

Six Woes Pronounced Upon Israel and Judah

Isaiah 5:8-30

Isaiah 5:8-10 - *“Woe to those who join house to house. They add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land! ⁹ In my hearing the Lord of hosts said, “Truly, many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant. ¹⁰ For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah.”*

Background Notes

The parable of the vineyard is found in Isaiah 5:1-7. In the parable, the vineyard is Israel. In Isaiah’s day, the nation of Israel consisted of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord had planted this vineyard, and He expected it to produce good grapes - but it produced wild grapes. Therefore the Lord said that He would let the vineyard go to ruins.

This was certainly a prediction of the coming invasions of Israel and Judah, when God would allow the foreign nations of Assyria and Babylon to invade and take over God’s special Land, and carry away His people into captivity.

In verses 8-30, six “woes” were pronounced upon God’s people for their sins. Every one of these woes in the six-point indictment of Israel has an application for today.

Doctrinal Point

God promises woes upon His wayward people.

a. Woe to those who are materialists (v8-10).

In verses 8-10 God pronounced woe on the people in Israel who were buying up all the real estate, with no concern for the housing needs of the less fortunate. Meanwhile, the rich landowners lived in their isolated luxurious mansions on big spreads of land.

This materialism was wrong, and Isaiah predicted that when the captivity came those big houses and mansions would be left abandoned and empty. The land would be unproductive, and would not yield much grain or grapes (v9-10). One bath of wine for ten acres and one ephah of grain for a homer of seed was not a productive harvest

Just as God hated materialism then, so He hates materialism today. When will we ever learn to obey the Lord and be content with what we have? Hebrews 13:5 says, *“Be content with such things as you have.”* Woe to those who are materialists.

b. Woe to those who are drunkards.

Isaiah 5:11-17 - *“Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them! ¹² The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of His hands. ¹³ Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge. Their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. ¹⁴ Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure; their glory and their multitude and their pomp, and he who is jubilant, shall descend into it. ¹⁵ People shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled. ¹⁶ But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness. ¹⁷ Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat.”*

I'm glad verse 11 doesn't just say “woe to those who rise up early or go to bed late.” That would put a lot of us at fault! The point here is that many people in Israel and Judah only wanted to party all day long - music and alcohol from early morning to late at night. They cared nothing for the things of the Lord, or what was pleasing to Him.

God condemns this “partying” lifestyle – both then and today. As a result of this ungodly behavior, the armies of the Babylonian Empire would besiege Jerusalem. There would be no more partying then. Instead there would be famine and death and exile - and many of these partygoers would descend into Sheol, the place of the grave (v13-14).

The exile in Babylon would be a time of humiliation for the captives (v15), but it would be a time of exaltation for the Lord (v16). Why? When the land was empty of its wealthy inhabitants, and it was only a place for sheep and shepherds (v17), the desolation would prove that God was holy and righteous, and that He judged righteously, according to what He had declared in His Law.

c. Woe to those who are skeptics.

Isaiah 5:18-19 - *“Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; ¹⁹ that say, “Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it.”*

The skeptics and mockers within Israel were challenging God as to His promises and prophecies. They doubted God's Word, and as a result of their skepticism, they were “hitched with a cart rope” to the consequences of their sin. It's not surprising that unbelievers are skeptical of God and His Word, but unfortunately some Christians doubt God's

Word. For example, some Christians doubt God's ability to create the universe, deciding that the universe began with some kind of an accidental "big bang." And some believers have a hard time accepting that the Bible is God's inspired Word, free from human error. Woe to those who are skeptics!

d. Woe to those who call evil good.

Isaiah 5:20 - "*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*"

If Isaiah was living in America today, he'd write the same words. Look at our movies, books, and TV shows. Evil is diminished or neutralized or made into a joke - and sometimes even made to appear loving and beneficial. Using comedy, the media can manipulate our emotions - and we don't even realize it. Did you ever notice how humorous sitcoms and late night comic shows are able to get Christians to laugh - and thus desensitize us to certain sins? What would not be tolerated even 25 years ago is standard comedy routine and sitcom material today. Woe to those who call evil good!

e. Woe to those who are conceited.

Isaiah 5:21 - "*Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!*"

There were people in Israel who would not listen to the prophets and the word of the Lord. They thought they knew it all, and that they had all the answers. They thought that they could solve all the nation's problems by diplomacy and treaties, so they didn't have to rely on the Lord. But they were wrong! And so are a lot of know-it-alls today! Think of this verse when you listen to the arrogant statements of some of the "clever" politicians today.

Conceited people who think they have all the answers can be found in the Church as well. Be on your guard against those who say they can solve all church problems and create a "successful" church without depending on the Lord. Woe to those who are conceited!

f. Woe to those who are unjust.

Isaiah 5:22-23 - "*Woe to men mighty at drinking wine. Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink,²³ who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man!*"

Parties at just about any college fraternity house in this country today are an illustration of what Isaiah was talking about in verse 22 - "*men mighty at drinking.*" In the biblical context, however, Isaiah was speaking about the unjust judges in Israel. Instead of being fair and just, they were taking bribes. They were determining justice by the highest bidder. Rather than thoroughly investigating the cases, they were spending their time getting drunk in the clubs of those days.

God is against injustice at every level, including in ministry and in Christian service. Are you fair in the way you treat people in church appointments and rewards? Or do you play favorites? Do you have hidden agendas for your own advancement and praise, even though other people get stepped on or hurt in the process? Woe to those who are unjust!

In Isaiah 5 God pronounced six “woes” upon His people, Israel and Judah. Sadly, they all have their applications for today. God pronounces woes upon His wayward people.

Practical Application

Let’s not cause God to “whistle”!

Isaiah 5:24-30 - *“Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. ²⁵ Therefore the anger of the Lord is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. ²⁶ He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, and will whistle to them from the end of the earth; surely they shall come with speed, swiftly. ²⁷ No one will be weary or stumble among them. No one will slumber or sleep; nor will the belt on their loins be loosed, nor the strap of their sandals be broken; ²⁸ whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses’ hooves will seem like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. ²⁹ Their roaring will be like a lion. They will roar like young lions; yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey. They will carry it away safely, and no one will deliver. ³⁰ In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened by the clouds.”*

In this last section of Isaiah 5, we read further about the consequences of Israel’s sins. When the Lord would allow the enemy to come in and invade the land, it would be like a fierce prairie fire consuming dry grass (v24). So many people would die that the bodies would not receive proper burial, but would rot in the streets (v25). The Assyrians, and later the Babylonians, would come with well-trained armies and overtake the land (v26-28). As roaring lions carry off their prey, so God’s sinful people would be carried away into captivity and exile (v29-30).

When God said that He would “whistle” (v26), this meant that He would be summoning the foreign nations to come and invade Israel, to carry out God’s discipline on His people.

Is it possible that God must bring discipline into our lives because we have deliberately disobeyed Him or rebelled against Him?

Let’s heed the warning of Isaiah 5. Let’s not cause God to “whistle”!