

The Vineyard Song Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-19 bible-sermons.org Sept. 21, 2014

This study of Isaiah has begun with some very severe prophecies about the coming captivity of Judah, intermingled with words of hope about the coming Messiah and His kingdom. The purpose of the coming captivity is to purify the nation and prepare it for the coming Messiah.

This week's passage is a prophetic song that has repetitive sounds in its original language of Hebrew. If Psalm 80 was written by Asaph from the time of King David, then the inspiration originally came from his psalm (1 Chronicles 16:7). Jesus will take it up and use it to address His culture, which again shows us the multiple fulfillments of prophecy.

¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. Isaiah 5:1 Isaiah begins by announcing in prose that he will sing this song for his beloved. I believe he is using the language of the Song of Songs (1:16), and sees the LORD as the One he loves. He sings the song of the LORD for the LORD concerning the LORD'S vineyard.

Isaiah calls it a love song. It sounds like the prototype of country western songs. Everything that was good goes bad. We can see it as a love song if we see it as Isaiah singing of his grieving love for the LORD'S broken heart. Isaiah is one of those people that make up the vine. It is personal to him. It's about the Lord he loves and His people. It was the earliest of the songs that would later be sung in captivity when the people of Judah sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept for their homeland (Psalm 137:1).

Psalm 80 verse 8 tells us that the LORD brought this vine out of Egypt. It is a transplant of a choice vine carefully chosen by God and planted in a fertile place. You'll recall that when the spies came back from exploring the land they brought a giant bunch of grapes carried on a pole between two of them (Numbers 13:23). The physical condition of the land was a picture of the spiritual preparation for the success of the nation.

^{2a} He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; Isaiah 5:2a Israel is a land full of stones. There is an Arab saying that an angel had two bags of stones to distribute over the earth, but as he was flying off, one of them broke over Israel. Even today in the plowed fields of Israel you'll see white stones everywhere you look. It was a lot of work to clear the stones. This represents the work God did in the wilderness to clear the hearts of the people from all the stoniness they had taken with them out of Egypt, the murmuring and lack of faith in God (Joshua 5:6).

He does the same work in our lives as we journey through our own wildernesses. The trials and judgments teach us to quit murmuring and begin trusting and praising (1

Commented [PW1]: 1 Chronicles 16:7 (ESV)

⁷ Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brothers.

Commented [PW2]: Song of Songs 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful. Our couch is green;

Commented [PW3]: Psalm 137:1 (ESV)

¹ By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.

Commented [PW4]: Psalm 80:8 (ESV)

⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

Commented [PW5]: Numbers 13:23 (ESV)

²³ And they came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they also brought some pomegranates and figs.

Commented [PW6]: Joshua 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Corinthians 10:10-11). Some of us are slower to learn than others. But God is faithful to break up our hard hearts and remove the stones.

He planted it with a choice vine. There is another more recent saying about God's choice of the Jewish people. "It's odd of God to choose the Jews; He chose which shows God knew His Jew." It has a similar assonance (repetition of sounds) as the poem we are studying. God chose the Jews because they are just like us. God chose them because of Abraham (Genesis 22:16-18), but He knew they would emphasize the plight of the human race, such potential, and such a disappointment, such high points of faith and low points of faithlessness.

God built a watchtower and hewed out a wine vat. This was a lot of work. Stones that are pulled from the field are used to make a small tower and shelter. From the tower you can oversee the whole vineyard and be shaded from the heat of the sun. The small room at the base was a shelter for the farmer and a place to store tools.

The wine vat was harder to make. There is a nice example in the Nazareth Village. A Christian group bought some land in Nazareth to recreate a first century village for pilgrims to see what the town was like at the time of Christ. As they cleared the land they uncovered an ancient wine vat and crushing pit. The pit is hewn into the limestone in the shape of a bowl with a trough on one side that runs into a vat, a hole in the limestone to hold the juice.

Everything was done that could be done to make this a fruitful vineyard. The rest of the verse tells the sad results. ^{2b} *and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.* Isaiah 5:2b In the saddest of tones, Isaiah sings of the results. God, the vineyard owner, looked for the nation to bring forth fruit, but wild bitter grapes were all it bore. He looked for righteousness, justice, and worship from devoted hearts, but instead injustice and hypocrisy abounded.

We have wild grapes near my home. They are small and very bitter. Selfishness was the response to the generosity of God. How bitter it was to God to see His work result in bad fruit.

And what shall we say of our own nation? Has God not planted us in a fertile field? Did He not pick our ancestors fleeing from persecution to worship God in freedom? Did God not provide everything we needed to be just, righteous, and faithful worshipers of God in our heritage and constitution? The founders wanted the Bible to be available for every student, and our universities were founded to raise up ministers who could faithfully expound upon the Word of God. Now we hear reports of Bibles banned from classrooms.

