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The Song of the Vineyard

5: 1-7

The song of the vineyard DIG: If you were a gardener with an annual crop, how long would it take you to give up on that plot of land if it wasn't producing? What is the purpose of God's asking the people to judge for themselves what He should do to the vineyard? What are some of the ways the LORD Almighty had cultivated and cared for Judah, the garden of His delight? What is one chief quality ADONAI expects to see in His people (1:17)? How is the "fruit" that has grown different from what He expected?

REFLECT: How would you feel about singing a love song about the adultery of your spouse? In effect, this is what the LORD is doing here. If it were you, how would you react? Or if you have been a victim of adultery, how did you react? When have you been wronged and wanted justice? What is the difference between justice and vengeance? Is it wrong to want justice? As believers, who should deliver the justice and who should deliver the vengeance? If you were listening to Isaiah's song, what would you expect to be the next stanza after this verse? What are some of the "fruits" people use today to evaluate how "spiritual" a person is? How do these compare with what God looks for in spiritual growth (Matthew 21:33-44; John 15:1-3; Galatians 5:22-23)? How would you assess the "fruit" in your own life: (a) just budding? (b) still premature? (c) developing on schedule? (d) ripe for enjoyment? or (e) diseased?



Chapter 5 is the third major section of the book and brings the introductory oracles to a close. If **Chapter 1** introduces the book as a whole, and **Chapters 2** through **4** expose the enormous conflict between what **Judah** was called to be and what, in fact, she had become, then **Chapter 5** brings us back to the reality of what **her** condition was at the moment of **Isaiah's** prophecy. Whatever happened in the future, however redemption for the righteous of the **TaNaKh** might occur, the plain fact was that present sin must somehow be dealt with. Something had to give. **The rabbis teach that the parable of the vineyard, by means of its imagery, enables the prophet to subtly and effectively bring home to the people God's mercy and kindness towards them, which they repaid by ingratitude and disobedience. As a result, terrible consequences are threatened.** This parable of **the vineyard** sets the stage for the rest of the chapter.

These first two verses comprise the **song** of the **vineyard**. As previously stated, the **vineyard** motif was a familiar one to **Judah**. **Isaiah** declared: **I will sing for the One I love a song about His vineyard: My loved One had a vineyard on a fertile hillside (5:1).** The word **I** refers to **Isaiah himself**, the **One I love** refers to **God**, and **His vineyard** refers to **Isra'el**. **He** had this **vineyard** planted on a very **fertile hillside**, literally, *a horn the son of fatness*, which is an allusion to the fertility of the Land of **Isra'el**. The soil in which it was planted should have produced the choicest **vines** and **fruit**. All seemed well.

Isaiah is called the "Prince of Prophets" not merely because **he** saw **ADONAI high and lifted up (6:11)**, but also because **he** learned that **El Elyon, God most High (Genesis 14:18-22; Psalms 57:3 and 78:35; Dani'el 3:26, 4:2, 5:18 and 21; Luke 1:32)**, also lives **with the contrite and lowly in spirit (57:15)**. Such a **God** could be truly **loved**. In light of this, the fact that **Judah** could reject **the One** that **Isaiah loved** would only make **her** all the more guilty in **his** eyes **(2:9)**.

Nothing was left undone to guarantee a bountiful crop. **The LORD** had great expectations of **His vineyard**. **He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower**, not a temporary hut, **in it and cut out a wine vat as well**. Once the **vines** were planted, then there would be an interval of two years before the grapes would be produced. During that time of waiting and anticipation, the **wall** could be strengthened, the **watchtower** built, and the facilities for pressing and gathering the juice completed. These facilities usually consisted to two vats **cut out** of the **hillside**, one above the other and connected by a shallow trough. The upper one would be used for pressing the grapes and the lower one as a settling basin for the juice that had run down the trough from the **winepress**.

Isaiah emphasized the farmer's prior commitment. **He** had done all the backbreaking work in expectation of receiving a good crop. **Then He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit (5:2).** The **LORD** took special care of this **vineyard**. **He dug it up and cleared it of stones** (which in **Isra'el** is no small task). **He built a tower** to protect it from any thieves. **ADONAI** was sure it would produce **good grapes** that, in time, would produce **good** wine. But instead **of good grapes, He got only bad fruit**. The result was bitter, both in fact and in spirit, for the **grapes** were worthless. The word **bad** here really means *stinking*. **He got stinking fruit**. As a result, this **song** communicates no message of hope. In fact, divine grace had been exhausted.

