EXEGESIS OF ISAIAH 5:1-7

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Introduction

Early in Isaiah comes a song or parable of a vineyard God has cultivated but which has produced bad fruit and will thus be destroyed. Isaiah 5:1-7 is structured partly as prophetic condemnation and partly as prosecution of sin. The song with its personification imagery is the author's unique way to draw the eighth-century B.C. Judean audience to empathize with the charges against them, before they realize they are implicated.

Isaiah 5:1-7 continues to develop the themes of rebellion and judgment introduced in Isaiah 1 and prepares readers for the discussion of their spiritual blindness in Isaiah 6. Through the story of the vineyard, the author taps into the earliest audience's emotions, in an effort to speak through their spiritual blindness and help them recognize how their rebellious behavior has harmed people, corrupted the land, brought judgment and destruction, and dishonored God's care of them. While this passage focuses entirely on the people's bad fruit and the impending judgment that will take place, the story is set in the larger context of Isaiah, in which a call to repentance can bring people back into God's restoration plan.

I. Translation

5:1
אָשִׁירָה נָּא לִידִידִי שִׁירַת דּוֹדִי לְכַרְמוֹ כֶּרֶם הָיָה לִידִידִי בְּקֶרֶן בֶּן-שָׁמֶן

I will sing (Qal Jussive[1] 1cs שִׁיר), please,[2] for my beloved a song of my beloved of his vineyard. A vineyard is (Qal Perfect 3ms הִיה) to my beloved on a hillside[3] in a fat (i.e., fertile) field.

[1] I struggled with whether this was Imperfect or Jussive. I did not understand why the word ended with qamets heh. Then I remembered something from Cook and Holmstedt say, "The *first-person* Jussive forms (sometimes referred to as *Cohortatives*) often end with [qamets heh] in *all* [binyanim]," in John A. Cook and Robert Holmstedt, *Biblical Hebrew: A Grammar and Illustrated Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013),109. I looked up Cohortatives in Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65, section 3.3.3, and found that with first-person subjects, the cohortative "emphasizes the determination behind the action, or one's personal interest in it." I translated this as "I will sing" because the "resolve" function seemed most appropriate in this context.

I will sing for my beloved a song of my beloved about his vineyard. My beloved has a vineyard on a hillside in a fertile field.

5:2
וַיְעַזְּקֵהוּ וַיְסַקְּלֵהוּ וַיִּטָּעֵהוּ שֹׂרֵק וַיִּבֶן מִגְדָּל בְּתוֹכוֹ וְגַם-יֶקֶב חָצֵב בּוֹ וַיְקַו לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲנָבִים וַיַּעַשׂ בְּאֻשִׁים

He dug it (Piel Past Narrative 3ms עזק), and cleared it (Piel Past Narrative 3ms סקל) of stones, and planted it [with] (Qal Past Narrative 3ms נטע) a choice kind of grapes. He built (Qal Past Narrative 3ms בנה) a tower in the middle of it, and also a wine-vat he hewed out (Qal Perfect 3ms חצב) in it. He looked eagerly (Piel Imperfect 3ms קוה) for [it] to yield[4] (Qal Infinitive עשה) grapes. But it produced (Qal Imperfect 3ms עשה) bitter grapes.[5]

He dug it out, cleared it of stones, and planted it with a choice kind of grapes. He built a tower in the middle of it, and he also hewed out a wine-vat in it. He looked eagerly for it to yield grapes. But it produced bitter grapes.

5:3
וְעַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב יְרוּשָׁלַ͏ִם וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה שִׁפְטוּ-נָא בֵּינִי וּבֵין כַּרְמִי

And now, inhabitants[6] of Jerusalem and men[7] of Judah, judge (Qal Imperative 2mp שׁפט) please between me and between my vineyard.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between me and my vineyard.

5:4
מַה-לַּעֲשׂוֹת עוֹד לְכַרְמִי וְלֹא עָשִׂיתִי בּוֹ מַדּוּעַ קִוֵּיתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲנָבִים וַיַּעַשׂ בְּאֻשִׁים

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[2] According to Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* , "the particle נָא, which is frequently added to all three volitive modals (imperatives, jussives, and cohortatives), evinces no discernable difference in meaning," 65, section 3.3.2. It can be translated as "please" or "I pray," or it can go untranslated (probably untranslated in this sentence). In that same section 3.3.2, they discuss more about the different views behind the use of this particle in this situation.

[3] Watts notes that this word, normally defined as "horn," refers to land only in the Old Testament. John D. W. Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 55.

[4] The III ה infinitive has a וֹת ending, according to Cook and Holmstedt, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*, Appendix a-37. The לַ in לַעֲשׂוֹת goes with the preceding verb וַיְקַו according to the Holladay lexicon. William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971).

[5] The Holladay lexicon offers "sour" or "unripe" grapes and makes additional note of the use of "wild grapes" Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Given the context that the grapes are unusable for wine, I described them as bitter grapes (similar to sour but seemed to better describe grapes unusable for wine). However, I do not know enough about the cultural context to determine whether "wild grapes" might be a more appropriate translation. I am curious to know where that particular translation originated and why.

[6] This seems to be a collective noun that appears to be singular but would be translated as plural. Waltke and O'Connor indicate that these collective nouns may be different in Hebrew than what we would find in English. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 112, 7.1c under Chapter 7: "Number."

[7] See footnote 5.

What [was there] to do (Qal Infinitive עשה) more for my vineyard but not I did (Qal Perfect 1cs עשה) in it? Why I eagerly looked (Piel Imperfect 1cs קוה) for [it] to yield[8] (Qal Infinitive עשה) grapes, but it produced (Qal Past Narrative 3ms עשה) bitter grapes?

