

God's Mercy in Judgment

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord sings a song over His vineyard—the nation of Israel. He goes into great detail describing how the owner of the vineyard had chosen fertile ground, tilled the soil, cleared it of stones and planted the choicest vines. He had built a winepress and looked for a crop of good grapes but only found bad fruit. Therefore, he was giving the vineyard over to be destroyed. Then the prophet makes it clear that the vineyard of the Lord is the nation of Israel.

When we read this song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, we think that perhaps it is all over for Israel. But later in chapter 27, the Lord tells Isaiah to sing another song about His vineyard, and in it, He declares that Israel will take root again and fill the whole earth with fruit. With this hope, Isaiah watched the people of the northern kingdom of Israel go into exile.

Isaiah's song of the vineyard expressed the Lord's tender love and care for His people. But they simply were not producing the fruit they were created for. So He raised up prophets to preach to them and to lead them back to Him. When that did not work, He allowed their enemies to begin to defeat them, and, little by little, they lost territory until their kingdom was reduced to the capital city. But the people did not heed the prophets nor the warnings, and eventually, the end came.

One kingdom was down, and while it would take another 150 years, there was one to go—Judah. God had promised His people safety and security if they obeyed his commandments and lived in covenant and fellowship with Him. He had also promised their lack of safety and security and warned of eventual exile from the land if they disobeyed Him.

In the song over the vineyard, the owner asks the people,

“What more could I have done?” (Isa. 5:4). His mercy had run out. But even in judgment there is hope of a future return and the fulfillment of God’s promises to use this vineyard to bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3).

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