant, the Abrahamic covenant. YHWH’s promises to Abram were clearly unconditional: “I will make you into a great nation”; “I will bless you”; “I will make your name great”; “I will bless those who bless you and the one who belittles you I will curse”; “all the families of the ground will be blessed through you.” And the covenant ratification ceremony recounted in Genesis 15 is obviously unconditional: Abram was asleep during the ratification and only YHWH as a burning torch and smoking furnace passed between the pieces of the animals, thus obligating only himself to keep the covenant. But I left out a clause from the Abrahamic covenant which speaks of expectation: “Be a blessing.” The form is an imperative, a 2<sup>nd</sup> person volitive; whereas all of the other forms are either cohortatives (I will ...)

or *qatal* (formerly called ‘perfect’) 3<sup>rd</sup> common plural (will be blessed). This is not a suggestion but a command.

The second appearance of this expectation is in 17:1b: “Walk before me and be blameless.” Again two imperatives (both of which are used to describe the character of Noah in 6:9—but in reverse order). These imperatives seem to be an expansion on the earlier “be a blessing.” Of course, another expectation in the unconditional covenant is that Abraham circumcise all newborn male children, and although this one is not in our immediate purview, were a male child not to be circumcised he would be cut off (כרת) from his people because he had broken YHWH’s covenant (17:14).

The third iteration of this expectation is much more specific. The occasion—YHWH and two angels came to Abraham and Sarah to proclaim to them that by that time the next year, old Sarah would bear Isaac, the son of the covenant. As the party was leaving and looking down on Sodom, YHWH paused to talk to Abraham, saying, “Shall I cover from Abraham what I am about to do?” Then he repeated two unconditional aspect of the covenant: “Abraham will certainly become a great nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.” After this reassurance, YHWH spoke of Abraham’s obligation to his descendants yet to be born so that they would meet YHWH’s expectations of them: “I entered into relationship with Abraham **in order that** *he would command* his sons and [even more] his extended household, **so that** *they would keep YHWH’s way*, [specifically] *to do righteousness and justice in order that* YHWH might bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken” (emphasis added). The last part of YHWH’s statement made the meeting of the expectation of doing justice and righteousness into a condition for receiving covenant blessing. That is, certain aspects of the unconditional covenant had become conditional.

The only information we have to go by to explain this change—and that is what it seems to be—is the account of Abraham’s actions in the preceding chapters of Genesis, in that YHWH is not capricious and does not renege on his promises. The onus therefore must fall on Abraham. But before we explore this intriguing development further, we will look at more



evidence that this expectation persisted throughout the history of Israel.

Note the following:

### **YHWH's demand for equitable adjudication**

“Do not do evil in judgment: do not lift the face of the poor [give them special treatment] and do not magnify the face of the great [ditto]; righteously [fronted for emphasis] you will judge your neighbor” (Lev 19:15). It is noteworthy that these prohibitions are the strongest possible in Hebrew—like those of the Decalogue.

The judges and officers must judge the people with right judgment (Deut 16:18). And Deuteronomy 25:1 insists that in disputes the judges will determine innocence and guilt and declare innocent the innocent and declare guilty the guilty. According to Proverbs 17:15, an inversion of this is an abomination to YHWH.

### **General**

Isaiah 28:7 concerns the evaluation of behavior. Lines are used for measuring the length of something, in this case behavior, and the line is justice. And weights on a scale are used to determine the weight of something, again of behavior, and the weight is righteousness.

Isaiah 33:14–16 is very similar to Psalm 15 in that it asks: who can dwell with YHWH? who is characterized as a consuming fire in the Isaiah passage. In the psalm the three-fold answer from YHWH, because David asked the question of Him, is: “the one who walks in integrity, does righteousness [צדק], and speaks truth in his heart” (Ps 15:2), after which specifics are given, which include not slandering, not lending money for interest, and not taking a bribe to pervert justice. The Isaiah passage answers the question: “one who walks in righteousness, speaks equitably [shows no prejudice or partiality], rejects the gain of extortion, shakes his palms from taking a bribe, closes his ears from hearing [plans] of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes so as not to see evil.”

Micah 6:8 is one of the great ethical teachings of the Old Testament—what does YHWH require of a man: “doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God.”

Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll like water and righteousness like a permanent wadi [not bone dry as usual].”

According to Ezekiel 18:5, a righteous man is to do acts of justice and righteousness.

### **The identity of the disadvantaged who are often victims of injustice and unrighteousness**

Isaiah 58:6–7 identifies the disadvantaged as having ungodly bonds, fettered with ropes of a yoke, oppressed, and wearing a yoke. These appear to be figurative designations. But maybe not. Then the prophet gets specific: break your bread with the hungry, you should bring the homeless afflicted into your house, cover the naked, do not hide yourself (neglect or ignore) your flesh (family, close and distant).

Jeremiah 5:28 names orphans and destitute among those often deprived of justice. Jeremiah 22:3 specifies who these oppressed are in the Divine mandate: “Do justice and righteousness; deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of oppression; the stranger, the orphan, and the widow do not oppress [יִגְדֹּל].” Following this are the promises of blessings upon those who follow this mandate.

