

Isaiah 1-5

Judgment and Salvation

→ Isaiah 1:1-20

Isaiah 1:1

ISA 1:1 The **vision** concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz **saw** during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

--Note that the prophet “saw” the “vision.” The prophecy of Isaiah was something that could be seen. It was a physical entity that could be seen and delivered.

--Isaiah 1 is likely a collection of Isaiah’s prophecies placed at the beginning of the book as an introduction. The major themes of the book are revealed in this chapter in a rather briefer form.

Isaiah 1:2-3

--Witnesses to Rebellion

ISA 1:2 Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken:

"I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

ISA 1:3 The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

--Heavens & earth are called as witnesses to a crime, a rebellion against God. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah was building a message based on Deuteronomy 32:1. Compare this to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1ff:

DT 32:1 Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

DT 32:2 Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.

DT 32:3 I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

DT 32:4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.

A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

DT 32:5 They have acted corruptly toward him;

to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation.

DT 32:6 Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people?

Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

--“Children”

--Israel is compared to ungrateful children. After their father provided everything that they needed and brought them to maturity, Israel has rejected their God. At the founding of their covenant with the LORD (i.e. Exodus 19 or 34), the Israelites agreed to obey in return for a land, a nation, and a life of peace and rest. God provided the land, the nation, and the life of peace and rest; but Israel had broken the relationship of trust with God.

--“Ox” and “Donkey”

--Israel is contrasted to the “ox” and “donkey.” The ox and donkey know the identity of their masters, and they know the location of their homes & food. Israel, on the other hand, has forgotten their master—their Lord—and rebelled against Him.

--“Know”—

--The word “know” (*yada* ׃) is often considered a covenant term. It is used in covenant contexts and to “know” God is to be in covenant with Him. Hosea, also an 8th century prophet, also condemned Israel for lack of “knowledge” (Hosea 4:6, & see also Proverbs 1:29, 2:5, & 8:10). Amos said that Israel was “known” by the Lord, and actually the term means and is usually translated as “chosen” (Amos 3:1).

--They have no true knowledge of God (i.e. relationship with Him), nor have they “acquired understanding,” which is probably a good translation of the last Hebrew term in the verse.

Isaiah 1:4-9

--Evidence toward Judgment--

ISA 1:4 Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt,
a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.

--Taunt or Lament?

--Some have called this a “taunt song,” mocking Israel for its pride & rebellion.

--Rather, most today seem to see this as a “lament” or “dirge.” It is basically a funeral song, lamenting the fact of their death. If this is correct, then the prophet is announcing the death of Israel even while the nation was alive and well. There is a spiritual truth here. Without an active relationship with the Lord, we are spiritually dead, even if we look alive—even if we talk spiritually—even if we look spiritual—even if we are active worshippers.

--“Sinful nation”

--Israel is a people of “sin” (*chata*׳t חַטָּאת), “guilt” or “iniquity” (*avon* אָוֹן), and a land of “evildoers.” These terms denote, along with “rebelled” (*pesha*׳ עֲשָׂפָה) in 1:2, the totality of Israel’s existence. Their history since the time of the judges has been one of rebellion, of falling short of God’s covenant, and of guilty wickedness.

--Broken covenant

--These are three synonymous descriptions of actions of rebellion. Israel has “forsaken,” “spurned,” and “turned their backs” on their God. This is deliberate act of breaking the covenant, even though the term is not used here. [Isaiah’s lack of the use of the term “covenant” has been explained in many ways. The bottom line may be that the term “covenant” was primarily, albeit not exclusively, used as the defining definition of Israel and God’s relationship at a later time, say the 7th rather than the 8th century. In other words, the term was not unknown in earlier times, but it came into popular use at a later time.]

--“Holy One of Israel”—This title for God is used 26 times, as well as “Holy One of Jacob” once and “Holy One” twice. A major theme of Isaiah is the holiness of God (i.e. Isaiah 6). God, the LORD, the “Holy One,” is the only Lord, God, and king of his people. He is worthy of praise, honor, worship, and obedience.

--Lament Over the condition of Israel

--Mortally Wounded

ISA 1:5 Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion?
Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted.

