

Isaiah 5 Handout

In Isaiah 3 we saw how pride, injustice, and moral decay lead to the collapse of society and divine judgment. Chapter 4 provided a hopeful contrast—a purified remnant, divine restoration, and the promise of the Messiah.

In this chapter, God is going to expose the numerous sins of His people by using a parable of a failed vineyard. There is a prediction as well of the coming judgment upon these sins. This chapter starts out like a song, turns into a courtroom drama, and ends in pure condemnation. Isaiah lures his listeners in with a sweet song and then proceeds to burn them with fiery preaching.

The Song of the Vineyard (verses 1-7)

Verses 1-2

The song Isaiah sings starts out quite pleasant.

What is this song about? _____

We learn several things about this vineyard:

- Vineyard of a loved one
- On a fertile hillside
- He dug it up and cleared it of stones
- Planted choicest vines
- Built a watchtower around it
- Cut out a winepress

The owner did everything that one ought to do when planting a vineyard.

What did he expect to get? _____

What did he get instead? _____

Verses 3-4

What are the people asked to do in verse 3? _____

Up to this point, the people have just been listeners. Now though, they are brought into the story by being asked their opinion. What more could the owner have done than what he did to get a good crop? They are being invited to pronounce judgment on the failure of the vineyard. We are going to come back to this question in just a few minutes, but for now let's keep going.

Verses 5-6

The owner tells what he will do to his vineyard:

- He will stop protecting it - take away its hedge and destroy it
- He will abandon it to the elements and enemies - break down its wall and it will be trampled
- He won't invest anymore labor into it - won't prune or cultivate it; briars and thorns will grow there. It will become a wasteland.
- Stop providing the nourishment it needs to thrive - no rain

Verse 7 READ

Isaiah now identifies the characters in this parable.

Whose vineyard is it? _____

Who is the vineyard? _____

They are the vines He delighted in.

The good fruit that God was looking for was justice and righteousness, but the bad fruit that the vines (Israel and Judah) produced were bloodshed and cries of distress.

The vineyard brought disappointment to the Lord, just as Isaiah's song would have been a disappointment to its hearers who were expecting to be entertained and instead were being confronted.

Now that we know who the characters are, let's go back to verses 3-4. God invites Judah to "judge between Me and My vineyard". By doing this, he traps them in their own moral reasoning. They would be led to agree to the deserved judgment without even realizing they are the guilty part. By doing this, God shows them the fairness of His coming judgment. The use of this question here, disarms them, shows their guilt and calls attention to God's love and justice. This forces the people to ask themselves, *"If God has done everything He could for us, why have we produced bad fruit?"*

What these first seven verses teach us about responsibility and accountability in a covenant relationship with God:

- God's covenant comes with blessings
 - All the things the vineyard owner did to produce a good crop symbolize the privileges of God's covenant with His people. His law guided them, His prophets warned and gave instruction to them, His presence protected them.
- God's covenant comes with moral responsibility
 - Since God's people benefit from His care and covenant love, they are accountable to bear fruit that is a reflection of His character; things like justice, mercy and righteousness.
- Disobedience (failure to produce fruit) brings covenant consequences
 - Since the people have failed in their moral responsibility, there are now consequences (vs.5-6). The protection that had been given to them will now be removed. This will come in the form of invasion and exile.

Moving forward, we are going to see six 'woes' brought against the nation. Remember, 'woe' is a word of prophetic judgment used over and over in scripture. The 'woe' sections show the crop produced while the 'therefore' sections show the harvest (judgment) to come.

1. Aggressive Greed (vs. 8-10)

Specifically the greed for more land and larger houses is being addressed here. The wealthy were buying up land from their neighbors in order to increase their holdings. They were taking advantage of the less fortunate and depriving them of living on the land that God had given

them. Buying more land in of itself is not wrong. However, taking advantage of others while doing it is wrong. Isaiah is condemning the pushing out of those who were vulnerable to make themselves more prosperous, to feel secure and to be admired.

What will happen to these houses? _____

What will happen to their crops? _____

2. Self-Indulgence (vs.11-17)

Verses 11-12

This manifested itself at this time in drinking too much wine usually at a continuous round of parties.

This is not an attack on all pleasure seeking. Rather, it is the attacking of the giving of so much attention to it as if it is the only thing that matters. When the passion for seeking pleasure becomes the most important thing in a person's life, it squeezes out a passion for God.

Verses 13-15

Therefore what will happen to the people? _____

We get another 'therefore' in verse 14.

Death would open its throat to drink down the pleasure-seekers.

What will happen to the people according to verse 15? _____

Verses 16-17

The Lord Almighty will be exalted for his _____ and the holy God will be proved holy by His _____.

So we see that in contrast to the humiliation of the people in verse 15, God will be exalted. His character is in total opposition to what His people were like at this time, specifically when it came to justice and righteousness.

3. Cynicism and mocking God (vs. 18-19)

The people were sinning deliberately. They hadn't just fallen into sin innocently. Rather, they were willfully pursuing it. Instead of fleeing from it, they were holding it close. To make matters worse, they were baiting God to respond. They didn't think that God would punish them. Their ties to sin were like the ropes used to lead animals and the cart ropes that were super strong and hard to break.

The picture we get here is of a nation of people willingly sinning without shame or a guilty conscience.

4. Redefining of truth (vs. 20)

They call evil _____ (good) and good _____ (evil).

What other two opposites do we get? _____

These metaphors are being used to disguise harmful things as pleasant or acceptable. This shows a level of self-deception and manipulation.