### **Of and to rulers**

1. They must manifest the righteousness of YHWH and His justice with Israel (Deut 33:21).
2. Standard for how a king should rule (Ps 72:1–2).
3. “Remove violence and devastation. Instead do justice and righteousness” (Ezek 45:9).
4. Stern warning against those who turned justice into wormwood and threw righteousness down on the ground (Amos 5:7).
5. Another warning to those who turn justice into poison and righteousness into wormwood (6:12).

### **The benefit**

1. “Happy are the guardians of justice who do righteousness at all times” (Ps 106:3).
2. “Better is a little with righteousness than much production without justice” (Prov 16:8).

3. “Doing justice and righteousness is more choice to YHWH than sacrifice” (Prov 21:3).
4. Doing justice and righteousness can preserve life and reverse the judgment of YHWH (Ezek 18:21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19).

### **Pronouncement of failure**

In one of the most famous word plays in Isaiah, YHWH said, “I expected justice [מִשְׁפָּט], instead oppression [מִשְׁפָּח]. These words sound very similar in Hebrew, but their meanings are radically different, justice versus oppression. In the second exclamation by YHWH the words again differ by only one consonantal sound, but that little difference makes a major difference in signification: “I expected righteousness [צְדִיקָה] and instead a cry for help [צַעֲקָה]” (Isa 5:7b), with the implication that the oppression provoked the cry for help.

Now we turn to explore the factors that resulted in the unconditional becoming in some parts conditional.

### *Presentation*

#### **The Patriarchal narratives**

The clues to explain the change are found in Genesis, particularly, in the selection of the material and how it is presented. Abraham lived 175 years, 100 of them in and about the land of Canaan. We obviously do not have an exhaustive account of his life in Canaan in the dozen or so pericopes in Genesis. Moses was very selective, and it behooves us to ascertain to some extent what guided this selection.

A natural starting point is the Abrahamic covenant recorded in Genesis 12:1–3. We want to see if there is an intersection between the promises made there and the pericopes. What are some characteristics of these stories? First, Abraham mostly encounters kings and rulers. Second, for the most part he triumphs in these encounters. Third, he gets richer and richer. Fourth, although mostly he manifested faith, on occasion he faltered, serious consequences followed, and YHWH intervened to protect him and his. Fifth, he lied about Sarah twice, putting

her into jeopardy and potentially jeopardizing YHWH's plan. Sixth, during negotiations to acquire a burial place for Sarah, he was called a "great prince among us" (23:6).

From this short list we start to get an inkling of what Moses was about: he was demonstrating that YHWH was fulfilling in the life of Abraham some of those things he had promised him. He had begun making him into a great nation. He was blessing him by enhancing his status and enriching him through his various encounters. He was making his name great: he bested pharaohs and kings, he was becoming famous, and moreover, he was being transformed into a great man of faith. YHWH was protecting him from those who presented danger to him and blessing those who blessed him.

But something else is evident: Moses is showing us when Abraham was a blessing to others and when he was not. He was not a blessing to Sarah when he lied about her to pharaoh's men. This endangered Sarah and because of the subsequent judgment upon pharaoh and the Egyptians, Abraham was not a blessing to him and them. Yet again when he lied about her to Abimelech, he was neither a blessing to her nor to him and the women of his kingdom.

And of course the expectation in question and concomitant aspects of the presentation to demonstrate whether or not such and such an individual was meeting it is found throughout Scripture, not just with Abraham, but as YHWH said, with all his descendants from Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, the Egyptian sojourn and exodus, the wilderness years, the conquest, and all the judges and kings until the exile and repatriation. But particularly as Abraham violated the expectation, YHWH modified it a bit. More violation led to more modification until the prospect of enjoying some of the promises and otherwise forfeiting them had to be made the motivation for compliance, which is what we see in Genesis 18:19 and continues on to what I believe is an extension of this expectation, the Decalogue.

## **The Conditional Mosaic Covenant**

The Decalogue is divided into two parts. Seen from the perspective of justice and righteousness, the first part concerns justice and righteousness toward YHWH of which he was most

worthy because he delivered them from the land of Egypt from the house of slaves (Exod 20:1). This justice and righteousness was to be manifested in fealty toward YHWH and to no one else. Fidelity to another god was perfidy and covenant breaking.<sup>10</sup> The fourth commandment, although memorializing YHWH's work of creation (Exod 20:8–11) and his redemption of the nation (Deut 5:12–15), is also an instantiation of justice and righteousness to the disadvantaged. The rest of the commandments are clearly either injunctions to do justice and righteousness to each other or the strongest prohibitions not to engage in blatant violations of justice and righteousness toward one another.

After extensive particularization of justice and righteousness towards YHWH and man, the expectation in the two directions is once again summarized in its two parts in Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18, respectively. Furthermore, according to Deuteronomy 27:19, once the nation was in the land, one of the curses was to be “Cursed is whoever perverts justice for a stranger, orphan, or widow.” And the people were to respond “Amen!” According to Joshua 8:33–35, since all the blessings and curses were read at Shechem between Ebal and Gerazim after Israel had secured the strategic middle of the hill country, those concerning the expectation were read and affirmed at that time.

The last mention of justice and righteousness is in Moses' blessing upon Gad, found amongst his other blessings upon all the tribes: “. . . the righteousness of YHWH he has done and his judgments with Israel” (Deut 33:21b). We don't know what righteousness and justice refers to. But that is actually immaterial. Here at the end of Moses' ministry he singles out one of the tribes as doing justice and righteousness, probably in the context of adjudication.