ISA 1:6 From the sole of your foot to the top of your head
there is no soundness--only wounds and welts
and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

--The image here is a mutilated human body. From head to foot the body is covered with wounds. The wounds are open and oozing. The sores lie unmedicated and unbandaged. For all practical purposes the body is dead.
--Also, note that the “heart” of the body is also afflicted. Both the internal and external of the body—Israel—is damaged, and perhaps even destroyed.
--The point here, again, is that Israel is already destroyed—even though they do not know it. This is the message of Isaiah’s commission in chapter 6. The Israelites have already committed fatal rebellion, but they continue to walk wounded. The message is that they will fall!

--Totally destroyed

ISA 1:7 Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire;
your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you,
laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

--The body imagery is now changed to national imagery. The nation is destroyed—country, cities, & fields. Everything is destroyed.
--And that destruction has been wrought by foreigners. Here we have a new matter introduced. God will use foreigners to bring his judgment on His rebellious people. This will, of course, be a major theme of Isaiah as his prophecy unfolds.

--Completely Desolate

ISA 1:8 The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard,
like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege.
ISA 1:9 Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors,
we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

--The vineyard is an image used more than once by Isaiah (3:14, 5:1-7). The vineyard was a symbol of prosperity. In chapter 5, Israel is pictured as a prosperous vineyard that has rejected the benefactor of the vineyard. Therefore, the picture is the same as earlier in this chapter. Israel has rebelled against the LORD, who gave them everything they needed.
--Because of their rebellion, they are left desolate, abandoned to the ravages of enemies. They are judged for their rebellion.
--However, there is still hope for a remnant. Israel will be judged, but it will not become like Sodom—erased from history. There is still a measure of hope (as seen in 6:13).

Isaiah 1:10-17

--The Sacrifices of Sodom

ISA 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom;

listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

ISA 1:11 "The multitude of your sacrifices--what are they to me?" says the LORD.

"I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

ISA 1:12 When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?

ISA 1:13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me.

New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations--I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

ISA 1:14 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates.

They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

ISA 1:15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you;
even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen.

--The leaders of Israel are compared to the rulers of Sodom, a slap of insult to the apparently proud leaders of "God's chosen people." This condemnation would certainly have been met with disdain & disbelief. So Isaiah lays a foundation for his word of judgment.

--The LORD has rejected their religious rituals—all of them! He has no pleasure in sacrifices or offerings. He detests their incense (prayers?). In essence, these things make him sick! He is not able to withstand their festivals and gatherings. He will not hear their prayers.

--He considers their actions in attempt to reach out to him as a "trampling of my courts" and "a burden." Like in Amos 5:21ff, God has rejected their acts of worship because they have ceased to be true worship. But how can we know that our worship is no longer true and pure?

--Do what is right!

ISA 1:15d Your hands are full of blood;

ISA 1:16 wash and make yourselves clean.

Take your evil deeds out of my sight!

Stop doing wrong,

ISA 1:17 learn to do right!

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.

Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

--Their lives do not support their purported belief & rituals. Unless worship changes lives and leads the worshiper to a righteous life, the worship is worthless. This is a continual message of the prophets (Amos 5:21-25, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:8, Jer. 7). One can easily trust in ritual to make one right with God and find that God has ultimately rejected the actions meant to bring one to God!

--"Righteousness" & "justice" are the prophetic description of the life lived for God. They are commonly defined by caring for the oppressed, the orphan, and widow, as is the case here. Note that James, in the NT, makes the same description of "true religion" (James 1:26-27).

Isaiah 1:18-20

--On to Judgment!

ISA 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD.

"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

ISA 1:19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land;

ISA 1:20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword."

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

--In light of the evidence, the LORD in essence calls for a council. This meeting is a call for covenant renewal, like that found in Exodus 34, Joshua 24, Ezra 9-10, or Nehemiah 9. Their sins can be removed and they can be purified, but only by returning to faithfulness. Resistance will result in destruction—"devoured by the sword."

→ Isaiah 2:1-5

--Isaiah 2-4 is a single literary unity, note the introduction on 2:1. It begins and ends with messages of hope, but sandwiched in between are several messages of judgment. This juxtaposition of hope and judgment is difficult for the modern reader, but is nonetheless a common feature of biblical prophecy.