In Psalm 80 we read of the early success of the vine, Israel, how it spread over the land and covered the high cedars. But now where is the fruit? Where is the justice, righteousness, and faithfulness to God and His Word? God looks out and sees a harvest of sour grapes.

Commented [PW7]: 1 Corinthians 10:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Commented [PW8]: Genesis 22:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,

¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,

¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

But let us take this as individuals as well. What has God done for you? How has He cared for you? What does He have the right to expect from your life and mine, and is He reaping it? We can weep with Isaiah for our nation, but we must then be sure that we have not followed the selfish pattern that it took. Are we serious about our relationship with God and bearing the fruit that should be the result of all the goodness with which He has blessed us (Romans 7:4)?

³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. Isaiah 5:3 Stand back and look what God has done for our nation, for each of us individually, and look at the fruit. Now consider if God is getting what He deserves from all His input.

We have a Fuji apple tree in our garden. It's about 12 years old. Every year we say, "One more year, and if it doesn't produce a better crop, it comes down." We brought in good soil in which to plant it. We water and feed it. We spray for bugs. We do everything we can, and it gives us a handful of mediocre apples. Isaiah was asking what the people thought should be done. This fall the apple tree comes down.

Listen to another prophet declare the aching heart of God for His people. *⁷ Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, I will refine them and test them, for what else can I do, because of my people?"* Jeremiah 9:7 What else can God do? If we won't respond to His goodness, we may respond to His discipline (Hebrews 12:6). That is why we usually learn more in the trials and painful experiences of life than we do when times are easy and carefree. Refinement comes from heat. If we won't let the cool winds of God's goodness blow away the chaff, God will use the refining fires of difficulty to burn it up. Stubbornness in our hearts must be plowed through (Jeremiah 4:3).

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? Isaiah 5:4 Think of all God did for Israel. He gave them homes and fields already in place (Deuteronomy 6:11-12). It was a fruitful land. He put the fear of them in the surrounding people so they were not invaded for a long while. He gave them godly leaders to help turn them back when they strayed. Numerous times He gave them victory over a far larger army. He blessed them with rules that helped them physically to not have the illnesses of people around them. His laws for the nation were far superior to any in the world, laws we adopt in the modern age because we see how beneficial they are. So what should have been the response?

If we were to list all of God's kindness to us, we might ask what more could He do for us? We, who are here today, live in one of the most prosperous nations in the history of the world. We are freer than most of the world from violence. We have the Word of God and more commentary and study material than anywhere else on earth. There are churches on every corner. We have the best medical care. What else could God do to cause us to yield the fruit we should?

⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

Commented [PW9]: Romans 7:4 (ESV)

⁴ Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Commented [PW10]: Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

Commented [PW11]: Jeremiah 4:3 (ESV)

³ For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Commented [PW12]: Deuteronomy 6:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full,
¹² then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Isaiah 5:5 God had a hedge of protection around Israel. He allowed enemies to harass them to turn them back to Him (Judges 2:18), but now it had to be more than that. The hedge had to be removed altogether. The vineyard had to be devoured and trampled down. The song is taking on a woeful sound. What follows the song is a description of the bad fruit.

That hedge is still about the nation of America, but it is thinning out. I can't say if God is allowing harassment so we will turn back or if He is done and ready to remove the hedge altogether. But I do know we better wake up before it is too late. Either way, the believer can still walk in the protection of the Lord with the pillar of cloud over them by day and fire by night (Isaiah 4:5). Though we may suffer loss, the things that really matter to us cannot be taken from us. The hedge around Judah was utterly removed. God was true to His Word. His warning came to pass. But the song is not over.

⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. Isaiah 5:6 Thorns represent the curse of God on the earth from Genesis three (3:17-18). The lack of rain is also seen as God's judgment for disobedience and idolatry (Deuteronomy 11:16-17). The beautiful land would become a wasteland. And so it was during the captivity. But it was also more recently. There are some fascinating drawings of the land of Israel in the 1800s. It was barren inland and swampy along the coast. The last couple of generations have turned Israel once again into a fruitful land. That too was predicted by Isaiah in a song of the redemption of the vineyard (27:6). In fact, today Israel is one of the world's leading citrus fruit producers and exporters.

⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry! Isaiah 5:7 The prophet closes the song with the explanation of the analogy. The house of Israel is the vineyard. The fruit God looked for was justice. The bitter wild grapes were bloodshed. The other fruit that was sought was righteousness. Instead God saw those who were crying out like Abel's blood cried from the ground for justice (Genesis 4:10).

Jesus used the parable of the vineyard with a twist. In His retelling of the song, the vineyard was lent out to tenants, who were the spiritual leaders of the nation. That is in keeping with Isaiah's prophecy that the Lord is contending with the leaders (Isaiah 3:14). In that prophecy God was contending with the leaders because they were the ones that spoiled the vineyard.