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<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the Decalogue follows a Hittite suzerain vassal treaty exemplar, in which fidelity to the suzerain is the primary responsibility of the vassal. An extant example is the treaty between the Hittite king Tudhaliash IV (the suzerain) and Shaushga Muwa (his vassal).

## Unconditional and Conditional Aspects of the Davidic Covenant

The following seem to be unconditional aspects of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17; Ps 89; 132):

1. “I will make a place for my people Israel.”
2. “I will plant him.”
3. “He will no longer be disturbed.”
4. “Evil ones will no longer oppress him [Chronicles has “wear him out”] as at the first.”
5. “I will give you rest from [Chronicles has “subdue”] all your enemies” [to David].
6. “YHWH hereby declares to you that YHWH will build a *house* [dynasty] for you.”
7. “I will raise up your seed after you, who will come from your loins, and I will establish his kingdom.”
8. “I will establish the throne of his kingdom for perpetuity.”
9. “I myself will become a father to him; and he will become a son to me.”
10. “My grace will not turn aside from him.”
11. “Your *house* and your kingdom will endure in perpetuity before you” [Chronicles has “I will cause him to stand in my house and in my kingdom in perpetuity”].
12. “Your throne will be established in perpetuity.”

However, this statement in the Davidic Covenant sounds conditional: “Whenever he acts perversely, I will chastise him with the rod of men and with the blows of human beings” (2 Sam 7:14). And this statement appears to be both conditional and unconditional: “I will not cause the foot of Israel to wander from the ground which I gave to their fathers only if they observe to do according to all I commanded them—with respect to the instruction [Chronicles adds “statutes” and “ordinances”] which My servant Moses commanded them [Chronicle has “by the hand of Moses”]” (2 Kgs 21:8; 2 Chr 33:8).

Ethan the Ezrahite, the author of Psalm 89, wrestles with this duality. He repeats many of the unconditional aspects of the

covenant in this psalm (21–30; 34–38 [20–29; 33–37 in English text]) using poetic imagery. He adds that it really was a newly inaugurated covenant with David: “newly inaugurated” because he uses the term “cut” (כרת) a covenant (v. 4 [v. 3 in English text]) and “covenant” (בְּרִית) in verses 4, 29, 35, and 40. The psalmist, however, also refers to the conditional aspects of the covenant in verses 31–33 (30–32 in English text). In the last part of the psalm, his struggling with the reality that the nation was undergoing chastisement, even as he was writing, is quite apparent (39–47; 50–52): after saying that YHWH had promised to David that his throne would endure like the sun and the moon (36–37), he says,

But you yourself have spurned, rejected, and acted enraged toward your anointed. You repudiated the covenant with your servant ... his throne you have thrown down to the ground.... Where is your grace which you swore to David in your faithfulness? (38-39a, 44b, 49).

Psalm 132 has this twofold aspect as well: both in verse 10; unconditional in verse 11; and conditional in verse 12.

### ***Realization***

Although surely the mandate to do justice and righteousness was given to all of Abraham’s descendants, those who held the reins of power would have been the most likely to oppress the disadvantaged and in fact did, and thus Scripture’s focus is on the leaders: the patriarchs themselves, patriarchal leaders like Moses and Joshua, and also judges, but particularly kings.

Unfortunately, the latter with a few exceptions left a shabby record in this regard. It was said of only two kings that they manifested justice and righteousness: David and Josiah. Of David it was said—“So David reigned over all Israel. This self-same David was doing justice and righteousness to all his people” (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Chr 18:14). Readers hear of Josiah’s meeting of the expectation indirectly in Jeremiah’s excoriation of Jehoiakim:

Are you reigning because you compete in cedar? Your father—did he not eat and drink and do justice and righteousness, so then it was good for him? He vindicated the cause of the afflicted and destitute. Is this not really knowing me. Oracle of YHWH. (Jer 22:15-16)

Now, who was the father of that wretch Jehoiakim? Why none other than Josiah. The possibility exists, however, that since אָבִיךָ, “your father,” may mean “your ancestor,” Jeremiah may have been referring to David.

Sadly, even these two kings did not persevere in doing justice and righteousness. David descended into the nadir of injustice and unrighteousness when he committed adultery with Bathsheba while her husband was off fighting his battles, recalling him to try to cover up his sin, then plotting his murder, and most callously writing off his death as “the sword consumes this one and that one” (1 Sam 11:25).

YHWH’s outrage and condemnation of David’s egregious violation of the expectation screams from the pages of Scripture. Only his mercy saved David. But David paid dearly through problems with four sons for David’s nefarious deeds.

Josiah, on the other hand, did not escape his lapse. Unbidden by YHWH, in his foolish pride to try to stop Pharaoh Neco II’s march to support Assyria against Babylon, he died in battle. Apparently not thinking of what his sons might do to the poor and needy were he to perish, that there might be a return to the oppression of his father and grandfather, he went ahead, and as a result catapulted Judah into a precipitous decline which culminated in the slaughter of countless people, the destruction of the city and the temple, and cruel exile.

