

ISAIAH 5

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

The first six verses of this chapter contain “a song” or a parable that is addressed by God the Father to His well-beloved Son, the Lord Jesus. And in the seventh verse, the Prophet explains the meaning of the song: “The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant plant.” God placed the Israelites in the land of Canaan, like a vine upon a beautiful hill. He fenced them in by His protecting power and love, and by the ordinances which He established to keep them separate from the neighboring heathen nations. In His vineyard, the Lord built a tower – representing the Temple, where His presence and glory were particularly displayed. He left nothing undone which might benefit the vineyard. But alas! The time came when He should have found a fruitful harvest of grapes; but instead, it brought forth wild grapes – despite all the labor and care He had invested in this vineyard!

In verses 5 and 6, the Lord declares how He would punish His vineyard. First, He would take down the fence, and all the surrounding nations would trample upon it and waste it. And very speedily, this threatening began to be fulfilled. Not very long after this prophecy was given, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria took some of the northern tribes of Israel and carried them away into captivity (2 Kings 15:29). Eventually King Shalmaneser of Assyria carried away all the rest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17). About 135 years later, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon carried the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylon, where they remained in captivity for 70 years. At length, they were restored and planted once more in the vineyard, but the fence was not built up again. Armies from Syria on the north, and from Egypt on the south, were continually passing and re-passing through the land. At the same time, God’s other threatenings were being fulfilled. Briers and thorns sprang up; wickedness abounded more and more; the clouds rained no rain upon the land. God withheld His blessings; He no longer granted the teaching of prophets, nor the help of miracles. He withdrew His Holy Spirit, and left His people to themselves. It was then that they filled up the measure of their iniquity, by crucifying their very own long-awaited Messiah; and then, in righteous judgment, the Lord finally gave up the vineyard to destruction by the Romans. To this day, it remains a witness to God’s truth.

So what is the lesson for ourselves from all of this? We all know very well that the Israelites have not been the only people upon whom God has bestowed care and blessings. Let each of us ask ourselves, “What has the Lord done for

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The parable of the unfruitful vineyard – verses 1-7*
- ❖ *An enumeration of the sins that abounded among God’s people, along with threatenings of punishments for each of these transgressions – verses 8-23*
- ❖ *A general desolation that would destroy everything is threatened – verses 24-30*

me? Has He not placed me in a free land and in a Christian family? Has He not supplied me with the nourishment of His own Word, and provided for my spiritual education by the advice of pious friends and the teaching of faithful ministers? And what fruit have I brought forth?" If we find ourselves obliged to confess that we are not making a suitable return for the Lord's gracious dealings with us, let us immediately take the only course for remedying the fault. Let us go to Jesus! In chapter 4, He was referred to as the Branch that has life in Him-



self; and if we are grafted into Him, we shall not fail to bring forth fruit. "I am the vine," He says; "ye are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing!" (John 15:4-5)

In verses 8-23, we read a succession of woes denounced upon different sins. It would be well to compare them with the curses recorded in Deuteronomy 27:15-26, with the woes denounced in Habakkuk 2:9-20, and with the words uttered by our Lord in Luke 6:24-26 and Matthew 23:13-32. Those upon whom God pronounces woe are not always those whom the world reckons unhappy. Verse 20 tells us, "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" What does the worldly man call "light"? Trifling amusements, thoughtless companions, wealth, splendor, self-indulgence, and gratified ambitions. And what does he call "darkness"? Prayer, Scripture reading, public worship, Sabbath days, Christian friendship, and labors of usefulness for the Kingdom of God.

The particular woe that is spoken (verse 8) against those who join house to house and field to field strikingly reminds us of Ahab's unlawful acquiring of Naboth's vineyard to add to his own possessions, which was recorded in 1 Kings 21. He was met by the prophet Elijah with this solemn message: "Hast thou killed and also taken possession? In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." It is a piteous sight to watch a person toiling all his life long to gather land or money – and yet forgetting that when he dies, he shall not carry away anything of his labors which he got for himself in this world (Ecc. 5:15). How wise and how kind are our Savior's exhortations in Matthew 6:20: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!" "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you" (John 6:27).

Lord, we thank You for bestowing such great care and blessings upon us, so that we may grow and bring forth fruit. Help us to make a proper and fruitful return to You for all the benefits which You have showered upon us! Amen.