

THE WARNING TO ISRAEL, GOD'S DISAPPOINTING VINEYARD: TERRIBLE SIN WILL BE EXPOSED

ISAIAH 05:01–07

Introduction

Guilt can be a healthy experience. When we fail or do wrong, guilt gnaws at our souls, causing us to sense conviction, shame, failure and self-condemnation. In this respect, guilt is a protective mechanism that warns us to correct our behaviour before we hurt or damage ourselves. Because of guilt, we know that we have slipped, been irresponsible, done wrong or committed an offense. Unless we handle or correct our irresponsible behaviour, we can seriously damage ourselves and others. Furthermore, depression and other neurotic (or even psychotic) conditions can creep into our lives and take hold of us. For this reason, we must be sure to deal with the guilt in our lives. When we make a mistake, we must correct the irresponsible behaviour. Correcting our mistakes is absolutely essential.

This is the reason God has given us His Holy Word: to reveal how we should live, the path we should take, and the things we should do to live victorious, conquering lives. But God's Holy Word also tells us the path not to take. His Word spells out the sins and the misbehaviour that will cause problems for us, defeating and dooming us. Thus, when we misbehave, God's Word condemns us and His Spirit convicts us, arousing a sense of guilt within our hearts. Guilt then causes us to correct our behaviour before we bring disorder to our lives and doom ourselves to failure.

In the present Scripture, we see the people of Israel and Judah guilty of the most outrageous and evil behaviour imaginable. They stood guilty before God and were condemned. Sensing the seriousness of the situation, Isaiah changed his tactical approach to the people. Hoping to stir a renewed interest in the Word of God, he sang a song or parable about the vineyard of God. In his message he issued three major warnings to God's people. This is, The Lord's Condemnation of His Wayward Nation. The first warnings to God's People: Isaiah 5:1-7.

Isaiah 05:01–07 Warning to Israel, God's Disappointing Vineyard: The Terrible Sin

The first warning was to Israel, which is identified as God's disappointing vineyard. Israel was guilty of terrible sin; therefore, God issued a strong warning to them through His prophet Isaiah. But in this third prophecy, a different approach was used with the people. Before directly condemning the people for their gross sinfulness, Isaiah sang the following parable to them at a public gathering:

1. The beginning of the song declared that the One whom Isaiah loved had planted a vineyard (vv. 1-2). Of course, the One whom Isaiah loved was the *Lord*, and the vineyard was Israel (see v. 7). In planting His vineyard, the *Lord* was very careful. He even went to the extreme, making sure that the vineyard had every opportunity to produce the highest quality fruit. He took five important steps.
 - a. The most wonderful land had been given to the Israelites, the promised land of God that flowed with milk and honey, a symbol of heaven. (See note, Gen. 12:1.) Thus the *Lord* chose a very fertile hill for His vineyard, a hill that had the richest soil and that sat high above the surrounding land. It had constant, unobstructed sunlight (v. 1).
 - b. The *Lord* cultivated and removed all stones from the land so that nothing would obstruct the growth of the vines (v. 2). He did everything He could to prepare the land for the Israelites. As long as they were faithful to Him, they could live in peace and lead victorious lives that bore the choicest fruits (Gal. 5:22-23).
 - c. The *Lord* then planted the choicest vine in His vineyard (v. 2). He gave His people His very own Word, His law. His commandments were to govern their lives. His law would also enable the people to build a just, caring and secure society.
 - d. Next, the *Lord* built a watchtower to protect His field (v. 2). The watchtower probably refers to the temple, for it symbolized God's very own presence dwelling among the people. It was His presence that protected them.
 - e. Finally, the *Lord* built a wine-press, expecting a rich harvest of the finest grapes (v.2). In the days of Isaiah, a wine-press had two troughs. The upper trough was used for trampling grapes, and the lower one was used to catch the juice of the grapes as it flowed down into it. The harvest represented the fruitful life God expected His people to produce (Gal. 5:22-23).
2. Although the *Lord* had done everything possible to make sure His vineyard (Israel) produced the finest grapes for the choicest wine, the results were utterly disappointing. When the *Lord* looked for a crop of good, sweet grapes, He found only *wild grapes* (v. 2). The term *wild grapes* actually means *stinking grapes*. However, Isaiah did not identify the *wild grapes* until the end of this parable.
3. God Himself appealed to the people: He wanted them to consider the case of the vineyard (vv. 3-4). He asked two very straightforward questions:
 - => What more could He have done for His vineyard?
 - => Why would a vine so cared for yield *wild grapes*?
4. Having aroused the people to objectively judge the situation themselves, God then pronounced judgment against the vineyard (vv. 5-6). He removed the protection of the vineyard, its hedge and wall. The vineyard would be destroyed and trampled upon by others. Of course, this is a clear reference to the invasion of foreign nations.

The *Lord* actually said that He would make His vineyard a wasteland (v. 6). Since it produced only *wild grapes*, there was no need for Him to prune or cultivate it any more. The *Lord* would stop the rain and the vineyard would become unproductive. Consequently, it would become overgrown with briars and thorns.

5. So that no one could misinterpret or fail to understand the parable, God identified the vineyard and the *wild grapes*. As pointed out above, the vineyard was Israel and Judah. Both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were named so the listeners would know that all Jews stood accountable before the *Lord*. The *wild grapes* were identified as the fruit of the corrupt nature, the fruit of a hypocritical life that professed to know the *Lord* but that exhibited wickedness. Several sins in particular are mentioned. Whereas the *Lord* looked for the fruit of justice and righteousness among His people, He found only violence, lawlessness, oppression and distress. Instead of bearing good fruit they were guilty of producing corrupt fruit that stunk in the nostrils of the *Lord*. The whole vineyard of Israel had become an unjust society, guilty of the worst acts of violence and lawlessness as well as oppression of the innocent and defenceless.

Thought 1. Far too many of us continually engage in sinful behaviour. For example, how many of us are guilty of violent acts? Violence includes more heinous acts than just murder, the shedding of innocent blood. It also includes acts of abuse — verbal, physical, mental or sexual — acts of coercion, of forcing others to do something against their will. Violence also includes acts of cruelty, brutality and terrorism.

How many of us are guilty of lawless behaviour, of breaking not only God's law but also the laws of society? How many of us are guilty of shoplifting, of stealing from our employers, schools, churches, neighbours or even our customers? How many of us cheat, lie or destroy property?

How many of us are guilty of oppressing other people and causing undue distress for them? Judges, attorneys, and juries oppress the innocent when they rule against them and do not give them the full benefit of the law. Businesses oppress people when they overwork their employees or do not pay fair wages. Any of us oppress people when we do not pay fair wages for work done on our behalf. We oppress people when we mistreat them, whether at school, work, home or out in public. We oppress people when we put them down, abuse, harass, overload, suppress, trample, pick on or persecute them.

God warns us against bearing sinful fruit, against producing a harvest of sin. Listen to what God's Holy Word says:

Mat 7:17 "*Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.*"

Rom 1:18, 29-32 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.... They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.*

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Gal 5:19-21 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Gal 6:7-8 *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

Rev 14:15 *Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."*

Job 4:8 *As I have observed, those who plough evil, and those who sow trouble reap it.*

Isa. 17:11 *Though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them to bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain.*

Jer. 12:13 *"They will sow wheat but reap thorns; they will wear themselves out but gain nothing. They will bear the shame of their harvest because of the Lord's fierce anger."*

Joel 3:12-13 *"Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the wine-press is full and the vats overflow — so great is their wickedness."* ■