### *Anticipation*

The reader of the Book of Kings has a sense of anticipation about Solomon’s reign after he, now king, asked for wisdom to govern the people. Certainly he recognized that the bloody succession, costing the lives of Joab, Shimei, and Adonijah and the banishment of Abiathar, was not the way to begin his reign. In addition, the demonstration of his wisdom given to him by YHWH strengthens this impression the reader has.



But it is not the reader's anticipation which matters here so much as it is that of the Queen of Sheba, who, when hearing of his fame, "came to test him with riddles" (1 Kgs 10:1). She arrived with a huge entourage, but after extensively quizzing him, was so overwhelmed by him and his court that she lavished praise on them all and especially upon YHWH, who "when loving Israel in perpetuity placed you [Solomon] as king to do *justice and righteousness*" (vs. 9b; emphasis added).

Unfortunately Solomon did not do justice and righteousness toward YHWH or his people: he flagrantly violated every aspect of the law of the king (Deut 17:14–20); apostatized after foreign gods; and his policies and excesses resulted in his son Rehoboam's day, the split of the united kingdom built by David.

### *Degeneration*

Almost without exception the story of the kings of Israel and Judah is one of covenant perfidy and continual violations of the expectation. We have space to only treat the most foul (and some could argue if these are they, but YHWH's reactions seems to confirm them). We will observe each time the severe retribution from YHWH that came upon these violators. We begin with the shocking advice of Rehoboam's young friends, which contemned justice and righteousness.

### **Shocking words at Rehoboam's succession (1 Kgs 12:1–19)**

The historical context was the succession of Rehoboam and whether or not the northern tribes, whose representative was Jeroboam, would support Solomon's son. Solomon's policies to support his bloated court had so antagonized the northern tribes that Rehoboam went to them at Shechem to hear and address their grievances in order to win them over. They said to him, "Your father made our yoke harsh. So now you lighten your father's harsh labor and his heavy yoke which he placed upon us so that we may serve you" (1 Kgs 12:4).

Rehoboam, instead of immediately agreeing to this reasonable request and thereby securing their loyalty, asked for three days. During those days he consulted his father's

counselors and the young noblemen he had grown up with. The former encouraged him to serve his people and give them a good answer and then they would serve him throughout his reign. The latter advised him to return an unbelievably harsh, vulgar, and extremely unwise answer, no doubt so that their privileged lifestyle supported by the burdensome taxation would continue indefinitely: “My little finger [probably obscene] is thicker than the loins of my father. So now my father loaded a heavy yoke upon you. I will add upon your yoke. My father chastised you with whips. I will chastise you with scorpions” (vv.10–11).

Rehoboam returned the latter’s answer to the northern tribes and not surprisingly they broke away from Judah. Then amazingly, Rehoboam sent Adoram, the leader of the *corvée*, to them (to force them back to working for him? or to collect taxes from them?). In any case, this foolish and futile act cost the latter’s life and Rehoboam had to beat a hasty retreat back to Jerusalem in his royal chariot, now king of only a stub of his father David’s kingdom.

### **Good king Asa’s reaction to prophetic rebuke (2 Chr 16:7–12)**

Asa was one of the good kings of Judah—the account in Kings makes that plain, saying nothing against him other than that he did not remove the high places Solomon had set up and indeed stating that he had an upright reign, like that of David and going on to describe his reforms. It also includes without comment the account of Asa using funds from the temple and the palace to bribe the Arameans to break covenant with Baasha and attack his northern cities so as to lift the latter’s blockade of Jerusalem.

And the account in Chronicles for the most part echoes this positive assessment, even greatly expanding on his reforms. But Chronicles also looks at the aftermath of Asa’s dealing with the Arameans. YHWH was not pleased that Asa had resorted to such a stratagem and not relied on YHWH’s power as Asa had before. YHWH sent the prophet Hanani to rebuke him, telling him that by depending on Aram instead of YHWH, the army of Aram had escaped from his hands. Asa was so provoked to anger by the prophet’s words that he incarcerated him and furthermore

inexplicably lashed out at the people, mistreating (רצי) them, even though they had done nothing wrong, a terrible violation of the expectation, as if he were some kind of wounded animal.

YHWH would have none of this and inflicted him with a foot disease. But instead of seeking YHWH for help, he opted again for the human solution, the doctors. So, he was afflicted until his death.

### **The vile circumstances of Ahab stealing Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 20)**

Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard. Naboth, following the Mosaic law, would not sell him the land which belonged to his family. Ahab returned to Jezebel, sullen and sulking. That black widow wove a plan to steal the land. Naboth was lured into a public assembly at a fast supposedly proclaimed by the king by being promised that he would be seated in the most honored place at the head of the people. On that occasion he was falsely accused by two supposed witnesses that they had heard him curse God and the king. Hearing this, the people took Naboth outside the city and stoned him to death. YHWH sent Elijah to confront Ahab with words most severe as he was in the process of securing his ill-gotten gain in egregious violation of the expectation.

YHWH's reaction to this vile deed is clear: the dogs' licking Ahab's blood and the dogs' eating the dead body of Jezebel.

