

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
God's Call to Live in Light of the Future
Isaiah 5:1-30

INTRODUCTION:

What we know so far... Isaiah is preaching to God's people during a time when they have recently experienced material prosperity but now they are engaged in war or potential war - northern tribes of Israel have allied themselves with Syria (Damascus) against Assyria (Syro-Ephraimite War, 734-32 B. C.). Assyria is going to destroy Israel (Samaria) and come against Jerusalem. It's not going to be pretty.

The *reason* why is because of sin. Jerusalem has revolted against her Father, against her husband. She is sinful, weighed down with iniquity, evildoers, and corrupt (1:4). Forgiveness will be possible; it will be made available (1:18) but Judah was to "consent and obey" (1:19).

Idol worship is their fundamental problem. They do not know God (1:3; that is, they do not have a relationship with Him) because they are worshiping under the terebinth (oaks) false gods (1:28-31).

The new, spiritual temple is going to be established in Jerusalem to which Gentiles will join and from which the law of God will be proclaimed (2:1-3).

In this new, spiritual temple peace will abound (2:4).

Israel needs to repent of pride, abusing the poor, and trusting in man, in his gods, his business, or his military.

Israel's leaders were not guiding men back to God. Subsequently, God would provide His own leader (4:2). To *Him*, the "survivors" would listen!

As we study this song, remember the immediate background is the promised blessings of a fruitful land when the "Branch" comes and brings with Him holiness (chapter 4).

THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD - 5:1-7:

Isaiah writes a song to portray the relationship between God and Israel. God is clearly the landowner, vineyard owner. In verse 7, Isaiah tells us that the vineyard itself is the house of Israel. This picture is frequently used in the OT: 27:2-6; Jer. 12:7-10; Psa. 80:8; Jer. 2:21 and is the background to Jesus' parables about vineyards, with Israel being that vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16; 21:33-44).

This song is about God's "well-beloved." Since this is a designation for Israel, we understand that when God speaks from heaven at the baptism of Jesus and calls Him His "beloved" Son, God is referring to Jesus as the ideal, perfect Israelite (Matt. 3:17). Of course, Christians are also called "beloved" by God because we are united with Christ (Col. 3:12).

In verse 1, the song says that the vineyard was planted on a "fertile field." We would immediately get the idea that the vineyard ought to be very fruitful and productive. This expression translates a Hebrew term that literally means "son of oil."

Verse 2 shows us the care and extent to which the owner went to nurture and care for the vineyard. He even used the best of the best of the plants, the "choicest vine." This was the top of the line brand of grapes. He had done everything possible and necessary and reasonably expected the vineyard to produce "good grapes." All of these specific actions do not have a counterpart in reality, in the application of the song. They are simply parts of the overall picture. Keep that in mind when you study the book of Revelation.

Instead, to his great disappointment, it produced “only worthless ones.” Sour, unripe berries.

In verse 3, Isaiah calls on Israel to “judge.” What more could the owner have done for them that he had not already done (vs 4)? In the words of Paul from Romans 9:4: to the Israelites “belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever.” Keep in mind, Romans 9-11 contain the densest concentration of quotations and allusions to the preaching of Isaiah.

What is God going to do to the vineyard, verse 5? Verse 5 is very emphatic in the Hebrew language. God says, “I am going to make you know what I am going to do.” Then, the verbal actions are also emphasized (infinitive absolutes). He is going to remove its hedge of defense and will allow it to be consumed. He will break down its wall of defense, allowing it to be tramped down. In the imagery of the song, God is allowing the vineyard to be open and defenseless against wild animals and humans, as well who will disregard the fact that this is a vineyard. In the application of the song, clearly we have prophesied here the invasion of Assyria and the desolation of the land.

That is the picture from verse 6. Except in verse 6, please observe that the verbs are active voice. In verse 5, they are passive. In verse 6, they are active and first person. God Himself is going to take an active part in laying waste Jerusalem and bringing famine on the land. In Jesus’ parable the owner of the vineyard takes an active role in coming and destroying the tenant farmers and giving the vineyard to another people.

In verse 7, of course, God makes clear that the vineyard is Israel, the house of Israel. God had looked for justice (*mispah*) - 26 times Isaiah uses the word “justice.” At one time, under King David, perhaps King Solomon, Jerusalem was full of justice - 1:21, but no more. Now, God sees only bloodshed (*mispah*; 4 times). That’s why God had commanded back in 1:17 that Israel should “seek justice.”

Also, God had looked for righteousness (*sedaqah*) - 68 times Isaiah uses the word “righteous.” Again, at one time, Jerusalem was full of righteousness - 1:21, but no more. Now, God sees only distress (*seaqah*). Israel needs to be made right before God. Sin is her problem.

When Jesus repeats the substance of this vineyard in His parable in Matthew 21, the Jews - with this particular parable also in their background - should have repented of their bloodshed and unrighteousness and accepted the Messiah who was standing in front of them. Despite the picture of destruction in this song, God gave Israel another chance even following the Babylonian exile - but Israel could not keep their eyes off of material possessions. They could not walk by faith.

In the rest of the chapter, God is going to elaborate on this “bloodshed” and “distress.” And, consistent with chapter 3, we will see that a great deal of the fault lies with the leadership in Israel.

ONE WOE (#1) AGAINST OPPRESSIVE LANDOWNERS - 5:8-10:

Note the word “woe” which begins each of these sections.

Young writes these are “a covetous people” (205).

First, we again have pictured, as in 3:14-15, the wealthy taking advantage of the poor, taking their land and their houses. Verse 9 is a clear statement of verbal inspiration on Isaiah’s part. God speaks to him at that point and says that God will make *their* houses desolate and bring an economic depression into the land.

