

Israel, Believers, and the Kingdom of God

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Isaiah 5 is one of those passages in the Bible that can certainly stand alone, but its greatest impact is felt when you connect it to others. 5 others to be exact. That's because of the *vineyard* metaphor. It's common to all of them and used to describe the place of God's people in the Scriptures. Or God's *kingdom*.

So we're going to trace that theme and connect the dots. Hopefully resulting in a picture that will bring clarity and wonder.

Isaiah 5:1-7 – Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. [2] 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; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

[3] And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah [God is speaking], judge between me and my vineyard. [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 [in other words, there's no excuse]?

[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. [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.

[7] For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel [i.e. the place and presence of God's rule and reign; which in that day was the nation and land of Israel], and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting [the vines]; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

The first thing to realize is that . . .

• **Isaiah 5 is a bombshell. (Is 5:1-7)**

And you don't need to know a lot about grapes, vines, and vineyards to feel the shock of it; or the astonishment of leaving them *unprotected*. That would be like opening the doors to your store in the middle of a riot. Or opening the windows in your home during a hurricane. It's unthinkable.

Especially when *you're* the vineyard, and God's words don't line up with your expectations. Like in Ex 15:17 when Moses said:

You will bring them in [he was speaking to God, and referring to the Promised Land] and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

That's what they expected. And it had proven true for centuries. But now, 700 years later, through Isaiah, God's saying, "No more. All bets are off."

God was sick of Israel's blatant disobedience. They didn't follow him, they didn't hold up their end of the bargain, and they rebelled. So he punished them. Promising to remove their protection and withhold his blessing.

Boom. It was bombshell. And the first dot on this picture of God's kingdom.

But there's more. 150 years later, in the midst of the Babylonian exile . . .

• **Ezekiel said it even stronger. (Ez 15)**

And that's the second passage I want to look at. Ezekiel 15.

And the word of the LORD came to me: [2] "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? [3] Is wood taken from it to make anything [the implied answer is no]? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? [No]

[4] Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? [5] Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything!

[6] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. [7] And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them [they're still going to be punished], and you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. [8] And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord GOD."

This was right at the beginning of the Babylonian exile, just before Jerusalem was completely destroyed. And God basically says, "You're going to get it." Not just neglect and a lack of protection, per Isaiah, but destruction. Giving them up to fire. The same fate that awaits *all* those who reject God.

The vineyard, the *place* of God's people, would not only be *desolate*, but the vines themselves, the people, would be *discarded*. Just like the wild vines of the forest.

It's the same thing Isaiah said, only stronger. And the second dot to connect.

Third, is that . . .

• **Asaph referred to it as well. (Ps 80:7-19)**

Isaiah dropped a bomb, Ezekiel dropped the people, and Asaph, one of the Psalmists, dropped a hint. That's found in Psalm 80:7-19.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved! [8] You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. [9] You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. [10] The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. [11] It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River [In other words, the blessings of God's people were plentiful, and extended far and wide].

[12] Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? [13] The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.

[14] Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, [15] the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong

for yourself. [16] *They [your enemies] have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!* [Looks can kill.]

[17] *But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!* [18] *Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!* [19] *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

Now, we can't be *sure* of the circumstances here, but it *seems* that the Psalmist is writing sometime after the Assyrian Overthrow of 722BC. When the northern tribes fell. Hence his question in v12, "Why have you broken down its walls?"

And he calls out to God on behalf of his people, to reverse their fortune. To change things. *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!* Look favorably on us. Rebuke us no longer. It's a cry for help.

➤ But the interesting part, is that he appeals to a *messiah*; someone on whom God's hand, God's favor, would rest. Like in v15 where he says, *have regard . . . for the son whom you made strong for yourself.* And v17 – *Let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself.*

Now, if it were just v15, we might conclude that he's simply talking about Israel as a whole. Because the prophets often did that. They often referred to the people at large, as God's *son*.

But with the addition of v17, where he says – *let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself* – it seems like he's narrowing the field, and talking about an individual. Most likely a king or leader, because *man of your right hand* and *son of man* is royal language.

It seems even then, some 700 years before Christ – that God put it in the heart of the Psalmist to yearn for a deliverer. To hint at someone who had the strength and power to restore the vineyard. Someone who would influence the people to call on God's name, receive life, and be saved. It's all there.

Even in the midst of judgment God hints at the means of restoration. Connect the dots.

But whatever you do, don't stop there. Because . . .

• **Jesus took it a step further. (Mk 12:1-12)**
In fact, he *really* upsets the apple cart. Mark 12:1-12.

And he [Jesus] began to speak to them in parables [fictional stories to illustrate a point]. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower [Sound familiar? Isaiah 5], and leased it to tenants and went into another country.

[2] *When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.* [3] *And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.* [Think Old Testament prophets.]

