Commentary and Questions by Clyde M. Miller

The Fate of Judah and Jerusalem

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Text:

Isaiah 5:1-30,

1. I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.
2. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.
3. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.
4. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?
5. Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.
6. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."
7. The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.
8. Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.
9. The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants.
10. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain."
11. Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine.
12. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands.
13. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst.
14. Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.
15. So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled.
16. But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.
17. Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.
18. Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes,
19. to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it."
20. Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
21. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.
22. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks,
23. who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.
24. Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.
25. Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.
26. He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily!
27. Not one of them grows tired or stumbles, not one slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal thong is broken.
28. Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are strung; their horses' hoofs seem like flint, their chariot wheels like a whirlwind.
29. Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue.
30. In that day they will roar over it like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds. NIV

Commentary:

Isaiah 5:1-7, I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge be-
tween me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. NIV

The Parable of the Vineyard (5:1-7)

Isaiah sings his song about God’s vineyard in the third personal singular pronouns in verses 1-3, then, he speaks for God in the first person singular pronouns in verses 4-6, and finally returns to the use of the third person singular pronouns as he speaks about the vineyard in verse 7.

Although this passage has been variously interpreted by scholars, it is best to take it as a parable. Vivid metaphors are employed to describe God’s preparation of His vineyard. Isaiah declares his love for God in a veiled fashion as “the one I love” and “my beloved one” (5:1a,b).

As a husbandman, God has done everything possible to make His vineyard productive (5:1-2d). He chose a fertile ground, the Fertile Crescent of Palestine, in which to plant the vineyard, properly prepared the soil by allowing Israel to defeat the pagan people living there, and planted it with the choicest vines, His own covenant people Israel. He built a watchtower in the vineyard in the form of protection against enemy nations, to be effective as long as they were faithful to their covenant obligations. He anticipated the reaping of a bountiful harvest by cutting out a winepress for trampling out the grapes in order to harvest the wine.
Isaiah 5:8-23, Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain." Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst. Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers. So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled. But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich. Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it." Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. NIV

When all the above preparations had been made, God looked for a crop of good grapes, that is, faithful obedience on the part of His people, but the vineyard yielded only bad fruit (5:1e,f). The “bad fruit”, or
“wild grapes”, RSV, are defined in the six woe oracles that follow in verses 8-23.

The covenant lawsuit literary device comes into play in verses 3-6. God is the plaintiff (vv. 3-4), and the judge and executioner (vv. 5-6). God challenges Israel to name His failings with His people, knowing that they can find none (v. 4a,b).

The fault is with the apostate nation. In His effort to bring Israel, that is, Judah, to repentance, God declares His judgment against His faithless people (vv. 5-6). He will take away its protective hedge and wall and allow pagan nations to war against them. The people, therefore, will no longer be able to care for the vineyard by pruning or cultivating it (v. 6a-c). God will add his direct judgment against them by withholding the rain so necessary for the grapes to produce a good harvest (v. 6d). This doubtless refers to God’s allowing foreign armies to decimate the nation so that it is left destitute.

The climax to the parable is verse 7. The vineyard is defined as the Lord’s (v. 7a), and specifically it refers to Israel/Judah (v. 7b,c). “Israel” and “Judah” indicate the entire twelve-tribe people. Vivid word play is involved in v. 7e-h, in which homonyms (words with similar sounds but opposite meanings) are employed.

He looked for justice (mishpaf, but saw bloodshed (micpach), for righteousness (tsedhaqah) but heard cries of distress (ts'Uaqah).

The word “bloodshed” refers to any kind of oppression. The “cries of distress” come from the defenseless and helpless that cannot get justice.

Isaiah 5:8-30, Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. he LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. A
ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain." Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst. Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers. So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled. But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich. Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it." Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily! Not one of them grows tired or
stumbles, not one slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal thong is broken. Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are strung; their horses' hoofs seem like flint, their chariot wheels like a whirlwind. Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue. In that day they will roar over it like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds. NIV

_Six Woe Oracles and a Threat (5:8-30)_

Isaiah 5:8-10, Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain." NIV

Deuteronomy 28:16-19, You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. NIV

First verses 8-10 pronounce a woe against those who trust in riches. The word "woe" indicates that severe judgment is coming. The first woe is against the greedy rich landowners who by selfish ambition acquire the property of the less fortunate who thus become poverty stricken. God will make them desolate and will make empty their mansions. Their vineyards and fields will yield only about one-tenth their usual harvest (v. 10). This general judgment was according the threat of Deut. 28:16-19.
Isaiah 5:11-17, Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst. Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers. So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled. But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.  NIV

Isaiah 2:9, 11, So man will be brought low and mankind humbled—do not forgive them. The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.  NIV

Second, verses 11-17 pronounce a woe against heavy drinkers and drunkards. Their days are filled with debauchery (v. 11). They are utterly consumed with banqueting, but have no regard for godliness (v. 12). God threatens to send warfare upon them that will result in exile, hunger and thirst (v. 13). Their nobles and masses, their brawlers and revelers will die an immature death (v. 14). The humbling of man and the exaltation of God must occur in order to right the wrongs (vv. 15-16; cf. 2:9-11). The land of these thoughtless revelers will become pastures for sheep and lambs (v. 17).

