

## ***Isaiah Part 3: The Lord's Vineyard...***

### **Isaiah 5**

#### ***The Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5 verses 1 to 7)***

Geoffrey Grogan (a modern theologian) wrote this about the 'Song (or parable) of the Vineyard': "For exquisite beauty of language and consummate skill in effective communication, this parable is virtually peerless. One difficulty of a literary masterpiece is that a would-be translator who is not the literary equal of the author faces an impossible task ... It is in fact an outstanding example of the way the inspiring Spirit employed human language to convey the divine message..."

- How would you describe the owner of the vineyard, and his care for it (v 1, 2)? How did he feel when he inspected the harvest?
- The phrase "I will" is used six times in verses 5 and 6 (perhaps foreshadowing the six 'woes' that follow) – what will the owner of the vineyard do, and why?
- Compare Isaiah's 'song of the vineyard' with Jesus' parables in Mark 12 v 1 to 9 and Luke 13 v 6 to 9. What are the differences, and what is the one great lesson taught in all three passages? How can this be applied to us today? See John 15 v 8.

'Wild grapes' have been described as 'poisonous berries – not merely useless and unprofitable grapes, but grapes offensive to the smell, and noxious'. 'Wild grapes' means that the vineyard produced just what you would expect it to produce if nothing had been done to it. All the love, care, time, work, and investment resulted in 'failure'.

"He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!" (v 7) – Isaiah plays on words: in Hebrew, he wrote "He looked for מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat*, 'justice'), but behold מִשְׁפַּח (*mispach*, 'bloodshed'; for תְּשׁוּבָה (*tse'daqa*, 'righteousness'), but behold תְּשׁוּבָה (*tse'ava*, 'outcry')."

#### ***The first woe (Isaiah 5 verses 8 to 10)***

- "Woe to those who join house to house..." (v 8) – the picture is of greedy real estate buying and development. How does God judge these 'land barons' (v 9, 10)?

#### ***The second woe (Isaiah 5 verses 11 to 17)***

"Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink..." (v 11) – the picture is of those who party endlessly, and celebrate everything but God. Their lives are filled with substance abuse and music, "but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands" (v 12).

- How does God judge these 'pleasure seekers' (v 13 to 17)?
- Consider especially what happens to "honoured men" (v 13), the "nobility of Jerusalem" (v 14) and "the haughty" (v 15). Notice also how God's justice and righteousness are vindicated (v 16).

Anyone who really does regard the deeds of the LORD, and sees the work of his hands, will live in the knowledge that God is real, and knowing there is much more to life than partying and entertainment.

***[MORE OVER...]***

### ***The third, fourth, fifth and sixth woes (Isaiah 5 verses 18 to 23)***

The last four woes are grouped together, and God's judgment on the whole group starts from verse 24...

- “Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes” (v 18) – can you see here a picture of our entertainment industry, complete with carnivals and pageants? Notice the blatant flaunting of low moral standards, with presumptuous contempt for God's judgment: “let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near” (v 19).
- “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!” (v 20) – using clever and deceptive words, they blur moral issues and excuse their sin. They look at their own evil and call it ‘good’, and these people look at the good of others and call it ‘evil’. Isaiah here is describing a deep state of moral confusion.
- “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” (v 21) – these people are full of arrogance, rejecting the wisdom and standards of God.
- “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!” (v 22) – these people place greater value on drinking than on fairness, integrity and justice...

### ***God's 'promise' of sure and complete judgment (Isaiah 5 verses 24 to 30)***

“As the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame...” (v 24) – stubble and dry grass are both highly flammable: God is warning of sudden, complete, and severe judgment.

- What was the root cause of God's anger (v 24)? How can we, on a personal level, guard against such sins? See Psalm 1 v 1 to 3, and Psalm 119, especially verse 11.

“He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth...” (v 26) – God will call foreign nations to come and invade Judah, making them instruments of his judgment upon them.

“Behold, quickly, speedily they come! None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps; not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken; their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent” (v 27, 28) – the armies God will call against Judah mean business. They are totally focused, prepared, dedicated and ready – and can easily overcome the men of Judah who use their strength for drinking contests...

In historical terms, the enemies that God summoned included the Assyrians in Isaiah's time around 700 BC; the Babylonians some 100 years later, who ransacked Jerusalem and took the Israelites into captivity for 70 years; and then the Romans, who took away Israel's independence, and finally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD.

*Prayer – Lord, help us once again to heed the warnings of judgment in this chapter. We pray that it may never be said of us that we 'have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel'. We pray that our delight may be in the law of the LORD, and that on your law we would meditate day and night.*

*We pray, Lord, that we may not be 'wild grapes'. Thank you, Jesus, that you are the vine and we are the branches. Help us always to abide in you, that we may bear much fruit, and so prove to be your true disciples. Amen.*