They are blurring moral issues and excusing their sin. The people were redefining good and evil based on their own desires or gain. This is an attempt to corrupt God's standards of right and wrong. They do this by substituting man's values over God's moral standards. They look at their own evil and call it good and look at the good of others and call it evil. By reversing moral values, they are inviting God's divine judgment.

5. Arrogant false wisdom (vs. 21)

They are _____ in their own eyes and _____ in their own sight.

This kind of wisdom is rooted in the worship of self. They were impressed with themselves.

6. Drunken, corrupt justice system (vs. 22-23)

The people have taken on corrupt values. The more a person could drink, the greater the honor from those around them.

What were they doing in the justice system? _____

Proverbs 17:15 says, "*Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both.*"

The second explanation for the coming judgment.

Verse 24-25

We get a double 'therefore' announcing God's judgment for the sins talked about in verses 18-22 as well as those brought up since verse 8.

What will God's judgment look like? _____

The judgment will also be like an internal disease that destroys a plant, roots and all.

What is the reason for this judgment? _____

The second 'therefore' is in verse 25.

What do we see about the Lord's anger? _____

- His hand is raised
- He strikes them down
- The mountains shake
- Dead bodies are like refuse in the streets.

Yet with all of this, His anger is not turned away; His hand is still upraised.

The coming destruction (verses 26-30).

Even though we've had an explanation for the coming judgment in verses 13-17 and 24-25, we now see a deeper clarification of these reasons.

Verse 26

Back in verse 19, we saw how the people had concluded that since God had not brought judgment on them, He couldn't. Now we see Isaiah reveal God's sovereignty, not just over the nation of Israel, but over all nations. In fact, He is summoning distant nations to punish them.

All God has to do is raise a flag and whistle and they will respond swiftly and speedily even though they are located far away.

Verses 27-30

This is a continuation of what these foreign nations would be like. Israel's enemy was ready and waiting, all prepared to do the Lord's bidding.

What are these nations compared to in verse 29? _____

Judah would be devoured like a hungry lion devouring its prey. No one will be there to rescue them.

What other roar are they compared to in verse 30? _____

They will not be able to look to the land for help. There will be only darkness and distress. The judgment predicted here was not far away in time.

Let's return to the question from the beginning of the chapter with the song of the vineyard.

What more could the owner have done? God had lavished a lot of grace on Israel and the advantages that they had were a lot. However, something was lacking: the internal transformation of their hearts brought about by God's grace. Without that transformation taking place, all those external blessings only corrupted them and led to hardened hearts. Their hardened hearts needed to be replaced by hearts of flesh.

When we look at what we have today, we see we have been given far more privileges through the death and resurrection of Jesus than Israel experienced under the law of Moses. This chapter is a reminder to us to not take for granted the many blessings we receive from the Christian faith.

The reality is that no one has more spiritual advantages than Christians in America:

- Bibles in all kinds of translations at our fingertips
- Seminaries that teach strong biblical truths from God's word
- Bible believing churches
- Publishers and book distributors
- Internet resources
- Good preaching
- Godly role models
- Men and women openly living for Christ
- Opportunities to serve the Lord in all kinds of ways

Even with all of these advantages, it is amazing how little fruit is being produced here. We need to make sure we are taking the grace that God has given us along with all its advantages and living in holiness and spreading the Gospel.

Luke 12:48 says, *“But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

How does this make you feel?

When looking at the six woes, I see all of them evident in our world today.

There is one in particular however that I want to spend a little time talking about because I find it the most concerning and that's *redefining truth*. This verse is often cited today in discussions about ethics, culture, and society—where what was once considered wrong may now be celebrated, and vice versa.

We live in a culture today that does this same thing - redefining good and evil. It confuses what is true, right and honorable in God's eyes. We see a:

- **Reversal of Morality** (vs. 20a) - “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.”
 - When people reject the truth of God, they don't eliminate morality, they invert it.
 - What was once thought of as shameful is now celebrated and what was once honored becomes ridiculed.
 - Moral blindness - sin disguised as virtue.

Romans 1:22 says, *“Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.”*

- **Confusion of Truth** (vs. 20b) - “who put darkness for light and light for darkness”
 - Truth is replaced by personal opinion or emotion. This allows confusion to take over.
 - People trust feelings over facts, culture over Scripture and convenience over conviction.

John 3:19 says, *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

- **Corruption of Desire** (vs. 20c) - “who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”
 - Obedience vs sin. What should bring you joy and life (obedience) now seems bitter and what destroys (sin) now tastes sweet.
 - Sin deceives - it looks good at first, but it leads to destruction (Proverbs 14:12)

Hebrews 5:14 says, *“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”*

What are some examples of the ways that society today is redefining truth (calling evil good and good evil)?

So, what does this mean for believers? **As Christians, we need to:**

→ **Stand firm** - We need to stand firm and be a light in the darkness.

John 1:5 - *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it".*

→ **Know God's Word** - it should shape our moral compass

Psalms 119:105 - *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*

→ **Love truth and people** - speak truth with love

Ephesians 4:15 - *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."*

→ **Live differently** - we need to live with integrity, compassion and purity.

Philippians 2:15 - *"so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky."*

→ **Pray with discernment** - ask the Holy Spirit to help us clearly see when the world blurs the line between good and evil.

Reflection questions:

- What are some areas where cultural values might be quietly shaping my thinking more than Scripture?
- How can you stand for truth without becoming self-righteous or harsh?
- What practices can you implement to help keep your moral and spiritual discernment sharp?
- Am I bearing the fruit God desires in my life?
- Have I become desensitized to cultural messages that twist right and wrong?