### **Jehoram of Judah's murder of his brothers (2 Chr 21:4–20)**

The fourth dynasty of Israel—unlike the preceding three of aggression—was a period of alliance between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, an alliance secured by marriage of Jehoshaphat's eldest son to Ahab's daughter. To secure his throne, even though Jehoshaphat had promised it to him since he was the oldest, Jehoram killed all he thought could threaten his position, all his brothers and some of the princes of Israel as well. Although a descendant of David, he acted like a descendant of Ahab: building even more high places in the hills and forcing Jerusalem into whoredom (most likely of a spiritual kind?).

In response to this covenant violation YHWH brought predation from Edom and the Philistines upon Judah.

Nevertheless, though his people had broken covenant with him, he would not break covenant with them because of his promises to David of a perpetual dynasty. Then a letter came to the king from Elijah, excoriating him for leading his people into idolatry and murdering his brothers and pronouncing judgment upon the people and a ghastly ending upon the king, some terrible disease which would cause protrusion of his bowels. And so it came about. While the king was in the throes of the disease, the Edomites and Philistines invaded and took much spoil and all but the youngest of his sons, Jehoahaz (aka, Ahaziah). Jehoram died in most acute pain. And adding to that painful death was the ignominy of neither being given the usual royal burial rights nor being lamented.

### **Athaliah's extermination of all her grandsons and her atrocious reign (2 Kings 11)**

Jehu's divinely ordered usurpation of the Omride dynasty and the establishment of the fifth dynasty of Israel involved many executions of royals of both royal houses, not just of Israel.<sup>11</sup> And so with the death of Jehoram of Judah by the hand of YHWH and the death of Ahaziah of Judah by the hand of Jehu, only the sons of the latter, her grandsons, stood in the way of Athaliah's ambition to seize the throne and perhaps place Judah under the hegemony of Phoenicia (after all she was the granddaughter of Ethbaal the Sidonian king).

Upon hearing of her son's death, she immediately destroyed all the royal seed except the infant Joash, whom his aunt had been able to snatch from her clutches and hide until he was old enough to reign.

The crown prince hid in the temple for six years, the span of his grandmother's reign, being under the care and protection of Jehoiada the high priest, the husband of Joash's aunt. Jehoiada skillfully conceived of a plan to safely and secretly bring Joash out in public and install him as the legitimate king. Taking those he knew to be trusted officials into his confidence, he showed them the son of the king and then gave them their orders, which

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<sup>11</sup> Jehu's execution of members of Judah's royal family went far beyond the divine prescription.

they followed to the letter, encircling the young lad so that he could be anointed and installed.

Athaliah heard all the commotion and when she saw the king she tore her garments and cried, “Conspiracy! Conspiracy!” Jehoiada ordered her to be removed from the temple precincts and executed. His orders were carried out in the precincts of the palace.

Then Jehoiada established a covenant between YHWH, the king, and the people. The people extirpated Baal worship and all its trappings with which Athaliah had afflicted the nation, and they killed the priest of Baal in front of his god’s altars. The officials brought the king to the royal palace and he sat on the throne of the kings. The people of the land were happy again and the city was quiet. Athaliah they put to death with the sword in the palace.<sup>12</sup>

### **Joash’s murder of the son of his protector and mentor**

This strikes me as a singularly nasty example. Not only was it a violation of the expectation, but it was also a gross violation of דָּקָהּ for דָּקָהּ.

In the example immediately above we saw the role Jehoiada played in protecting Joash, removing the threat of Athaliah and securing him on his throne and mentoring him (2 Kgs 12:3). He even secured two wives for Joash (24:3). Even though Joash is reported as doing what was right in the eyes of YHWH in both Kings and Chronicles, their evaluations are qualified: in Kings “in which Jehoida the priest instructed him”; in Chronicles “all the days of Jehoiada the priest.” These caveats lead us to conclude that things might have changed after Jehoiada’s death. And indeed they did. Jehoiada died at the age of 130 and was honored by being buried in the tombs of the kings “because he done good with Israel, with God, and with his house” (24:16).

After this—no longer restrained by Jehoiada’s presence—the princes of Judah did obeisance [prostrated themselves] to Joash.

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<sup>12</sup> This is the last word about Athaliah. Because she was a usurper of the Davidic dynasty, her reign is not described by the formula for the kings of Judah (or of Israel, for that matter), which normally includes a reference to where additional information about a particular king can be found.

So he listened to them. What did they say? We only know the results: they abandoned the house of YHWH, their fathers' God, and returned to base idolatry. "And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of this guilt of theirs" (2 Chr 24:18b).

YHWH sent prophets to them to urge them to repentance but they paid them no heed. Among those sent was Zechariah, a son of Jehoiada with a stern message: "Thus says God, 'Why are you transgressing the commandment of YHWH, you will not be prosper; because you have abandoned YHWH, he will abandon you'" (v.20). Their reaction was to conspire against him and stone him to death by order from the king in the courtyard of the temple, where Jehoiada had forbid even Athaliah to be killed!

The callousness of Joash's deed is highlighted by the chronicler and even more his most blatant violation of the just and righteous principle of  $\text{דָּוָה}$  for  $\text{דָּוָה}$ : "Joash did not remember the grace which Jehoiada his father had shown to him" (v.22). Zechariah cried out for requital from YHWH as he died. And so the reprisals began: Attacks by the Arameans—inglorious defeats at the hand of a much smaller force, because they had abandoned YHWH the God of their fathers, as Zechariah had said—predations resulting in the loss of many of the leaders and the taking of much spoil—Joash seriously wounded—killed in his own bed by conspirators because of the violently spilled blood of Jehoiada's sons [not just Zechariah]. And then—in contrast to Jehoiada—*not* buried in the royal tombs.