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I did not do? Why did I look eagerly for it to yield grapes, but it produced bitter grapes?

5:5
וְעַתָּה אוֹדִיעָה-נָּא אֶתְכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה לְכַרְמִי הָסֵר מְשׂוּכָתוֹ וְהָיָה לְבָעֵר פָּרֹץ גְּדֵרוֹ וְהָיָה לְמִרְמָס

And now I will make known[9] (Hifil Jussive 1cs ידע), please,[10] to you that which I am doing (Qal Active Participle ms עשה) to my vineyard. To remove[11] (Hifil Infinitive סור) its hedge and it will be (Qal Perfect 3ms היה) destroyed (Piel Infinitive בער), to break through (Qal Infinitive פרץ) its stone wall, and it will be (Qal Perfect 3ms היה) a trampled land.

And now I will make known to you what I am doing to my vineyard: I am going to remove its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I am going to break through its stone wall, and it will be a trampled land.

5:6
וַאֲשִׁיתֵהוּ בָתָּה לֹא יִזָּמֵר וְלֹא יֵעֲדֵר וְעָלָה שָׁמִיר וָשִׁית וְעַל הֶעָבִים אֲצַוֶּה מֵהַמְטִיר עָלָיו מָטָר

I will make it (Qal Past Narrative 1cs שׂית) a waste. It will not be pruned (Nifil Imperfect 3ms זמר), and it will not be weeded (Nifil Imperfect 3ms עדר), and will spring up (Qal Perfect 3ms עלה)[12] a thorn-bush and weeds. And I will lay charge (Piel Imperfect 1cs צוה) upon the rain-clouds to rain (Hifil Infinitive מטר) no rain.[13]

I will make it a wasteland. It will not be pruned, and it will not be weeded. A thorn bush and weeds will spring up in it. And I will lay charge upon the rain clouds to rain no rain.

5:7
כִּי כֶרֶם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה נְטַע שַׁעֲשׁוּעָיו וַיְקַו לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִנֵּה מִשְׂפָּח לִצְדָקָה וְהִנֵּה צְעָקָה

[8] See footnote 3.
[9] See footnote 1.
[10] See footnote 2. Probably untranslated here.
[11] I am not certain why infinitives are used in the second part of this verse. Arnold and Choi refer to the infinitive function of "imminence" that seems to apply to this context, which "expresses action expected soon or about to take place." Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* , 72, 3.4.1f. But this sentence doesn't follow the pattern exactly. With the "imminence" function, the infinitive should appear with ל. That is the case with לְבָעֵר but not with the others. The "imminence" function sometimes includes a form of וְהָיָה which also applies in this sentence; however, that function is supposed to work with the past narrative, and that does not apply in this sentence. So I am still uncertain regarding why infinitives are used in this sentence, or how best to translate them. I opted for something that sounded like "imminence."
[12] The verb ending looks singular, but there is a compound subject (or seems to be); unless the waw in וָשִׁית is translated as "with" and not "and" (however, "thorn bush" and "weeds" seem like distinct objects that would take "and").
[13] Privative use of מִן. Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* , 118.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts [is] the house of Israel and the men[14] of Judah [are] the planting of his delight.[15] He looked eagerly (Piel Past Narrative 3ms קוה) for justice, and behold, bloodshed;[16] for righteousness, and behold, an outcry.[17]
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his delightful planting. He looked eagerly for justice, and behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, and behold, an outcry.

II. Referential Historical Context

Isaiah 5 falls within the timeframe of Isaiah's lifetime, during the years from 739-701 B.C.[18] The Assyrian empire was in its final ascendency after a period of relative peace throughout the region. Unfortunately for Judah, under the reign of King Uzziah, that time of peace had been equated mistakenly with God's blessings.[19] When the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III came to power in 745 B.C., Assyria became stronger, more demanding, and set its sights on expansion of territory.[20] Geographically, this expansion meant east and also west toward the kingdom of Judah. In 735 B.C. Judah's new King Ahaz sought an alliance with Assyria, especially in light of threats from the northern kingdom of Israel and Damascus.[21] Oswalt explains that the prophet Isaiah saw this move as "turning away from trusting God" and toward an Assyrian presence that did not have Judah's best interests at heart.[22] This is the

[14] See footnote 5.
[15] This genitive relationship seems to have an attributive function, so I translated "the planting of his delight" into "his delightful planting."
[16] Brown-Driver-Briggs defines this word as "probably outpouring (of blood), bloodshed," replacing ס with ש to mirror the look and sound of מִשְׁפָּט. Strong's defines this word as "oppression" based on the word סִפּוּח meaning "slaughter and oppression" or "to shed blood."
[17] This word is variously described as a cry, an outcry, a loud and bitter cry, a call for help, and wailing. The translation "an outcry" seemed to combine those qualities in a way that is strong enough and makes sense within this context.
[18] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 1986), Kindle edition, 13.
[19] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 14.
[20] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 15.
[21] John Muddiman and John Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 433.
[22] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 16.

historical and political setting in which Isaiah delivers both the condemnation of wild grapes in God's vineyard and the threat of future attack and destruction.

Yee observes that the vineyard imagery of Isaiah 5:1-7 would have been understood in Judah as referring to the northern kingdom of Israel.[23] The vineyard imagery would lead the Judean hearers to condemn Israel without realizing the passage is addressed to Judah as well. Poe Hays disagrees with the identification of the vineyard with the northern kingdom but agrees that the Judean audience would not initially have identified themselves with the vineyard.[24] In whatever ways the earliest readers and hearers of Isaiah understood the imagery, it is possible they would have begun the passage empathetic with the vineyard owner, and concluded the passage recognizing their own guilt in producing wild grapes displeasing to God.

