

Isaiah 5

This chapter expands what Isaiah states in 3:14-15 concerning God's vineyard, the vineyard being the descendants of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, the Hebrew people—those we today call the Jews.

Is. 5:1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

Isaiah sings a *song for* (or “to,” as some versions render it) his *well-beloved* (Jehovah), the *song* consisting of verses 1 and 2. This *song* relates to God's *vineyard* (the Hebrew people). Read the following note.

Note: The *vineyard* happens to be the Hebrew people, made reference to as *the Jews* for the first time in the Scriptures in 2Kings 25:25—after Babylon had overthrown Jerusalem in 586 BC.

They were called *the Judeans* as early as 2Kings 16:6. As we continue through Isaiah, in fact, anytime we are reading the Scriptures, it is important to know the context of the words “Israel” and “Judah.” Why? During the time of the united kingdom (during the reigns of the Saul, David, and Solomon), the Hebrew people were made reference to as *Israel* (read 1Kings 11:42 for an example). After King Solomon's death, however, the united kingdom of *Israel* was divided into *Israel* to the north and *Judah* to the south, *Israel's* capital later becoming *Samaria* (1Kings 16:29), *Judah's* capital being *Jerusalem* (you can read about this division in 1Kings 12). There are even instances where the word “*Israel*” makes reference to both the northern kingdom of *Israel* as well as the southern kingdom of *Judah* (Isaiah 8:14). Therefore, we should view the word “*Israel*” in its proper context as we travel through the book of Isaiah—or any other section of Scripture as far as that goes. If not, it can become more than confusing.

Isaiah was a prophet who had a special relationship with God. It is for this reason that he makes reference to God as “*my well-beloved*” (v.1). God allowed Isaiah to see and hear things that no other prophet saw or heard. For starters, he not only was given the revelation of the *virgin* birth (Isaiah 7), but received more truth relating to the Trinity than any other Old Testament prophet (Isaiah 6:8; 48:16). He also spoke of the suffering Savior (Isaiah 52:13-53:12), a subject that no other writing prophet addressed.

We will find in Isaiah 5:7 that this *vineyard* is the Hebrew people, both Israel as well as Judah. Therefore, God planted the Hebrew people, His *vineyard, on a fertile hill* (v.1)—meaning that she was given every opportunity to become a *vineyard* blessed of God. After all, at Mount Sinai she received God's Law, saw God's glory, and even heard God's voice (no other nation had such a privilege).

Is. 5:2 And He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, And hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.

This verse continues to describe what God did on His part to cause the Hebrew people (the vineyard) *to produce good grapes*. God *dug...all around* His *vineyard* (gave the soil ample opportunity to breathe in what it needed to be fruitful), *removed its stones* (removed many hindrances), *planted it with the choicest vine* (used only the best of vines—also read Jeremiah 2:21), *built a tower in the middle of it* (to protect it from intruders), and even *hewed out a wine*

vat in it (to manufacture good wine once the grapes were produced). Due to sin, however, *it produced only worthless* (wild or stinking) *grapes*.

In Jeremiah 12:10, we find that the *shepherds* of the *vineyard* were responsible for ruining the *vineyard*. This fits well with what is taught in Isaiah 3:13-15.

Is. 5:3 ¶ *"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard.*

God calls the *inhabitants of Jerusalem* and the *men of Judah* to tell Him what type of judgment was due His *vineyard*. Note: It is not until verse 7 that God reveals to the inhabitants of *Jerusalem* and *Judah* that the *vineyard* is actually all the Hebrew people (Israel was well as Judah). Therefore, at this stage, the inhabitants of *Jerusalem* and *Judah* think that this parable in no way relates to them. It is interesting how much this section of Scripture resembles what *Nathan* spoke to *David* in 2 Samuel 12:1-12.

Is. 5:4 *"What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?"*

God asks his listeners if there was anything else He could have done for His *vineyard*. Isaiah records no answer, so evidently no answer was given.

