

Isaiah – Chapter 5

Isaiah 5:1-2 – 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. He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.

REVIEW

Last week, we finished our walk-through chapters 3 and 4. We saw God strip away every support from Jerusalem and Judah, leaders and proud women alike, until the city sat desolate on the ground. Then, right in the middle of that darkness, the bright tile appeared: the Branch of the Lord, beautiful and glorious, the remnant made holy, and Mount Zion covered with the cloud and fire of God’s own presence. The “in that day” refrains tied the two chapters together as one movement in the lawsuit. The proud were humbled, but the faithful remnant was promised cleansing and glory.

All of that keeps the covenant lawsuit rolling forward from chapter 1. The big threads we are tracing stay clear:

- The Messianic Hope breaking in with the Branch
- The Motif of the City, showing Zion’s shame turning to future glory
- The Holy One of Israel judging sin while still keeping His promise.

Isaiah’s mosaic pattern is on full display again. Dark judgment sits right beside the light of restoration. We see the whole picture only when we evaluate the whole.

Chapter 5 now gives the heart of the indictment. God Himself sings a love song that turns into a parable. The nation He planted and cared for produced nothing but wild grapes. This chapter explains why the purge in chapters 3 and 4 had to come.

Isaiah 5:26-30 is typically understood as Assyria ready to take the Northern Kingdom into captivity.

Historical Context

We remain in the same window as chapters 1 through 4, roughly 740 to 730 BC. Judah still looks strong under Uzziah and Jotham. Borders are wide, trade brings wealth, the temple stands. But inside, the rot is worse than ever. Idolatry, greed, and injustice have turned the people’s hearts away from the Lord. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is already sliding toward its fall to Assyria. Isaiah stands in the royal court and in the streets, singing this parable so that all listeners will evaluate themselves before God brings the verdict.

Exposition Section 1:

The Parable of the Vineyard (verses 1-7) – The chapter opens with a sad love song, the kind a bridegroom might sing about his adulterous bride. Isaiah steps forward as the friend of the

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bridegroom and sings for his “well-beloved.” The Hebrew word for *well-beloved* is יָדִיד (yedid). It carries the warmth of intimate friendship and covenant love.

Point of the Song – Because of Israel's rebellion against God, God permits His nation to be trampled and destroyed. She did not become what was originally intended; this song was a plea from the husband to Israel to bring her back.

Isaiah 5:1-4 – Every detail shows tender care. The “fertile hill” is literally “a horn, the son of fatness,” the richest soil possible. The owner cleared stones, planted the best vines, built a watchtower, and cut a winepress out of solid rock. He did everything right. He had every reason to expect good grapes. Verse 1 provides, in a metaphor, the fact that Israel had every advantage (spiritual Romans 9:1-5; fatness of the land – animals and vegetation).

God set up the vineyard, planted it, protected it, and prepared it for proper harvesting.

Then comes the heartbreak. The Hebrew for *worthless ones* is בְּאִשִּׁים (be'ushim). It means stinking, rotten, wild grapes that are good for nothing. God had set Israel up as a nation and provided everything that was needed for success.

The owner turns to the men of Jerusalem and Judah and asks them to be the jury.

God asks logical and rhetorical questions; those who read this have only one answer: the vineyard failed.

Then the owner drops the verdict.

Isaiah 5:5-7 – Here is what God will do:

- Removal of His hedge
- Breakdown the wall
- The vineyard will be trampled down
- It will be laid waste
- Weeds will take over
- God stops rain - No blessing

Here is the wordplay that every Hebrew ear would catch. The Lord looked for *justice* (מִשְׁפָּט mishpat) but found *bloodshed* (מִשְׁפָּח mispach). He looked for *righteousness* (תְּשׁוּבָה tse'daqah) but heard only a cry of *distress* (תְּשׁוּבָה tse'aqah). One letter change turns the expected fruit into horror. The vineyard is not some distant nation; it is “the house of Israel” and “the men of Judah His delightful plant.” This is the same covenant people God chose, redeemed from Egypt, and planted in the land. The failure is personal.

This parable is the heart of the lawsuit. God is not a harsh landlord. He is a husband who did everything for His bride. The hedge and wall He removes are the protections He once

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gave. The coming trampling is exactly what we saw in chapters 3 and 4: invasion, chaos, and desolation.

Deuteronomy 28:15-20 lists these very curses for covenant disobedience.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 already promises that, after discipline, a remnant will return.

The vineyard will be judged, but the holy seed in the stump (Isaiah 6:13) will one day produce true fruit under the Branch we met in chapter 4.

Section 2: The Six Woes – The Rotten Grapes Named (verses 8-23) – The parable now becomes six sharp “woes,” each one naming a specific wild grape that poisoned the nation. These are not random sins; they are the exact opposite of the justice and righteousness God planted for.

Woe 1 (verses 8-10) – Greed that swallows the poor – “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!” The rich are buying up everything so small farmers become tenants or wanderers. The Hebrew root for *add* (סָפַח saphah) pictures piling one house on another until the land groans. Result: ten acres of vineyard yield only one bath of wine (10 gallons), a seed’s yield is one ephah (1 bushel). The typical yield is 1,200 gallons and 120 bushels.

Woe 2 (verses 11-17) – Drunkenness and ignoring God’s work – “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!”

They feast while the Lord’s deeds go unnoticed. Their parties drown out any thought of God, and the work of their hands suffers as well.

Result: the common man is humbled, the proud abased, and the Lord alone exalted, exactly as we saw in chapter 2.