III. Overall Theme and Flow of the Passage

A. Form

Oswalt notes "little agreement concerning the poetic structure or the exact nature of the genre."[25] Given the emphasis on a single message in this passage, he suggests the story in Isaiah 5:1-7 is a parable. Muddiman and Barton note that a parable is rare in prophetic literature.[26] Childs observes a combination of wisdom and prophetic judgment elements in this passage.[27] The wisdom elements can be seen through the indeterminate language and imagery with its intention to engage and puzzle the audience.[28]

[23] Gale A. Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," *CBQ* 43 (1981), 38.
[24] Rebecca W. Poe Hays, "Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah's Vineyard (5:1-7) and Its Relation to the 'Daughter Zion' Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135 (2016): 749.
[25] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39, 228.*
[26] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 442.
[27] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Kindle edition, Loc. 1449.
[28] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1459.

While this passage is sometimes described as a song based on the words of verse 1, the song offered in the opening line is later discovered to be a complaint.[29] Muddiman and Barton note two possibilities as to where the song begins. They refer to Petersen and Richards (1992) who describe verses 1-2 as the setting, while the song begins in verse 3; and a more traditional view that verses 1-2 are the song, while verses 3-6 are spoken by the owner of the vineyard.[30]

The author of Isaiah describes this passage as a שִׁירָה, or song, and Yee notes a precedent in Deuteronomy 32 of a biblical song with legal elements.[31] The song in Deuteronomy is written at the prompting of God in circumstances similar to Isaiah 5:1-7: "a prediction of Israel's transgressions of the covenant."[32] Deuteronomy 32:7-14 includes evidence of God's benevolence[33] similar to Isaiah 5:2-4. Because differences exist in the form, Yee concludes that Isaiah 5:1-7 is not only a song but also a juridical parable, similar to 2 Samuel 12:1-14.[34] A juridical parable "provokes the hearer to condemn himself."[35] Regardless of the exact form, Isaiah 5:1-7 seems structured to draw eighth-century Judean readers into judging themselves, possibly before they reach the revelation in verse 7 that identifies them as a guilty party.

In terms of prophetic structure, this passage seems structured primarily as prophetic condemnation, along with aspects of prosecution of sin.

1. Prophetic Condemnation

The condemnation in verses 5-7 is similar to the judgment given in Micah 1:2-7, including the reference to the vineyard and its stones. Unlike the passage in Micah, Isaiah 5:1-7 weaves the condemnation into something that sounds like a song of lament. The condemnation is

[29] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1461.
[30] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 442.
[31] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," *CBQ* 43 (1981), 31.
[32] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," 31.
[33] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," 32.
[34] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," 33.
[35] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," 33.

also pronounced before the identity of the vineyard is revealed. The author seems to use these emotional and metaphorical strategies to heighten the reader's sense of guilt.

a. Depiction of Situation

Verse 2 describes the effort that went into preparing, planting, and nurturing the garden, along with the disappointing outcome of the wild grapes. The situation is echoed at the end of the passage in verse 7, where God has not found what he was looking for from His people.

b. Messenger Formula

This passage does not contain a direct statement such as, "Thus says the LORD." Rather, the initial messenger announces his intention to sing a song about the situation. The voice changes starting with verse 3, where the singer no longer speaks, but rather the beloved owner of the vineyard speaks.

c. "Therefore"

In verse 5a, the vineyard owner expresses his intention to announce what he will do to the vineyard.

d. Prediction of Judgment

In the remainder of verse 5 and verse 6, the owner of the vineyard describes the condemnation that will follow his actions against the vineyard.

2. Prosecution of Sin

This passage takes on the notes of a trial in verse 3, when the readers are invited to judge between the vineyard owner and his vineyard.

a. Preparations for Trial

The opening song prepares the reader with the background information of what is at stake in this trial: the owner has taken diligent and loving care of the vineyard, and yet only wild grapes have been produced.

b. Cross-Examination (Questions)

The vineyard owner asks the readers (who do not yet know they are the accused) what more he could have done for his vineyard and why the vineyard did not produce as he expected (verse 4). This is a rhetorical question because the singer has already made the case that the vineyard owner has done everything possible (verses 1-2). Muddiman and Barton describe verses 1-4 as evidence of "God's kindness to his people" but not necessarily a defense, given that the speaker (God) renders judgment in verse 5.[36] The one defending himself would not give the judgment, although in verse 3 the people are asked to judge.[37]

Oswalt notes that vineyard cultivation was common in Judea.[38] By verse 4, readers who had any experience with working and living off the land would already have empathized with the frustrated vineyard owner. The question would have sounded rhetorical to them as well.

At the same time, Oswalt notes that audience participation would have been common at the earliest time of hearing this passage. The audience probably would have answered the speaker's rhetorical question with a resounding "nothing" or worse – made their own invectives regarding how they would have treated that worthless piece of property.[39] In this way, the author draws readers further into the judgment that (unbeknownst to them) is against themselves.

c. Accusatory Address (Accusations)

In verse 2b, the singer gives the initial accusation of the inappropriate grapes the vineyard has produced. The accusation becomes more direct in verse 7, after the accused is identified and

[36] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 442.
[37] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," 33.
[38] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 232.
[39] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 232.

called out for the specific sins of bloodshed and the cries of those harmed. Childs considers the owner's first question (see I.2.b.) as part of the accusation.[40]

d. Declaration of Guilt

In verse 5, the vineyard owner introduces a verdict. There is no direct statement of guilt. Rather, the reader assumes from verse 2b that the vineyard owner is not happy with the production of wild grapes; and the reader assumes from the condemnation threats that follow that the verdict is "guilty." Muddiman and Barton note that the guilt is assumed based on the announcement of punishment in verses 5-6.[41] However, the greater impact comes from the structure used by the author, who in verses 3-4 invites the reader himself to render a verdict. The final declaration of guilt comes in verse 7b.

e. Condemnation Threats

Verses 5 and 6 describe the condemnation threats. The vineyard owner will remove his protection and nurturing. The vineyard will suffer the consequences of its own actions, presumably at the hand of attackers (no walls and hedges to protect, verse 5) and through its own unclean behavior (no pruning, verse 6). Additionally, the vineyard owner will make a direct action against the vineyard by commanding the clouds not to produce rain.