Is. 5:5 *"So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.*

Because there was no response from the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah, God will bring judgment on the *vineyard*. He will judge it by removing *its hedge*, meaning that He would allow that which is undesirable to invade it (such as *briars and thorns*—v.6). God will also *break down its wall* and allow it to *become trampled ground*.

Is. 5:6 *"And I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."*

The vineyard will become a *waste*,...neither *pruned* nor *hoed*, overtaken by *briars and thorns*. Neither will *rain* fall on it.

Is. 5:7 ¶ *For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.*

God now states to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as to the men of Judah (who gave no reply in verse 4), that the *vineyard* is all the Hebrew people—all the descendants of Jacob, Jacob being the grandson of Abraham. Can you imagine how shocked they were? Their hands were tied, however, for they had agreed earlier in verse 4 (by giving no response) that God had done all that was necessary for *the vineyard* to produce good grapes. Therefore, they had agreed with God, without even realizing it, that He had given them every opportunity to bear good fruit. Instead of *justice* they had produced *bloodshed*, and instead of *righteousness*,...*a cry of distress*. In other words, they produced grapes that stank (the notes associated with verse 2 tie in well here).

Before continuing we need to develop the concept of *the vineyard* in more depth. There is no doubt that, during the Millennial Kingdom, this *vineyard* will produce proper grapes and realize

its true purpose and potential (Isaiah 27:2-6). Before doing so, however, it will have gone through several stages. Follow as closely as possible as we proceed.

In Psalm 80:8-13 we discover that God took a *vine* out of *Egypt*, planted it in the land of Canaan, cared for it, it became great, but He removed His protection and it was invaded by predators. From what we have learned in Isaiah 5, it is obvious that God removed the vineyard's protection because it produced *worthless* (improper) grapes. Jeremiah states basically the same thing in Jeremiah 2:21. In Jeremiah 12:10 we find that the *shepherds* (leaders) in the land were responsible for this woeful condition of the *vineyard*. They had failed to teach the people the words of God. In Hosea 10:1-4 we once again see that God's *vineyard* produced bad *fruit* because of its involvement with idolatry. And finally, in Matthew 21:33-46, we observe that *the vineyard* was unproductive because of the ungodly Jewish leaders who stooped so low as to reject God's Son, the Messiah. The point is this. Ungodly leadership is why *the vineyard* has produced sour grapes. But there is good news. *The vineyard* will eventually seek Jesus Christ, the *son of man* who is at God's *right hand* (Psalm 80:14-19; Hosea 5:15; Isaiah 53:4-6). But, obviously, this repentance and pursuit of God does not occur until *the vineyard* has been chastened by God, the most severe chastening to occur during the Tribulation.

The remaining verses in this chapter relate to some of the stages *the vineyard* experiences before submitting to the Lord at the end of the Tribulation. Enjoy your study of these verses, considering everything in the context in which it is stated.

Is. 5:8 ¶ Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, Until there is no more room, So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land!

As a result of the disobedience of the Hebrew people, judgment must come. Isaiah now pronounces six woes, the first of which is against greedy landowners. This verse confirms that they hoarded *land* in violation of Leviticus 27:24, for *in the year of jubilee* all *land* was to return to its rightful owner.

Is. 5:9 In my ears the Lord of hosts has sworn, "Surely, many houses shall become desolate, Even great and fine ones, without occupants.

Notice that God speaks into Isaiah's *ears*, pointing to the special relationship Isaiah had with Jehovah. The *houses* will *become desolate*, void of *occupants*.

Is. 5:10 "For ten acres of vineyard will yield only one bath of wine, And a homer of seed will yield but an ephah of grain."

The crops will fail to produce according to their capabilities, and famine will result.

Is. 5:11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!