### **Amaziah's bizarre idolatry and threats (2 Chr 25:14–16)**

Amaziah dealt with those who had conspired against his father Joash, but he did not execute their sons because he wanted to follow the Mosaic law that—in the spirit of the expectation—fathers should not die because of their sons nor sons for their fathers, but rather each should die for his [own] sin.

He is given a positive evaluation but—like his father—with a caveat in both Kings and Chronicles: "only not as his father [ancestor] David; he did as his father Joash did" and "only not with his whole heart," respectively. Perhaps a manifestation of these qualifications is his quite perplexing, even irrational, behavior after YHWH had given him victory over the Edomites:

he brought back their idols to Jerusalem, set them up as his gods, prostrated himself before them, and offered incense to them.

YHWH immediately dispatched a prophet to confront the king and point out to him how irrational it was to worship gods who could not deliver their people from his hand. Amaziah did not allow him to continue, saying, “Who made you the king’s advisor? Stop right now lest they smite you” (v.16). The prophet stopped but not before pronouncing the king’s doom.

Divine blow after divine blow followed: a humiliating defeat by Israel—captured by Israel—brought back to Jerusalem in shame—600 feet of Jerusalem’s city wall broken down—the treasuries of the temple and the palace pillaged. In light of these disasters, no wonder a conspiracy rose up against him. He tried to escape by fleeing to Lachish. But they sent men to pursue him, and they executed him there. His body was returned to Jerusalem on horses and he was buried with his fathers (presumably in the royal tombs, but this is not explicitly stated).

### **The flagrant violations listed in Isaiah 5:8–30**

Following the pronouncement of judgment on the nation for violation of the expectation, Isaiah specifies some of the most egregious: the stealing of houses and lands, self-indulgence while others suffer, mocking YHWH’s judgments, those who call evil good and good evil, and those who would pervert justice for a bribe. And upon these all violations of the expectation horrific judgments were pronounced.

### **Manasseh’s perfidy and provocation of YHWH (2 Kgs 21; 2 Chr 33)**

That Manasseh engaged in heinous practices is quite bewildering especially when seen in the light of the fact that his father Hezekiah was one of the nation’s great reformers. This, however, is not the only instance. Jehoram of Judah followed Jehoshapat, Ahaz followed a string of basically good kings; and Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah were the sons of Josiah. Moreover, the converse also occurred: Asa after Rehoboam and Abijah, Hezekiah after Ahaz, and Josiah after Manasseh and Amon. But of no king of either Judah or Israel are the things said which were said of Manasseh, where his actions are described as

“the abominations of the nations which YHWH dispossessed before the sons of Israel” (2 Kgs 21:2); undoing all the reforms of his father Hezekiah (v.3a); reverting the nation to Baal worship, even erecting altars to Baal—as Ahab had done—in the temple (vv.3b–4, 7); adding to this setting up altars for sun worship and astral worship in the two temple courtyards; causing his son to pass through the fire and practicing every form of divination, sorcery, necromancy, etc. expressly forbidden according to Deuteronomy 18:9–12; leading the nation astray to the point that they did more evil than the nations which YHWH had destroyed before the sons of Israel, than the Amorites who preceded them, causing Judah to sin by his idolatries (vv.9, 11); provoking YHWH more than any since the Exodus (v.15); and shedding innocent blood to the extent that Jerusalem was filled [with it] from end to end (v.16; 24:4). And thus this judgment was pronounced upon the nation: “I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, the weight of Ahab. I will wipe away Jerusalem as one wipes a dish—he wipes it and turns it over” (v.13).

Later the sins of Manasseh, particularly, for the blood of the innocent which he had shed, filling Jerusalem with innocent blood, so that YHWH was not willing to forgive, are cited as the cause for YHWH removing Judah from His presence (2 Kgs 24:3–4). Moreover, the chronicler tells that Manasseh was so bad that YHWH allowed the Assyrians to take him captive in chains to Babylon, where he repented, and when YHWH returned him to his throne, he tried to reverse all the wrong he had done, but it was too late for Judah (2 Chr 33:11–17). Furthermore, the final formulary reference to other sources of information on a king is unique in Manasseh’s case, in that it refers to his sins. In addition, he was not buried in the royal tombs but in a garden of his house. Amon, his son, named after the chief Egyptian sun god, reigned in his place and was so bad that after only two years his servants conspired against him and executed him.

### **The flagrant violations intoned by Jeremiah (Jer 7:5, 9–10)**

Jeremiah had to contend against a people whose priests, prophets, princes, and sages thought and acted accordingly that



the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and YHWH's choice of and presence in Jerusalem made the city inviolable. The people thought that they could act any way they wanted, sin with impunity.