B. Overall Rhetorical Flow

This passage can be divided into four paragraphs. The first three paragraphs contain two verses (verses 1-2, 3-4, 5-6) and are followed by the last verse that stands alone (verse 7). Oswalt uses the same division, with the term "segments" instead of paragraphs.[42]

The passage opens (verses 1-2) and closes (verse 7) with the voice of a friend of the vineyard owner, speaking in third person about the vineyard owner and the problems with his

[40] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1466.
[41] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 442.
[42] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 228.

vineyard. In the closing paragraph (verse 7), the identity of the vineyard and its owner are revealed. Verse 7 has the tone of a prophetic voice, which may be the same voice of the friend in verses 1-2. However, Muddiman and Barton identify the prophet as the speaker of verses 1-2 and YHWH as the speaker in the remainder of the passage,[43] including verse 7.

Between the opening and the closing are two paragraphs (verses 3-4 and 5-6) with a change of speaker: the vineyard owner now addresses the audience. In verses 3-4, the vineyard owner engages the audience for a response to his questions. Focusing on this passage as symbolic of a family court matter between a husband (YHWH) and his unfaithful bride (Israel), Watts notes four speakers: the friend (symbolic of the intermediary between a bride and bridegroom), the husband, YHWH, and the prophet.[44]

Following is the basic outline of this story:

In verses 1-2, the narrator describes the loving way the owner has tended to his vineyard, with a sad outcome at the end of verse 2.

In verses 3-4, the vineyard owner asks the audience to judge by answering his questions.

In verses 5-6, the vineyard owner gives his own verdict of the destruction he will bring to his vineyard.

In verse 7, the narrator (possibly the same one in verses 1-2) reveals that the vineyard owner is God and the vineyard planting gone awry is the people of Judah.

The vineyard owner's frustration and disappointment is felt in increasing degrees through each set of two verses. Through this progression of intensified frustration, with an audience familiar with farming and cultivation of vineyards, the author is able to bring the audience along in empathy with his situation.

[43] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 442.
[44] Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, 54.

The audience can surely identify with his dismay at the end of verse 2, is invited to judge the situation in verse 3, can agree with his frustration in verse 4, and probably feels the same destructive frustration expressed in verses 5-6. This strategy should heighten the readers' horror in verse 7, as they realize they are the source of God's frustration and dismay.

By inviting the readers' participation in verses 3-4, the author has also allowed the readers to judge themselves before they know the identity of the vineyard and its owner.

Identification is a key strategy in the structure of this passage. By initially withholding the identity of the vineyard and its owner, and by inviting and encouraging the readers to identify with the plight of the owner, the author has allowed the readers to judge and condemn themselves and to agree that the verdict of verses 5-6 is warranted. Judah has sown the seeds of its own destruction and now has agreed to this destructive judgment.

IV. Verse by Verse Analysis

A. Song of the Vineyard (5:1-2)

The author uses a subtle personification in his description of the vineyard and the emotional response of the owner toward his vineyard. The personification does not become clear until the identity of the vineyard and owner are revealed in verse 7. Until that point, a reader, especially one who works the land, might not see anything deeper than the description of an actual vineyard. However, the emotion of the vineyard owner – both the positive aspects of care for the vineyard and the negative aspects of disappointment and anger toward the vineyard – seem to stretch beyond a farmer's relationship with his land. Telling the story by song intensifies this emotional relationship. Even without the revelation of verse 7, the initial story sounds as if the narrator and vineyard owner are describing a person.

Goldingay observes that people listening to Isaiah 5:1-7 might have expected a love ballad, especially given the prevalence of vineyard imagery in love poems. People would have commiserated with the love-gone-bad turn the song quickly takes and would have empathized with the vineyard owner whose "courting gets him nowhere."[45] As the author taps into the hearer's emotions, the hearer unknowingly begins to empathize with God's plight toward His people.

Watts connects the story of the vineyard with the pronouncement of Isaiah 3:14: that the leaders have destroyed God's vineyard.[46] The imagery comes full circle in reflecting the description of the remnant in Isaiah 4:2.[47] Even though the revelation of identity does not arrive until the end of the vineyard story in Isaiah 5:7, the imagery and its implications should already be familiar to readers. Given that Isaiah 6 notes the blindness of the people to the reality of their situation, the impact of Isaiah 5:1-7 helps readers understand the true meaning of the earlier vineyard references. The placement of Isaiah 5:1-7 before the seemingly misplaced introduction of Isaiah 6 might be intended to prepare the hearts of the readers for the true situation of blindness revealed in Isaiah 6.

1. Narrator Sings of Beloved's Vineyard (5:1)

The opening line (5:1a) introduces the song that will follow. The next four lines are the content of the song. The first line of the song (5:1b) introduces the singer's beloved and his beloved's vineyard. The next three lines include a relationship of specification, describing how the vineyard was created.

[45] John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 20.
[46] Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, 51.
[47] Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, 51.

These lines also include a relationship of intensification, as each line shows an increasing amount of care lavished on the vineyard by the owner. Just when the reader thinks the owner has done enough, the owner does even more. For example, וְגַם in verse 2 tells the reader "and [he; the owner] even" hewed out a wine-vat in the vineyard.