The second *woe* relates to drunkenness. Jesus drank fermented wine, and Paul even encouraged Timothy to drink *a little wine* for medicinal reasons (1 Timothy 5:23). But drunkenness is never condoned in Scripture (Proverbs 23:20-21 and 29-35). Had the nation loved the Lord, its people would have been rising *early* and staying *up late* to pursue the Lord rather than *strong drink*.

Is. 5:12 And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, Nor do they consider the work of His hands.

Music was used to stimulate drunkenness. We need to consider as well that music was used in idol worship to stimulate the worshipper (Amos 6:5-6). This prevented the Hebrew people from paying *attention to the deeds of the Lord and the work of His hands*; thus they were blind to the judgments that God was preparing to direct their way.

Invariably, when man pays too much attention to the work of his own hands he fails to *consider* the awesomeness of the works of God's *hands*.

Is. 5:13 ¶ Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; And their honorable men are famished, And their multitude is parched with thirst.

Approximately 100 years after this prophecy, the southern kingdom was exiled to Babylon due to *their lack of knowledge*. The prophets had given the people ample opportunity to possess *knowledge*, but they had rejected the prophets' words due to sin. As a result, the *honorable men*, along with the other inhabitants of the land, were reaping the consequences of their less than wise decisions. Hosea, a prophet to the northern kingdom (Israel) about this same time, made a similar statement concerning the northern kingdom—*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge* (Hosea 4:6). A deficiency of truth in the minds of the inhabitants of a land always results in destruction!

Is. 5:14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure; And Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry, and the jubilant within her, descend into it.

Sheol is the place of the dead—it is called *Hades* in the New Testament (Luke 16:23). *Sheol*, or *Hades*, contained two compartments before the cross of Jesus (Luke 16:19-31), one compartment was hell, the other *Abraham's bosom* or Paradise. After the cross, the inhabitants of *Abraham's bosom*, or Paradise, were taken to heaven. The inhabitants of hell remained to later face the *great white throne* judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 (which takes place after the one thousand year reign of Christ).

Many in *Jerusalem* would be killed (and enter into *Sheol*) when the Babylonians burn *Jerusalem* and King Solomon's temple (in 586 BC—2Kings 25:8-9). Thus *Jerusalem* would lose her *splendor, her multitude* (people), *her din of revelry, and the jubilant within her*.

Is. 5:15 So the common man will be humbled, and the man of importance abased, The eyes of the proud also will be abased.

The proud would *be humbled* within the nation.

Is. 5:16 But the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness.

God will *be exalted* through this *judgment* because it confirms that He is *holy in righteousness*. He, in other words, is always right when He judges sin, for the Jews knew to do better due to receiving His commands.

Is. 5:17 Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy.

After God sends the Babylonians to carry Judah into exile (beginning in 606 BC and continuing through 586 BC), approximately 100 years after these words of Isaiah, *lambs will graze* in the areas where crops had once grown. Due to the fact that the northern kingdom (*Israel*) suffered devastation first, falling to the Assyrians in 722 BC (2Kings 17:6), *strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy* in both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Is. 5:18 ¶ Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes;

The disobedience of the nation resulted in their dragging *iniquity*...And *sin* behind them (as though pulling a heavy load). Therefore, the sinful *deeds* of man *follow* after him (Revelation 14:13), being extremely hard to bear.

Is. 5:19 Who say, "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near And come to pass, that we may know it!"

The unwise within the nation even challenged God's ability to intervene in history in order to bring about His *purpose* (much like in Jeremiah 17:15 and 2Peter 3:3-4). They, in other words, challenged His sovereignty. What a scary place to live!

Is. 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

This judgment comes against the people because of their inability to discern between truth and error. They even *call evil good, and good evil, ... substitute darkness (lies) for light (truth), ... bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*. A consistent dose of truth would have remedied this problem (Hebrews 5:14; 2Timothy 3:15).

Is. 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight!

True *wisdom* is found through one avenue alone—the *fear of the Lord* (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10). Thus, no man is to consider himself *wise in his own eyes* (Proverbs 3:7).