Isaiah 5:18, 19, Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it ap-
proach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it." NIV

Third, verses 18-19 pronounce a woe against deceptive practices. These men are so laden with sin that they pull them along with a cord, or with cart ropes. They make a mockery of God’s judgments as if these threats will never be executed.

Isaiah 5:20, Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. NIV

Fourth, verse 20 pronounces a woe on those who confuse good and evil because they do not know how to make moral distinctions. Moral perversity accompanies such confusion.

Isaiah 5:21, Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. NIV

Fifth, verse 21 pronounces a woe on those who trust their own wisdom and reject divine truth.

Isaiah 5:22, 23, Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. NIV

Sixth, verses 22-23 pronounce a woe on those who practice injustice. They are “heroes” and “champions” at mixing their wine and drinks, and they twist judgments, acquitting the guilty and denying justice to the innocent.

Isaiah 5:24, Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the
LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. NIV

The word “therefore” in verse 24 introduces the consequences of the above sins. They will be consumed like a grass fire because they have rejected God’s will. “Law” (24c) and “word” (24f) are synonymous, as are “the Lord Almighty” and “the Holy One of Israel”. This last expression is used twenty-six times in Isaiah to emphasize the majesty and integrity of God.

Isaiah 5:25, Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. NIV

Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21, Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west have devoured Israel with open mouth. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. NIV

Isaiah 10:4, Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. NIV

The repetition of the word “therefore” in verse 25 emphasizes the judgment of the Lord. His anger burns like a fire and he shakes the mountains like an earthquake. These two similes are often used in the prophets to describe the terror of God’s judgments. The expression, “his hand is raised” pictures the command of the leader indicating that
the army go forward in battle. The expression, “Yet for all this, his
anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised” informs the people
that further judgment is to come (cf. 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4).

Isaiah 5:26-30, He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he
whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly
and speedily! Not one of them grows tired or stumbles, not one
slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal
thong is broken. Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are
strung; their horses' hoofs seem like flint, their chariot wheels like
a whirlwind. Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like
young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off
with no one to rescue. In that day they will roar over it like the
roaring of the sea. And if one looks at the land, he will see dark-
ness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds.
NIV

Verses 26-30 describe the terrible result of invading armies. The “up-
lifted banner for the distant nations” (v. 26) may reference the Assyr-
ian (701 B.C.) or Babylonian (587 B.C.) captivity of Judah. These ar-
mies are untiring (v. 27) and their implements of warfare are keen and
effective (v. 28). Like fierce animals devouring their prey, so the pa-
gan armies carry off exiles “with no one to rescue” (v. 29). “ Darkness
and distress” will characterize that day of judgment (v. 30).
Questions

Isaiah 5:1-30

Questions

by

Clyde M. Miller

1. What is the “fertile hillside” in the vineyard song? ________
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2. What are “the choicest vines” in the vineyard song? ________
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3. What was the purpose of the “watchtower” in the vineyard song? __
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4. What was the purpose of the “winepress” in the vineyard song? __
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5. What were the “good grapes” God expected in the vineyard song?

6. What were the bad grapes that God found in the vineyard song?

7. What does the metaphor of no rain on the vineyard mean?

8. What was the sin described in the first woe?

9. What was the sin described in the second woe?
10. What was the sin described in the third woe? ____________________
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   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

11. What was the sin described in the fourth woe? ____________________
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    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________

12. What was the sin described in the fifth woe? ____________________
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13. What was the sin described in the sixth woe? ____________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________

14. What had these wicked people done with the law and word of God? ____________________
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    ____________________________________________________________
15. What is the meaning of the expression, “His [God’s] hand is raised”? _________________________________________________
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16. What is the meaning of the expression, “His [God’s] hand is still upraised”? _______________________________________________
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17. Who may have been the nations defined as “the distant nations”?________________________________________________________
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18. What was the condition of the war implements of these nations?________________________________________________________
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19. How successful would these nations be against Judah? __________
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20. What would be the emotional reaction of Judah when she was defeated?
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