In explaining the process of cultivating a vineyard in this historical context, Oswalt indicates that stones left over from building the wall could be used to construct a tower, "if the owner possessed enough energy and interest."[48] This understanding adds further meaning to the intensification in these lines. Clearly the owner did have the desire to put in the extra work of building the tower.

Through this structure of intensification, the author removes any question the reader might have about how the owner has cared for the vineyard. This intensification of the owner's care also sets up the reader for the intensification of God's anger (after He is revealed as the owner) that occurs in the remainder of Isaiah 5.

This paragraph ends with a contrast. Through the detailed buildup, the vineyard owner and even the reader would expect a good crop. Yet the final line ends when the singer laments that the vineyard has produced wild grapes instead.

Connecting this verse back to the Daughter Zion imagery of Isaiah 1:8, Poe Hays suggests that the vineyard be understood as representative of a woman, based on a combination of characteristics: the common association of vineyards with women in writing of that time period; the love song aspect of the passage; the linguistically feminine concept of cities; and the Daughter Zion references of Isaiah 1-4 that lead into this passage.[49] Personification draws the reader more deeply in to hear the truth of the passage. Feminine personification accentuates the

[48] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 230.
[49] Rebecca W. Poe Hays, "Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah's Vineyard (5:1-7) and Its Relation to the 'Daughter Zion' Tradition," 752.

relationship between Zion and YHWH, especially Zion's failure to live up to her side of the relationship. Poe Hays observes that early readers of this passage would have understood the socio-cultural expectations of this personified relationship and would have sided with the vineyard owner.[50] While different meanings may be connected with the vineyard imagery, the common thread seems to be the author's intent to draw out the earliest reader's empathy with the vineyard owner.

2. Care for the Vineyard (5:2)

A wine-vat was used to collect the juice from the grapes in order to make wine.[51] The owner expected that the grapes would be able to produce wine. Instead they were too bitter to make wine. It is important to note also the length of time the owner would have waited for the grapes to develop. From the time of planting the vines, the owner would have waited two years for a harvest of grapes.[52] It is no wonder the owner waits expectantly (וַיְקַו – "he waited expectantly or looked eagerly") and is extremely disappointed. The wild grapes that appear are known as "stinkers,"[53] "unripe fruit" with "a bad smell, stink," with "a bitter, sour taste," "spoiled," and "decayed, rotten."[54] Poe Hays notes that even though the passage is an allegory, the symbols of the tower and wine-vat closely represent the Zion tradition of God's protection and that the expectation of a good harvest reflects God's intended blessing.[55]

[50] Rebecca W. Poe Hays, "Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah's Vineyard (5:1-7) and Its Relation to the 'Daughter Zion' Tradition," 759.
[51] Childs, *Isaiah,* Loc. 1462.
[52] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 231.
[53] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 442.
[54] Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, 55.
[55] Rebecca W. Poe Hays, "Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah's Vineyard (5:1-7) and Its Relation to the 'Daughter Zion' Tradition," 754.

B. Inviting the Reader to Judge (5:3-4)

This entire paragraph is structured to actively engage the reader's participation in the plight of the vineyard and its owner. Verse 3 contains two lines structured as a continuation: address and invitation for a response.

The two lines of verse 4 reflect the vineyard owner's questions. The second line intensifies the first. The owner first asks what more he could have done. The implied answer is "nothing." He follows that question with his plaintive, "Why?" He has done all he can, and still it did not work. Having done all and lost is a terrible situation. His "why" reinforces his puzzlement (having done all, it should have worked) and brings even greater emotional intensity for the reader, who is now lamenting with the owner.

Beginning with verse 3, not only is the audience addressed more directly, but there is also a change of speaker. Childs also notes this "unexpected shift of speakers,"[56] along with a corresponding change of tone.[57] The shift is reinforced with the adverb וְעַתָּה ("and now").[58]

In verses 1-2, the narrator was a person singing about his beloved's vineyard. In verse 3, suddenly the vineyard owner is the speaker. He remains the speaker until verse 7, when someone (perhaps the original singer) again refers in third person to the vineyard owner, who is revealed in that verse as God.

In verse 7, the speaker no longer addresses the audience in second person. Most likely this shift takes place to allow the audience to identify themselves as the people of Judah. The structure and tone throughout this passage seem intended to help the audience identify and acknowledge what they have done in God's eyes. In this regard, the author does not simply offer

[56] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1464.
[57] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1465.
[58] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1468.

a condemnation, but also gives the audience a chance to take responsibility for the sin and respond in agreement.

1. Invitation to Judge (5:3)

By inviting the Judean audience to judge, the author gives them the opportunity to render for themselves the verdict that God is going to render against Judah. Oswalt equates this with the strategy used by the prophet Nathan to allow David to judge himself (II Samuel 12:1-7).[59] Watts reminds the reader that the passage does not include any response from the audience because ultimately they cannot judge themselves.[60]

2. Vineyard Owner's Questions (5:4)

As mentioned in III.2.b., the questions in this verse are rhetorical. Any farmer who has experienced a similar disappointment would not offer any real suggestion of something different the vineyard owner could have done.

However, the questions serve an additional purpose. Without knowing it, the guilty party has been given an opportunity to respond through these questions. Most likely, readers would not offer any disagreement with the vineyard owner's lament or with his questions. After the revelation of verse 7, those accused might want to offer objections. These questions in verse 4 have already served to counter those objections – by the reader's own account.

C. Verdict for the Vineyard (5:5-6)

In the first line of verse 5, the owner announces what he will do to his vineyard. The shift from engagement with the reader to owner's verdict is marked by the adverb וְעַתָּה ("and now") – similarly to how the shift of speaker was marked in verse 3.[61]

[59] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 228.
[60] Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33,* 54.
[61] Childs, *Isaiah,* Loc. 1468.