Isaiah had a very intimate relationship with **God** and so he refers to **Him** in affectionate terms. **ADONAI** revealed certain things to **Isaiah** that **He** did not reveal to any other prophet. **Isaiah** alone received the concept of the Trinity. **The prophet** alone received the revelation of the virgin birth. Only **Isaiah** clearly received the revelation of **Messiah's** coming death. In other words, **he** saw things that no other prophet was able to see.

ADONAI said: **Judge between Me and My Vineyard (5:3-6)**. Because of **the bad fruit**, the **vineyard** was to be judged. **God** called **Judah** to act as a **judge between Himself and His vineyard** (the people of **Judah** do not know that they are the **vineyard** yet; **the LORD** will tell them in 5:7), and then **He** makes **His** case. **Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard (5:3)**. As **Jesus** will also describe **His** parable of the **vineyard** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click ly - By What Authority Are You Doing These Things?**), by making **His** hearers both **judge** and jury, **He** begins to maneuver them toward self-incrimination: **What more could have been done for My vineyard than what I have done for it (5:4)?** This sobering question is evidently one that no one can answer. If divine power, wisdom and responsibility have exhausted themselves - what hope can remain? **The owner of the vineyard cannot ignore the disappointing results, and He will abandon it to ruin.**

Whatever might have been **his** hearers' responses, **Isaiah** leaves little doubt as to what **the Owner** will do: **Now I will tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard, the use of the Hebrew present implies an irrevocable decision and prompt action.** **God** will not only abandon **His** worthless **vineyard**, **He** will also oversee its destruction. This is **His** decision: **I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed. A valued vineyard is protected against trespass by both a thorn-hedged fence and a more substantially constructed fence. The prophet hints at a pending invasion. He** will leave **the vines** unprotected, saying: **I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled by wild animals (5:5).**

If the fertile field can only produce wild **grapes**, then there would be no cultivation. It would become **a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns** would **grow there**. And to make sure that it remains **a wasteland, He will command the clouds not to rain on it (5:6)**.

The vineyard of ADONAI-Tzva'ot is seen next. Here **the vineyard** song comes to a climax. By this time **Isaiah's** illustration in **5:1-2**, had undoubtedly captured the attention of **his hearers**. The occasion may have been at the end of the grape season, but we don't really know. But whenever it was, **everyone** who heard **him** could identify with the farmer's hard work and anxious expectation. All would have felt stunned and disgusted over **the bad**, literally, *stinking fruit (5:2)*. But then the tables were suddenly turned. Just as King David was stunned when the prophet Nathan said: **You are the man (2 Samuel 11:1 to 12:7a)**, **Isaiah's hearers** must have been shocked to learn that **they**, in fact, were *the stinking fruit!*

Isaiah prophesied: **The vineyard of the LORD of heaven's armies is the house of Isra'el, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight**. The application comes here. In other words, **Isra'el** ends up condemning **herself** because **God** says, what I did for **the vineyard** I really did for you. **And He looked for justice, but saw only oppression; for righteousness, but only cries of distress were heard (5:7)**. The good **grapes** that **God** looked for were the **grapes** of justice and righteousness, but instead **He** found only **oppression and cries of distress**.

As mentioned earlier, **Isaiah** was a master of the Hebrew language and sometimes he changes one vowel pattern, or one letter of a similar sounding word, to get a completely different meaning. Here **ADONAI** uses **Hebrew poetry to emphasize different contrasts: instead of justice (mishpat), He only saw bloodshed (mishpach); instead of righteousness (zed-daqa), He only heard cries of distress (zed-aka)**. **He** plays with words like this throughout the book. But aside from the word plays, the somewhat subtle point **Isaiah** made was that because of the lack of **fruit**, judgment had to come.

An expert storyteller doesn't have to explain the punch line, and **Isaiah** didn't explicitly mention the destruction of **Judah**. It didn't need to be, for once the connection between **Judah and the vineyard** had been made, the coming Babylonian invasion was inevitable.

There is none like you, O LORD, among the gods. There is nothing higher or greater than You in all the earth. May we confess with our mouths, and acknowledge before all people, that You alone are God.