They seem to have forgotten about the expectation and the Mosaic covenant, and the conditional aspects of the Davidic covenant. Jeremiah disabused them of this idea in his famous temple speech in which the expectation figures prominently, speaking for YHWH:

Indeed if you strive to make your ways and actions good; if you strive to do justice each one to another, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow you do not oppress, innocent blood you do not shed in this place, and after other gods you do not walk to your own harm, then I will cause you to dwell in this place in the land which I gave to your fathers for perpetuity. (Jer 7:5)

And again, he expresses YHWH's incredulity about their misconceptions in his rhetorical question: "Stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, offering incense to Baal, walking after other gods who you do not know, you enter and stand before Me in this house which is called by My Name and say we are delivered—in order to do all these abominations? Has this house which is called by My Name become a bandits' cave in your eyes?" (9–10). He then points them to the ruins of Shiloh, the place where YHWH's name formerly dwelt, which he allowed to be destroyed because of the infidelity of Israel at that time. And YHWH communicates that he will do the same thing to the temple and throw Judah from his presence as he did Israel.

### **The atrocious treatment Jeremiah received**

To put it mildly, Jeremiah's message was not well received, and he unjustly suffered much at the hands of his people and their leaders: beaten and put into stocks (20); seized after the temple speech and declared to be worthy of death (26); unjustly beaten and incarcerated in a prison compound, having been unjustly accused of defecting to the Babylonians (32:3; 33:1; 37:11–16); having to hide from the king and so not being able to go to the temple (36:5); thrown into a cistern (38:1–13); shanghaied to

Egypt (43:1–7); and then, according to tradition, stoned to death there. All those who participated in these outrages were severely judged.

### **Jehoiakim cutting up and burning the scroll (Jeremiah 36)**

The last example we will look at—albeit, there are many more—is a particularly blatant act of contumely on the part of Jehoiakim.

YHWH ordered Jeremiah to write down all the pronouncements he had made up to that point, giving Judah yet another opportunity to repent. If the people read about all the calamity which he was about to do them because of their sins, each man might turn from his evil way and then he could forgive them of their perversions and sins. So Jeremiah dictated all his prophecies to his servant Baruch, which he wrote down on a scroll.

Then Jeremiah sent Baruch to read the scroll to the people on a fast day when the people from outside the city would assemble at the temple because Jeremiah had to remain in hiding. Jeremiah reiterated to Baruch, “Perhaps their pleading will fall before YHWH and each man will repent from his evil way, because the anger and wrath of YHWH is great, which YHWH has spoken to this people” (36:7). So Baruch took the scroll to the temple and read it to the people who were there while he was standing near to one of the gates.

An official heard the recitation and reported it to others. Baruch was brought before them and told to read the scroll again. After he did, they decided that king Jehoiakim must be informed about this. They also told Baruch that he and Jeremiah must go into hiding.

Jehoiakim was informed about the scroll and ordered it to be read to him. After each portion was read to him and the officials attending him, Jehoiakim cut up that portion and threw it into the fire. The king and his courtiers showed no reaction as the scroll was read and then burned. This happened until all the scroll had been burned up. Some officials begged the king not to burn the scroll but to no avail.

YHWH then ordered Jeremiah to write another scroll and add to it the crime Jehoiakim had committed and the punishment he would receive: no descendant of his would sit on the throne of David and he himself would not be buried after his death. YHWH will not be mocked nor his purposes thwarted. Jehoiakim would pay for his deeds!

This brings us to what is arguably the sternest and most striking condemnation of injustice and unrighteousness, Isaiah's stunning Song of the Vineyard.

### *Execration*

Justice and righteousness is writ large in Isaiah: 12 times they are in tandem; “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט) occurs 42 times; “righteousness” (צְדִיקָה) occurs 67 times; “righteousness” (צְדִיקָה) occurs 36 times. But nowhere in this book of superlatives is there anything like the Song of the Vineyard.<sup>13</sup> Isaiah's listeners did not suspect that this song which he sang would be a condemnation of the nation. Nor did they suspect that they would judge themselves condemned.

The song unfolds in five movements, pulling the listeners into participating in the action. First, Isaiah asked to sing to his beloved. Second, it was a song of his beloved's vineyard. Third, Isaiah sang as his beloved. Fourth, Isaiah revealed the identity of his friend. And fifth, Isaiah revealed the identity of the vineyard. Six key words should be kept in mind as we study this song: the crowd, concealment, conferees, conclusion, condign punishment, and condemnation.

As Isaiah sang of his beloved's vineyard, he refers to the provisions to achieve great expectations: the place of the vineyard—the best place (Isa 5:1b), the preparation of the vineyard—the best ground preparation and removal of stones (5:2a), the planting of the vineyard—the choicest vine (5:2b), the

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah is referred to as “the prince of the prophets,” “the Messianic prophet,” and “the perfect artist with words.” He uses more names for YHWH than any other book and has the largest vocabulary of any book—although Job has more *hapax legomena*. The Servant Songs, the portrait of Christ in the OT, is found here, in particular the matchless fourth Song, 52:13–53:12, in which it is as if Isaiah were at the foot of the cross.

protection of the vineyard—wall and a watchtower (5:2c), the production of the vineyard—he carved a catchment basin in the rock to receive the juice (5:2d). Then he sang about the purpose for the vineyard—to bring forth good grapes. Finally he sang about what the vineyard ending up producing stink fruits!