The four lines that follow the introductory line of verse 5 have a similar structure of continuation: "I will … it shall," with an additional part to the third line; this additional detail serves to show doubly how the owner will make the vineyard a waste.

These four lines might be categorized as hyperbole because the anticipated result is extreme: "devoured," "trampled down," "waste," "no rain." This outcome is not literal, even in the worst moments of Judah's fate. People continued to live in the land; surely it rained and people ate to stay alive.

Yet through hyperbole, these words capture emotionally the devastation that Judah would experience at the hands of the Assyrians and later the Babylonians. In looking back after the devastation, people would have certainly "seen" and felt what happened in these extreme terms, and even more so because they had expected God's protection and blessing.

1. Announcement of Verdict (5:5a)

Oswalt observes that the author wants to make clear that the owner will not merely abandon a field that has produced wild grapes, as some owners might. Rather, he will very intentionally set up the vineyard for its destruction.[62] This activity heightens the angry emotion of these lines. Additionally, the intended act of setting up the vineyard for destruction serves the purpose of judgment and purification given in Isaiah 4.

2. Protection to be Removed (5:5b)

Removal of protection would allow predators to come into the previously well-guarded vineyard and consume whatever is left of it. The imagery is very poignant because the owner is allowing the destruction not only of his vines and grapes, but also of his careful handiwork in constructing the vineyard. All the effort he put into making every aspect of the vineyard perfect, and all the extras he added to give his choicest vines the best possible opportunity, will be

[62] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 232.

destroyed as well. This verse makes clear to the reader that the vineyard owner will also take the brunt of this destruction in his heart.

Oswalt also notes that given the emergence of wild grapes, the vineyard owner is allowing the vineyard to "return to a wild state"[63] or the waste described in verse 6. In this regard, it appears that the grapes have chosen their preferred environment and have rejected the caring and cultivating hand of the vineyard owner.

3. No More Pruning (5:6a)

While the thought of pruning often sounds unpleasant, pruning provides ideal conditions for a plant's growth and helps it to prosper. Any gardener knows that when pruning is neglected, it takes almost no time for the garden to be overrun with weeds and decay, and for the plants to wither and fade. In contrast to the two lines that precede it and the line that follows it, where a specific action is threatened, this line threatens to withhold an action, i.e., pruning. Yet this withholding is equally as destructive as the other actions. Perhaps that is why this line contains three parts instead of two. The action is to make the vineyard a waste; the means is by withholding the actions of pruning.

4. Preventing Rain (5:6b)

While Childs notes that this action concerning command over the clouds and rain would have revealed God as the speaker and vineyard owner (i.e., only God could stop the clouds from raining),[64] Oswalt notes that God's identity might not be the immediate conclusion of the reader. He notes that a frustrated farmer who has tried to curse the land and threaten the clouds might

[63] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 232.
[64] Childs, *Isaiah,* Loc. 1470.

recognize his own behavior in this verse, and thus might still be empathizing with the frustrated vineyard owner.[65]

D. Revealing the Identity of the Vineyard (5:7)

Childs notes the relevance of a sociohistorical "tradition of the land as a sacred inheritance," as seen in I Kings 21.[66] This tradition adds meaning to the abuses cited in Isaiah 5:7. Connecting this verse back to Isaiah 3:14, where the people are judged for abuse of the vineyard, Childs observes how Isaiah 5:7 brings the threat of utter destruction in condemnation for these abuses.[67]

Verse 7 is in part a complaint against the behavior of God's people, spelled out in the specific woes in verses 8-23 that describe the injustices referred to in verse 7. Verses 8-10 in particular describe injustice in taking land from the poor. Davies examines two possibilities for the intended recipients of this complaint: creditors and royal officials.[68] Creditors, while not technically breaking the law, could engage in practices that would still harm the poor, such as the pledge of land to a creditor and reluctance to lend when a Sabbath year was approaching.[69] Thus, the intent of the law was not always manifested in the way the law was carried out. Isaiah 5:7 (and 5:8-10) might also refer to selfish motives of officials in making the land-related laws.[70] The issue of officials creating laws that were not equitable is addressed later in Isaiah 10:1-4.[71]

1. Vineyard Owner is God, and Grapes are People of Judah (5:7a)

The author reveals that the vineyard is a metaphor for the house of Israel, the pleasant planting is the people of Judah, and the vineyard owner is the LORD of hosts. Muddiman and

[65] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 232.
[66] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1505.
[67] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1505.
[68] Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Traditions of Israel* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement series, 16, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981), 88.
[69] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Traditions of Israel*, 67-72.
[70] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Traditions of Israel*, 80, 82-83.
[71] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Traditions of Israel*, 81.

Barton suggest that Israel and Judah are interchangeable in this verse. This interchange could indicate a later date for the final form, a date in which the entire community was called Israel.[72] It is also conceivable that the prophetic warning in this verse refers to the once unified people of God who are already torn apart and threatened with destruction at the time of writing. Clearly God had intended His vineyard to grow in unity from the outset; hence, the disappointing outcome and the focus on both Israel and Judah in His lament.

Chaney argues that because of agricultural development at the time of writing, the people represented by this verse were not the general population, but rather the elites.[73] Viticulture in this time period had a detrimental effect on the peasants, as reflected in Isaiah 3:12-15 and 5:8-10, Amos 5:11, as well as archaeological finds.[74] Chaney also suggests that the collective singular reference to the capital city of Jerusalem would possibly refer to the ruling officials,[75] and the reference to the house of Israel would likely refer to the dynastic house of the king.[76] Chaney's argument stands up well in light of God's anger at the injustices perpetuated against the peasants returning from exile (Isaiah 61:8). However, the corporate dimension of the judgments against the people for the sin of idolatry and other sins is made clear throughout Isaiah. Most likely Isaiah 5:1-7 reinforces both themes.