In Jesus' parable, when the owner sent his servants to collect his share of the fruit, the tenants beat one, stoned another, and killed another. He sent more and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son. Here is where the song and Jesus' use of it takes quite a different turn. They took the son out of the vineyard and killed him in hope that the vineyard would become theirs.

Then Jesus wrapped it up with a question and answer similar to the way the song ends. The song asked if God could have done anything more. Jesus asked what should be

Commented [PW13]: Judges 2:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.

Commented [PW14]: Isaiah 4:5 (ESV)

⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy.

Commented [PW15]: Genesis 3:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Commented [PW16]: Deuteronomy 11:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them;
¹⁷ then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you.

Commented [PW17]: Isaiah 27:6 (ESV)

⁶ In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.

Commented [PW18]: Genesis 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

Commented [PW19]: Isaiah 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: "It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

done to the tenants. The Luke account is more in line with Isaiah 5:5. Jesus answers His own question, telling the people the owner will kill the tenants and give the vineyard to others (Luke 20:15-16). The crowd knew the Isaiah vineyard song and so they answered, "Surely not!" The land of Israel's inheritance included Jerusalem. Would God remove the Jews and let it be occupied by Gentiles? That is exactly what happened during the captivity and again 40 years after Jesus' death.

The parallel between the song and Jesus' parable was that in Jesus' parable the rejection of the Son was the same as Judah's rejection of God. Isaiah was one of the servants in Jesus' parable that came looking for the fruit but was shamefully sent away empty handed. All Isaiah could see was bitter wild grapes.

In Jesus' parable the final straw was the killing of the Son which was about to take place a few days after the parable was spoken. Jesus pointed to Scripture to show them exactly what they were doing. They were rejecting the cornerstone as predicted in the Psalms (Psalm 118:22). Those who fall upon the stone would be broken. We come to Jesus and realize the sinners that we are and are broken, only to be remade as in the promise of the previous chapter of Isaiah (4:4-5). But those on whom the stone falls in judgment will be ground to powder. It happened in the Babylonian invasion and again in the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Where is the vine today? Isaiah prophesied its redemption in another later vineyard song. The vine is now the Redeemer. When Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches (John 15:5)," He was declaring a total change in how God was working in the world. No longer would it be the Jewish nation and their failure to keep the laws of God and constant turning back to idolatry, but now it would be in Jesus who lived the Law for us. Now those who trust in Jesus would become a branch on the vine. He would prune them and cause them to bear much fruit (John 15:8). His Holy Spirit would be the life giving sap within that would empower them to live a life that is pleasing to God. It is His life in us that causes us to bear fruit.

There are still promises to the Jewish people that are yet to be fulfilled, but the greatest is that they would be grafted back into the vine by knowing that Jesus is their Redeemer (Romans 11:23). That is the same way any of us becomes a part of the vine. Once we are a part of the vine, He must prune us of the unproductive shoots in our life. It can be painful, but it means greater production of fruit. It means more love, joy, peace and all the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). No longer were the leaders of Israel expected to produce fruit. God has taken over caring for the vineyard. He is the pruner. It is His very life in us, the branches, that assures we will bear the fruit He desires.

Are you in the vine? Are you bearing fruit? In the song, the reason the hedge was taken away was because the fruit was bitter wild grapes. In Jesus' analogy, the branches that didn't bear fruit, that didn't remain in Him, were cut off, gathered up and burned (John 15:2, 6). The nation of Judah did not remain faithful to the Word of God. Our nation has drifted away from the Word of God. I pray that you haven't. Remain in Him and He

Commented [PW20]: Luke 20:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?

¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"

Commented [PW21]: Psalm 118:22 (ESV)

²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Commented [PW22]: Isaiah 4:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.

⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy.

Commented [PW23]: John 15:5 (ESV)

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Commented [PW24]: John 15:8 (ESV)

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Commented [PW25]: Romans 11:23 (ESV)

²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

Commented [PW26]: Galatians 5:22 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Commented [PW27]: John 15:2 (ESV)

² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Commented [PW28]: John 15:6 (ESV)

⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

will remain in you. Then you will bear the fruit that God is seeking. It's Jesus' promise (John 15:4).

Questions

- 1 Who is the beloved? Is He yours?
- 2 What is the vineyard?
- 3 What did God do for the vineyard?
- 4 Where did He get the vine?
- 5 How did He prepare the vine?
- 6 Why should it have born good fruit?
- 7 What did God do when it didn't? Why?
- 8 What is different from Jesus retelling of the song?
- 9 Why were the hearers shocked?
- 10 How can anyone be a part of the vine?
- 11 How do we bear fruit?

Commented [PW29]: John 15:4 (ESV)

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.