Why is the lack of knowledge a problem? Knowledge in the Hebrew Text does not imply the lack of information but a person who does not know God.

Sheol has enlarged. This is a reference to the grave, not to Hell.

The city motif continues. Jerusalem was filled with splendor, but in its end, she will die and go into the grave.

Woe 3 (verse 18-19) – Mocking God’s timing – “Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes; 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 that we may know it!’”

They treat God’s word like a joke, daring Him to act. The “Holy One of Israel” title we have been tracing appears here in sarcasm. They will see His work soon enough, but it will not be what they expect.

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Woe 4 (verse 20) – Calling evil good and good evil – “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 inverts the very order of creation. Moral confusion is a wild grape that destroys society. Moral values - good & evil - man's standards; spiritual values - darkness & light; personal values - bitter & sweet.

All this points to a loss of reverence for God and His word.

Your moral compass is broken.

Woe 5 (verse 21) – Wise in their own eyes – “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight!”

They reject God’s wisdom for human cleverness. Proverbs 3:5-7 stands in direct contrast: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.”

This returns to the problem as identified in Judges, “They did what was right in their own eyes.” Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 17:6, 21:25; Proverbs 12:15, 21:2.

The lesson that should have been learned from almost 1,000 years earlier still plagues them.

Woe 6 (verses 22-23) – Corrupt justice – “Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!”

Drunken judges sell justice. The orphan and widow, already mentioned in chapter 1, are crushed again.

Section 3: The Coming Fire and the Roaring Nations (verses 24-30) – The verdict is executed.

Isaiah 5:24-25 – The Hebrew for *stretched out* is נָטוּי (natuy). It is the same phrase repeated in chapters 9 and 10, showing that judgment keeps coming until the lesson is learned.

Verses 26-30 – A nation swift and strong, roaring like the sea, darkness and distress over the land. This is the Assyrian army on the horizon, but it also points forward to every empire God will use until the final day.

Isaiah has just finished the six woes that name the wild grapes (greed, drunkenness, mocking God, calling evil good, self-wisdom, and corrupt justice). Then he turns to the execution of the sentence.

In verse 26, God “whistles” for a distant nation (the Hebrew verb is שָׁרַק sharaq – the same sound a shepherd uses to call his sheep, only here the Lord is calling an army.) The nation comes “swiftly and speedily.” Verse 27 then zooms in on the terrifying discipline of that army:

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- None of them weary or stumbling – The Hebrew says לֹא יָעִיפוּ וְלֹא יִכְשָׁלוּ (lo ya'ef welo yikkashel). These soldiers do not tire; they do not trip.
- None slumbers or sleeps – They never rest. No night watches are missed.
- Nor is the belt at their waist undone – Their equipment stays perfectly in place (the belt held the sword and quiver).
- Nor the sandal strap broken – Not one soldier loses a sandal on the march.

This is military perfection. The army moves like a single, unstoppable machine. No stragglers, no fatigue, no broken gear. The picture is meant to terrify. When the Holy One of Israel decides the time has come, the instrument He chooses is terrifyingly efficient.

In Isaiah's day, this pointed first to Assyria. The Assyrian war machine was legendary for exactly this kind of disciplined, rapid advance (2 Kings 18–19 and the annals of Sennacherib). They came “swiftly and speedily,” and Judah felt the weight of it. But the language is bigger than one empire. The same description will reappear from later prophets when God summons other nations (Babylon, and ultimately the armies of the last day).

Conclusion

Remember the whole chapter is one long sad love song that turns into a courtroom verdict. God planted, tended, protected, and expected good grapes. Instead, He got wild grapes (verse 2) and the six woes. Verse 27 is the natural result of verse 7:

“He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.”

When justice and righteousness disappear from the vineyard, the hedge and wall are removed (verses 5-6), and the wild animals (the nations) are allowed to trample it. The perfectly disciplined army in verse 27 is the direct answer to the perfectly undisciplined society in verses 8-23.

This fits the three big threads we follow through Isaiah:

1. The Motif of the City – Zion, once the “delightful plant,” is about to be trampled because she refused to produce the fruit God planted her for.
2. The Holy One of Israel – He is the One who whistles for the army. His holiness will not tolerate the wild grapes forever.
3. The Messianic Hope – Even in this dark tale we already know from chapter 4 that a remnant will survive, and the Branch will one day restore the vineyard. Judgment is real, but it is never the final word.

The Parable of the Ruined Vineyard: A Study of Isaiah 5

Isaiah 5 presents a love song turned courtroom parable. God provides every advantage to His vineyard (Israel), yet it produces only 'wild grapes' (sin), leading to a verdict of total desolation.

Perfect Divine Provision

God planted His vineyard on a fertile hill with the choicest vines and protective walls.



The Great Wordplay

Divine Expectation	The Reality Found	Result
Justice (Mishpat)	Bloodshed (Mispach)	Protection Removed
Righteousness (Tsedaqah)	Cry of Distress (Tse'aaqah)	Land Laid Waste

The Verdict of Desolation

Because the vineyard failed, God removes its protective hedge, allowing it to be trampled.



The Six 'Wild Grapes' (The Woes)

Social and Financial Rot

Greed that swallows land from the poor and corrupt judges who sell justice for bribes.



Moral Inversion

Woe to those who call evil good and substitute darkness for light and bitter for sweet.



The Scarcity of Judgment

Due to greed, ten acres of vineyard will yield only ten gallons of wine.