2. What God Has Discovered from His People (5:7b)

The last two lines of verse 7 represent parallelism on a phonological level, i.e., word play.

וַיְקַו לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִנֵּה מִשְׂפָּח לִצְדָקָה וְהִנֵּה צְעָקָה

[72] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 434.
[73] Mario L. Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addresses of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy." *Semeia* 87 (1999): 107.
[74] Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addresses of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy," 108-110.
[75] Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addresses of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy," 114.
[76] Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addresses of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy," 117.

In this sentence, מִשְׁפָּט (justice) looks and sounds similar to מִשְׁפָּח (bloodshed),[77] and צְדָקָה (righteousness) looks and sounds similar to צְעָקָה (an outcry). This word play draws closer attention from the reader, causing the reader to ponder the differences and meanings in the words. Slowing down to ponder helps the reader absorb the message more deeply and, in this case, reflect on how the reality of Judean society differs dramatically from God's intention.

Goldingay notes that the meaning of מִשְׁפָּט is difficult to render in English and that the closest meaning is derived from understanding "justice" in the context of "righteousness." He defines these two words together as "faithful exercise of power in the community."[78] He describes this faithful use of power as one that provides resources for the poor, ensures fair legal rulings, and offers faithful worship to YHWH.[79] The kind of leadership God expects is described of a future king who will rule with genuine justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:7).[80]

V. Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Context of the Book of Isaiah, the Canon, and Today's Culture

A. Book

Melugin raises the question of whether the warnings of Isaiah are a recital after the fact or might have been issued during the occasion of impending or current attacks, with the hope that a change toward purity and justice might have mitigated God's judgment (for example, Isaiah 1:5).[81] He notes that metaphorical language makes it difficult to reconstruct the historical setting[82] but is helpful in portraying "a frightening yet hopeful figurative world in which a

[77] See footnote 16. Goldingay suggests "Isaiah perhaps invented this word" so it could be paired with מִשְׁפָּט. Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, 22.
[78] Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, 21.
[79] Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, 21-22.
[80] Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, 28.
[81] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement series, 214, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 283, 289.
[82] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah*, 283.

community of faith might live, hear itself addressed by God and experience both judgment and anticipation of renewal."[83]

Muddiman and Barton note that whether a literary or historical approach is taken regarding Isaiah, the scholarly trend has focused on unity of the final form.[84] Isaiah 1-33 is characterized by warnings that the failures of the eighth-century B.C. Jewish faith community will lead to their judgment and punishment, a theme reflected in Isaiah 5:1-7.[85]

Goldingay encapsulates the problem facing eighth-century B.C. Judah as follows: YHWH has good plans for Judah, but they ignore and rebel against His ways. If they would change their ways, they would experience His blessings without judgment. They do not change, so the judgment occurs. But they still have a chance to become the people God intended, if they decide to change their ways.[86] Goldingay notes that Isaiah 5:1-7 expresses this problem, focusing on "Jerusalem as she is, and her punishment," and that this passage is part of a pattern in the first five chapters that alternates between present punishment and possibility of future restoration.[87] I would add that in the context of the restoration prophesied in the latter part of Isaiah, readers can also look back to Isaiah 5:1-7, especially the first part of verse 2, and see YHWH's heart for His people behind His judgment.

The parable of Isaiah 5:1-7 is particularized in verses 8-23, as the author identifies the bad grapes with ungodly behaviors (set off by "woes") in the remainder of Isaiah 5.[88] The parable sets the stage for these woes so the reader will understand why these woes come to be.[89]

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[83] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah*, 286.
[84] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 434.
[85] Muddiman and Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 436.
[86] Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, 20.
[87] Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book Called Isaiah: Diversity and Unity*, 31.
[88] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39,* 235.
[89] Watts, *World Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, 51.

The condemnation threat of Isaiah 5:5-6 is revisited more specifically in verses 5:26-30. Childs notes that the Assyrians are not identified at this point[90] as the "nation far off" in verse 26 that will come to "execute God's judgment."[91] What is clear is that the judgment will come. In the context of Isaiah 5:26-30, the metaphorical threat of Isaiah 5:5-6 takes on a much clearer meaning in terms of an attack by a neighboring power. All of Isaiah 5 together provides the backdrop for the decision of destruction revealed in Isaiah 6.

Poe Hays connects the vineyard description with the Daughter Zion passages in Isaiah 1-4.[92] The unfaithful Daughter Zion is left without protection (represented by the unprotected booth in Isaiah 1:7-8) and removed of all finery (Isaiah 3:18-26), conceptually similar to Isaiah 5:5-6.[93]

Isaiah 5:1-7 continues the theme of a legal dispute set out in Isaiah 1:1-20 between YHWH and the people.[94] Isaiah 5:1-7 also continues the theme of the "once-faithful-bride turned harlot" set out in Isaiah 1:21-26.[95] Also continued in Isaiah 5:1-7 is the theme from Isaiah 1:7-9 of devastation in the land.[96]

Melugin sees unity in the more judicial language of Isaiah 1:2-20 and the more pleading call for repentance and prophecy of coming judgment and purification in Isaiah 1:21-31.[97] Isaiah 5:1-7 must be seen not only in part (past hope and current condemnation) but also in light of this unity of judicial warning and prophecy of judgment with promise of restoration through repentance and purification. Isaiah 5:1-7 metaphorically shows the early Hebrew faith

[90] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1546.
[91] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1375.
[92] Poe Hays, "Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah's Vineyard (5:1-7) and Its Relation to the 'Daughter Zion' Tradition," 745.
[93] Poe Hays, "Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah's Vineyard (5:1-7) and Its Relation to the 'Daughter Zion' Tradition," 757.
[94] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah*, 290-291.
[95] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah*, 291.
[96] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah*, 298.
[97] Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *New Visions of Isaiah*, 294.

community what God intended for their care, flourishing, and blessing and what they wrought by their behavior. But in verse 7, the author gives the people a means to examine and realign their behavior if they are willing. Without the larger context, this story might end with verse 7. In the bigger context of Isaiah, verse 7 is also a place to begin again.