Then Isaiah switched to singing as his beloved. He convened the crowd as a jury and polled them—what should I do (5:3)? Then he questioned the jury. What more could I have done (5:4a)? He knew that they were thinking that he could not have done anything more. The vineyard was at fault. Then he asked them why it happened that the vineyard produced stink fruits? He knew that they didn't have an answer. Then he sang like a judge about his decision: please let me inform you what I am about to do to my vineyard: remove its hedge so that it is for grazing, break down its wall so that it is a trampled place (5:5), I will make it a wasteland, it will not be pruned, it will not be hoed, and thorn bush and thistle shall come up (5:6a).

All of these things a human vintner could do, and no doubt the crowd agreed with everything Isaiah was saying. The vineyard was no good and had to be abandoned. But then Isaiah sang one more thing as his beloved: one more thing that he would do to the vineyard: “I will command the clouds to not rain upon it rain” (5:6b). At this point the crowd knew that they had been had. No human vintner could command the clouds! Isaiah's beloved was YHWH! And they probably suspected that they had condemned themselves. To remove all doubt and to confirm their suspicions, Isaiah continued his song, revealing the identity of the vineyard: “Indeed the vineyard of YHWH of the armies is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His pleasant planting” (5:7a).

And finally he sang as his beloved about expectations versus realizations: “I expected justice [good grapes]—instead oppression [stink fruits]; I expected righteousness [good grapes] — instead a cry for help [stink fruits]” (5:7b). Using in this indictment the same roots which occur in Genesis 18 reinforces YHWH's indictment of the nation in chapter 1 of Isaiah that the nation is like Sodom and Gomorrah and His addressing them as such.

After a horrendous eighteen-month siege, Jerusalem fell. The city was destroyed. The temple razed. The king—his sons were executed in front of him before he was blinded and dragged in chains to Babylon, where he died. The people were taken into exile. The vineyard was laid waste.

### ***Restoration***

After punishing the nation with exile for a host of sins, idolatry being paramount among them, but also according to the Song of the Vineyard, violation of the expectation being a direct cause, YHWH orchestrated the rise and domination of an empire whose policy was to repatriate those their predecessors (the Babylonians) had deported from their native lands. The Persians pursued this policy in order to curry favor with the national deities of the peoples they returned. YHWH promised a restoration which manifested justice and righteousness.

“The judged land will be restored and be a place where justice will tabernacle [שֹׁכֵן]...and righteousness will dwell [יָשָׁב]...” (32:12–20, esp. 16–17).

“Thus says YHWH, ‘Keep justice and do righteousness, because My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed’” (56:1).

The punishment that would come upon those who exiled his people would be a just vengeance. We behold the portrait of YHWH as Divine warrior: “He clothed Himself with righteousness like armor and a helmet of salvation on His head. He clothed Himself with garments of vengeance...” (59:17).

In an extraordinary personification, Jerusalem and Judah speak judgment to come followed by restoration:

I even I will watch for YHWH. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Do not be happy over me, my enemy, that I have fallen. I will rise again. That I am sitting in darkness. YHWH is my light. The wrath of YHWH I must bear, because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my case and does justice for me. He will bring me out into the light and I will see His righteousness. (Mic 7:7–9)

### *Finalization*

And finally we see that justice and righteousness characterize Messiah and his reign:

1. Isaiah 9:6—Both terms occur in a description of the characteristics of the eternal Messianic throne and kingdom.
2. 11:4–5—The Messiah “will judge the poor righteously and decide for the afflicted equitably.”
3. 16:5—“The throne [of the Messiah] will be established graciously. He will sit upon it in truth in the tent of David judging and inquiring of justice and zealous for righteousness.”
4. 32:1—“Indeed, A king shall reign righteously. And as for princes, they will govern justly.”
5. 42:1, 3, 4, 6—In this first of the Servant Songs, the Messiah is characterized with respect to justice and righteousness and the role truth plays: “justice [fronted, thus emphasized] to the nations He will bring forth,” “Through truth He will bring forth justice,” “...until He places on the earth justice,” and “I YHWH called you in justice.”
6. 53:8, 11—He had to be denied justice in order that we could be justified.
7. Jer 23:5—“Indeed, the days are coming—oracle of YHWH—that I will raise up for David a righteous branch. And a king will reign and He will be successful and He will perform justice and righteousness in the earth/land.”
8. 33:15–16—Verse 15 is very much like 23:5:

In those days and at that time I will cause to grow for David a righteous branch. And He shall do justice and righteousness in the earth/land.” But verse 16 adds: “In those days Judah shall be saved and Jerusalem shall tabernacle securely. And this is what it shall be named ‘YHWH is our righteousness.’”

## **Conclusion**

Certainly there are many more verses dealing with justice and righteousness. Suffice it to say that the evidence is overwhelming that YHWH expected justice and righteousness from his people because it originates in him and belongs to him and he wants his people to be like him. But this has a sobering side: this was not an option for Israel; it was a demand. Consequently, violations were not tolerated and retribution could be justly severe, even for his choicest human servants. Moses was denied entry into the promised land for failing to uphold the holiness of YHWH, and it did not matter that he was so provoked by the unbelief and grumbling of the people. David lost four sons and his reign went into a “tailspin” because of his egregious violation of this expectation. But what of us? Are we free to ignore an expectation flowing out of the very character of YHWH and that which will characterize the rule of the Messiah? Would we want to?