Is. 5:22 Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine, And valiant men in mixing strong drink;

This *woe*, when tied in with verse 23, is directed toward intoxicated judges who make judicial (legal) decisions within the land.

Is. 5:23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

These drunken judges set *the wicked* free through bribery. They also ruled against those who were *in the right*. This resulted in an improper value system void of absolutes, meaning the nation could no longer discern between *right* and wrong.

Is. 5:24 ¶ Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble, And dry grass collapses into the flame, So their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

God brings destruction when a nation can no longer discern between good and evil, and in this case *fire* will be the vehicle through which God will display his displeasure. The reason the nation can no longer distinguish right from wrong is due to their rejection of *the law of the Lord* (given at Mount Sinai) and *the word of the Holy One of Israel* spoken through His prophets.

Note: The destruction mentioned in this verse was probably fulfilled when the Babylonians burned Jerusalem and King Solomon's temple in 586 BC—2Kings 25:8-9. However, the destruction of Jerusalem during the Tribulation, along with many of the Jewish people, could possibly be the fulfillment of these verses. Either way, the conditions laid out by Isaiah concerning the vineyard will be fulfilled, that being the main issue.

Is. 5:25 On this account the anger of the Lord has burned against His people, And He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down, And the mountains quaked; and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. For all this His anger is not spent, But His hand is still stretched out.

Isaiah states here that a military attack will wipe out the *people*, and even after the fighting seems to subside, God's *hand* will remain *stretched out* for the purpose of bringing further judgment. The fact that *His hand* will remain *stretched out* is confirmed by Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21, and 10:4.

Is. 5:26 ¶ He will also lift up a standard to the distant nation, And will whistle for it from the ends of the earth; And behold, it will come with speed swiftly.

Verses 26-30 seem to make reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (and the surrounding area) shortly before the Second Coming of Christ rather than the destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC. Why? The word “*nation*” can actually be translated “*nations*.” We know that the armies of the Antichrist (assembled at the end of the Tribulation) will be made up of many nations. These armies, led by the Antichrist, will overthrow *Jerusalem* (Zechariah 12:1-3; 14:1-2). Therefore, the “*nations*” linking up with the Antichrist seems a better fit.

Is. 5:27 No one in it is weary or stumbles, None slumbers or sleeps; Nor is the belt at its waist undone, Nor its sandal strap broken.

The army coming against the Jews (made up of different nations) will not be *weary* nor stumble but will be awake and fully equipped for battle.

Is. 5:28 Its arrows are sharp, and all its bows are bent; The hoofs of its horses seem like flint, and its chariot wheels like a whirlwind.

This verse continues to describe the readiness of the army attacking the Hebrews, God's vineyard.

Is. 5:29 Its roaring is like a lioness, and it roars like young lions; It growls as it seizes the prey, And carries it off with no one to deliver it.

Absolutely nothing (outside of the Second Coming of Christ, discussed in the next verse) will be capable of delivering the Jews from the attacking army described as a *lioness*—the lion being the most powerful animal of the jungle.

Is. 5:30 And it shall growl over it in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land, behold, there is darkness and distress; Even the light is darkened by its clouds.

In the day of devastation, *darkness and distress* will prevail—creating a wonderful setting for the Second Coming. The only Jews remaining alive will be the remnant which has accepted the Messiah as Savior. This remnant will be rescued as a result of Christ's return to *Bozrah* (Isaiah 34:1-7), the first casualty being the Antichrist (2Thessalonians 2:8) followed by a portion of his army. This battle will continue from Bozrah into *the valley of Jehoshaphat* (Joel 3:12-13) just outside Jerusalem, where Christ will destroy the troops of the Antichrist that remain.

As we continue our study, remember that Isaiah will expand the topics he has dealt with in the first five chapters of his book. In the upcoming chapter we will examine Isaiah's call to his prophetic office.