The larger context of Isaiah offers a redemptive lens through which to view their judgment. The destruction in this passage is not an end in itself, but makes way for redemption and restoration that follows later in Isaiah. Isaiah 5:1-7 also offers a glimpse into how much God has cared for His people and how His response of judgment arises from that care.

Childs draws a line from the "old song" of the vineyard to the beginnings of a "new song" in Isaiah 27 and continued in Isaiah 42. He notes that this theme then becomes a "persistent note of expectation and hope" in Israel's liturgy.[98]

B. Canon

Despite the larger and hopeful future context, Oswalt offers a reminder that Isaiah 5 is intended to address the "realities of Israel's condition at the moment of Isaiah's speaking."[99] This focus on the immediate condition of Judah invites readers to identify with the accusations and take the responsibility for sin. Looking back on this strategy in the context of the Canon as a whole, New Testament readers can see how this opportunity to take responsibility for sin necessitates and precedes the response of repentance that is thematic throughout the Gospels.

The vineyard imagery is also reflected in the parable of Matthew 21:33-46. While the focus of Matthew's parable is different from Isaiah 5:1-7, Childs notes a theological connection between the two concerning "God's claim to receive fruits of righteousness from the people."[100] Childs makes a further connection between the righteous fruit expected from God's vineyard to

[98] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1476.
[99] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 227.
[100] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1488.

the righteous fruit produced by abiding in the true vine (John 15:1-11).[101] John 15:2 also depicts the beneficence of pruning, adding to the significance of the removal of pruning in Isaiah 5:6.

Regarding the Old Testament, Childs notes similarities between Isaiah 5:7, within the larger context of Isaiah 5, and the accusations and judgment in Amos 2:6,[102] especially concerning the lack of righteous behavior and the way this lack brings harm to others. Yee notes similarities to the literary twist in this parable and the self-condemning twist in 2 Samuel 12:7.[103]

C. Today's Culture

Although the specific circumstances surrounding Isaiah 5:1-7 were anchored in a specific time period, the meaning of this text is relevant today. Like the earliest readers of verses 3-4, today's readers are called to recognize, acknowledge, and repent for the ways they are not following and trusting God, and for the ways they are not allowing Christ to be the Lord of their lives. This passage from Isaiah can help individuals and congregations feel the weight of the bitter fruit they allow to grow in their lives, and how that bitter fruit affects everyone around them. In the context of verse 7 and the remainder of Isaiah 5, individuals and congregations can examine the specific ways in which they may be producing good and bad fruit. They can also focus on what righteousness and justice look like in God's eyes, reexamine their own understanding to see how it lines up with God's, and assess what roles they are playing to help or hinder God's vision of a righteous and just community.

In the larger, redemptive context of the book of Isaiah, today's readers can recognize that when God invites their death to self and purification of heart, through sanctification and transformation, it is for their own good and it is based in His love for each person.

[101] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1488.
[102] Childs, *Isaiah*, Loc. 1529.
[103] Yee, "A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," *CBQ* 43 (1981), 39.

Similarly to John 15, Isaiah 5:1-7 teaches today's readers that to reflect God's character, they must abide in Him. They have a choice to grow bitter fruit (Hebrews 12:15) or the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The difference comes from allowing God full access to their hearts. Abiding means centering their lives in Christ and allowing His presence to fill them in each moment. Abiding means allowing God to care for, cultivate, protect, and prune their lives.

The imagery of the vineyard wall and tower is relevant to individuals who try and guard their own hearts. Self-protection of the heart is often a response to childhood wounding. Even for those who profess to give their hearts to Christ, it is difficult for them to allow God to dismantle certain walls and towers. Isaiah 5:1-7 delivers a message that may be difficult for people to hear. If they try to cultivate and protect their own vineyard with their own walls, ignoring God's help, the outcome will be destructive. The message of Isaiah 5:1-7 also allows people to see the love and attention God gives to protecting His people. It is a story that might help people to realize how much they can trust God with their hearts and lives.

Conclusion

While a variety of perspectives exist on the genre and form of Isaiah 5:1-7 and the symbolic or literal meaning of its imagery, a common conclusion is that the author constructed this passage to draw the earliest readers into empathizing with God's judgment of themselves. While scholars do not agree on the authorship or authorial historical setting of Isaiah, many scholars endeavor to see unity in the final form, which helps today's readers better understand the message in its original context and within the bigger picture of God's redemption narrative.

Isaiah places equal emphasis on the reality of idolatry and rebellion, the call for judgment, the need for repentance, and the promise of restoration. While these themes are dealt with separately in the different sections of Isaiah, each of these themes is woven throughout,

beckoning Old and New Testament readers to self-examination and the embrace of repentance leading to God's promised restoration. In a New Testament context, Isaiah presents the backdrop for a full understanding of atonement: creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. This full understanding of atonement is important for individuals and congregations that desire to embrace God's process of sanctification and transformation. Isaiah 5:1-7 and the larger context of Isaiah 5 provides keys to recognition of iniquity, the need for repentance, and the promise and hope of God's restoration plan in both its future and immediate context. While the fullness of the future promised in Isaiah has not yet arrived, the Messiah who leads with the righteousness and justice called for in Isaiah 5:7 offers repentance and the ability to produce the good fruit desired by God.

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