[4] *Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.* [5] *And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.*

[6] *He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'* [7] *But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours [the vineyard, the kingdom, will be ours].'* [8] *And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.*

[9] *What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others* [if Isaiah was a bombshell, that's a nuclear explosion]. [10] *Have you not read this Scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [the most important part of the kingdom]; [11] this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"*

[12] *And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.*

Speaking to the Jews, Jesus is like: "Enough is enough. You obviously don't want me to rule over you, so I won't. You obviously can't handle the privileges and responsibilities of my kingdom, so I'm giving it to those who can."

He took it a step further. A *giant* step further.

➤ **Incorporating everyone who believes, Jew and Gentile. (Acts 13:46)**

As bad as it was for God to withhold his blessing and protection, and give his people over to destruction, their assumption all along is that he would preserve a remnant and start over. Just like he'd done countless times before.

But here, Jesus takes it a step further. He not only rejects those *Jews* who don't believe, but includes those *Gentiles* who *do*.

Like Paul and Barnabas said in **Acts 13:46**, speaking to the Jews.

"It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life [you don't believe, you don't want to have anything to do with it], behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."

God's offering the vineyard to others, they're saying. Resulting in a kingdom comprised only of those who believe, *Gentile and Jew*.

It started with a bombshell of judgment, and results in an avalanche blessing. Blessing for the world. The blessing of being a part of God's vineyard, God's kingdom.

And then, as if that wasn't enough, Jesus took it another step further . . .

➤ **Eventually identifying himself as the vine. (Jn 15:1-6)**

That's found in John 15:1-6. On the night Jesus was betrayed, only 2 days after his comments in Mark 12, he changed the metaphor altogether.

They had just eaten The Last Supper and were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane when he said this, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."

Now, I don't know for sure, but I have to believe that the disciples were still talking about what he said on *Tuesday*, 2 days earlier. That God was givin' the farm away. That someone *else* would inherit his kingdom.

Now he's changing the rules altogether to say that *he's* the vine in the midst of God's kingdom. *He's* the heir apparent.

And then goes on to say in v2 . . .

[2] *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he [God] takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [he cleans, he cuts back], that it may bear more fruit. [3] Already you are clean [washed, pruned] because of the word that I have spoken to you [the truth you believed]. [4] Abide in me, and I in you [let's stick together, remain connected]. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*

[5] *I am the vine; you are the branches [I'm first, I'm primary]. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing [nothing of any God-glorifying value]. [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.*

Can you say Ezekiel 15? Their heads must have been spinning

No longer are the people of God his pleasant planting as Isaiah said, but the Son of God, Jesus. *He's* the vine. The source of all life and fruit, and the heir of the vineyard. Allowing us to share *with* him in the blessings, the inheritance, because we're connected. *I am the vine; you are the branches.*

So once again, Jesus took the vineyard metaphor a step further, by not only incorporating *everyone* who believes, but identifying *himself* as the vine.

➤ **The fruit of which we remember at The Lord's Supper. (Mt 26:26-29)**

That's the *last* dot. Found in [Matthew 26:26-29](#). Isaiah dropped a bombshell, Ezekiel dropped the people, and Asaph dropped a hint. But Jesus exceeded them all, by including *everyone* who believes, declaring *himself* as the vine, and giving us something tangible with which to remember it. The *fruit* of the vine.

V26 – *Now as they were eating [The Last Supper], Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." [27] And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, [28] for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

The cup they held and the wine they drank was symbolic of the blood he was about to shed. Securing our salvation by forgiving our sins, and guaranteeing our life once and for all. That's the *covenant*. The *New Covenant*.

• And then he said this, connecting the dots and *completing* the picture.

[29] *I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

The Last Supper, that moment, was just a few hours *before* John 15, when Jesus identified himself *as* the vine. They had just left the upper room, having just heard Jesus refer to the cup as the *fruit* of the vine, when he said, "*I am* the vine." That's no coincidence.

In fact, I think he tied the two together in such close proximity to emphasize the meaning. That the cup, containing the fruit of the *physical* vine, represents the fruit of *the* Vine. Namely, his shed blood that redeems our soul and secures our covenant.

When we eat and drink at The Lord's Table, it's symbolic of our *connection to the Vine, Jesus; our participation in the vineyard, God's kingdom, and our inheritance of its fruit, eternal life.*

Summary

Put all this together and God originally promised to bless the Israelites by establishing them in Promised Land as his favored people. But they disobeyed and rebelled, so he withdrew their protection as a punishment.

When that didn't result in repentance, he destroyed the land and set the Israelites aside. Even then however, he set the stage for a Redeemer.

But when Jesus came, he found even *more* rebellion among the Jews, promising to *punish* them even more, and give the kingdom to others. Who the New Testament writers identify as those of *any* ethnicity who put their faith in Jesus.

In fact, he's the *true* vine. And the true *heir* of God's promises. Enabling us to share in the blessings of those promises only by virtue of our connection with him. All of which we remember and celebrate at The Lord's Table.

Ethnic Israel was promised a kingdom. But due to their sin it was destroyed, they were forsaken, and it was given to those of faith. Faith in Jesus. Through whom we receive all the benefits God *originally* promised, and then some.