Ten acres of vineyard will produce only one bath of wine, about 8-10 gallons. Not much produce for a lot of cultivation! In the same way, a homer of seed (about 6 bushels) will only produce an ephah of grain, about one bushel.

“Ambition is wrong when its aim is merely to further our own selfish interests” (Beyer, 55).

ONE WOE (#2) AGAINST PURSUERS OF DRUNKEN REVELRY - 5:11-17:

Young writes these are “a debauching people” (205).

The picture we have here are the drinkers and partiers, the socialites - the playboy lifestyle, Beverly Hills or New York glitterati. If the first woe pictured the Wall St. type, here we have the Madison Ave. type. Observe their error in verse 12: They do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, Nor do they consider the work of His hands.

Tied to that is yet another reference to their “lack of knowledge” (vs 13). It’s not that they didn’t *have* the word of God available; it’s that they didn’t take it seriously.

“Sheol” is the world of the dead, the grave, and it will open its mouth and receive those whom God is going to punish with death and destruction (vs 14). Jerusalem and all her splendor, her revelry, everything is going to go to Sheol, to the grave. Again, while it is easy to point the finger at modern American culture, the text is primarily to be applied to us as Christians. Are we living like Wall St. or Madison Ave. or are we pursuing the knowledge of the Lord and trying to fulfill His will in our lives?

Verses 15-16 are the heart of this section - God is going to humble both the common man and the man of importance. God, alone, needs to be exalted, honored, listened to and obeyed. “The Holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness.” If man will not willfully recognize the holiness of God, God will force him to recognize it. If in no other way, God’s holiness is seen in the punishment of sin.

Verse 17 pictures the desolation of the land - the coming punishment at the hands of the Assyrians and/or the exile in Babylon.

Do we preoccupy ourselves with things that have no lasting importance or value?

ONE WOE (#3) AGAINST GOD TESTERS - 5:18-19:

Young writes these are “an unbelieving people” (205).

The picture we have here is people who are so engulfed in sin that they are pulling a cart loaded down with “falsehood” (better translated “vanity”) and “sin!” And they do not believe God is going to do anything about it!

The prophet laments in 30:1: “Woe to the rebellious children,” declares the Lord, “Who execute a plan, but not Mine, And make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, In order to add sin to sin;”

They are *testing* God, His patience, His limits, His *holiness*. These people believe that they have a better knowledge of what is right and wrong than God does. “They looked for him to fit into their conception of how he would act in a given situation” (Beyer, 56). Like the atheist whom I told you about in New Mexico who challenged God to strike him dead at that very moment. If God does not fit into my perspective, I’ll not accept him. Paul warns the Christians in Corinth about creating a Jesus after their own image (2 Cor. 11:4).

ONE WOE (#4) AGAINST THE MORALLY TWISTED - 5:20:

Young writes these are “a truth-perverting people” (205).

Politicians today don’t lie. They just “misspoke.” It is so very aggravating. People have “affairs” today instead of engaging in adultery or fornication. An “alternative lifestyle” instead of homosexuality. Pro-choice instead of murdering babies. Adult entertainment instead of pornography. New Age philosophy instead of old paganism. Young writes: “Perversion is of the very essence of sin; for sin is the transgression of the law. He who transgresses the law thereby tacitly proclaims that the law is wrong and that the opposite of the law is right” (220).

Man also wants to make his own rules and his own definitions. “...personal taste now rules supreme” (Motyer, 74).

ONE WOE (#5) AGAINST THE SELF-EXALTED - 5:21:

Young writes these are “a people wise in its own eyes” (206).

These people think a lot of their shrewdness. “They may have thought themselves wise, but in God’s sight, they were fools” (Beyer, 56). “They make up their own moral standards, instead of allowing God or his divine law to guide them” (Smith, 178).

ONE WOE (#6) AGAINST THE IMMORAL OPPORTUNISTS - 5:22-23:

Young writes these are “justice-perverting people” (206).

These folks look for opportunities to better themselves, to improve themselves without any concern for God or for others. The people pictured are military heroes but the only thing they do well is serve themselves alcohol. “[Moral] courage, honor, and bravery mean nothing” (Oswalt, 165).

In the meantime, these people pervert justice as it relates to the poor / righteous. “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 17:15).

THE CONCLUSION - 5:24-30:

In this concluding section, we return once again to pictures of God taking vengeance on His people. God will consume them as fire consumes stubble. Why? Because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts. 2:3 was the first time the word “law” was used by Isaiah - people will stream to Jerusalem to learn the law of the Lord so they can walk in His ways. *Israel does not know the law!* And because of that, they “despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

So, verse 25 pictures the anger of the Lord burning against His people. This verse also gives us apocalyptic imagery again. This is the first prediction of the coming of a nation to punish Judah. Compare with 9:12, 17, 21 and 10:4.

Verse 26 shows God is going to call a nation to come against His people - the nation of Assyria. In verse 27, we see that the Assyrians are dressed and prepared for battle, well rested and refreshed. Verse 28 - Assyria’s army is well armed for battle. Assyria’s destruction of Israel (vs 29) is pictured as a lion consuming its prey and feeding its cubs. What is seen in Israel? In the land of Jerusalem and Judah? Darkness. Distress. Because. of. sin.

KEY POINTS:

Israel’s problem is that they do not accept and follow the law of the Lord. They despise the word of the Holy One (5:24). That is why they are experiencing a lack of knowledge (5:13). They need a Teacher who will teach them but also give them the right *motivation* to learn and follow the Law of the Lord.