--Isaiah 2:2-4 & Micah 4:1-3 are almost identical, even in the Hebrew text. Why?

--One of the prophets used the other's words.

--Both prophets used an existing prophetic oracle. Either of these are possible, and while the true answer means little for interpretation this is an interesting phenomenon.

Isa 2:2 In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

--"The Last days"

--The "last days" can mean either the coming days of judgment or the coming days of hope. The prophetic timeline is not as careful as the modern calendar. The truth is that the biblical writers were not as concerned with linear time as the modern reader tends to be. The primary issue was that God was in control of history—for hope and for judgment. But in the end, He would be fair.

--Here the "last days" are quite obviously eschatological days of hope. The text is normally read as a messianic text. These days will be ushered in by the advent of the messiah. Much of the same language is used in Revelation.

--Two aspects of the "last days," or eschatological age are emphasized here:

1. The LORD will be the center. His mountain, His temple, His dwelling place, will be the most prominent characteristic. Of course, the LORD is already, & has always been, the center of the universe, but in the "last days" everyone will see Him as such.
2. "All nations will stream" to Him. Everyone will recognize the LORD as the true God and will come to Him in His temple. (Does this mean that a physical temple must be built? Maybe, but the student must also see the passage in its cultural and historical context. The temples of ancient time were almost always on the highest point in the region or town. Second, to

conceive of worshiping God without a temple was impossible. Today, we know [as do the Jews] that it is indeed possible.)

ISA 2:3 Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

ISA 2:4 He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

--The LORD's Truth

--The purpose of coming to mountain of the LORD is to learn "his ways." The nations will acknowledge the LORD as God and will want to know Him, which at the present time even Judah does not truly want to do. The student of the text should not miss this contrast.

--His "law" and "word" will go out from Jerusalem. Here, Jerusalem is synonymous with "mountain" and "temple." This simply means that from His presence His Torah will spread throughout the world. This probably means more than just the Law of the Pentateuch, even including the prophetic word. However, the prophetic word is always based upon the Torah, even if the prophet sometimes interprets the Torah more ethically than did the original Pentateuch.

--The LORD's Peace

--Through His own justice, the LORD will establish peace. Judah should have been practicing justice, perhaps even building a world of peace by knowing and following Him, but instead they had rebelled and disobeyed Him. In the "last days," the LORD Himself will establish true peace, without war or dispute.

--As Childs pointed out, the future peace will not come from a human social program. Rather, it will be the work of the LORD. The LORD Himself will enter to bring about a completely new existence.

--The "swords into plowshares" image is used in Joel 3:10, but it is reversed. In that text, the people are told to turn their "plowshares into swords" in order to enter into battle. The contexts & literary genre are very different, but the common imagery is striking. Perhaps, Joel knew of Isaiah & Micah's prophetic texts and used them in an ironic twist.

ISA 2:5 Come, O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD.

--The final verse of this text is a call to Judah to return to the Lord. Isaiah may well be playing up the contrast between the "last days" nations and the present day Judah. They

should be learning his ways and walking in his paths, but instead they have rejected His truth and their covenant with Him.

--“Light”—This is a common theme for Isaiah.

--It is certainly at times messianic (9:2).

--More generally, “light” represents God & His truth.

--Remember the theme of John in the NT is that Jesus is the “Light” that has come into the world as the Messiah.

→ Isaiah 3:8-9

ISA 3:8 Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling;
their words and deeds are against the LORD,
defying his glorious presence.

ISA 3:9 The look on their faces testifies against them;
they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.
Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.

--This is an excerpt from this long passage (2:6-4:1) that describes the present reality. In contrast to the peace, blessing, and prosperity of the eschatological, messianic kingdom, Judah & Jerusalem faces judgment because of their sins. In 2:5 the call went out to “walk in the light,” but the people refused to hear & follow, just as told to Isaiah in chapter 6.

--Not only do they sin, they are proud of their behavior. They flaunt it like Sodom. Thus, like Sodom, they have “brought disaster upon themselves.” Note Isaiah’s continual use of Sodom as a picture of the current state of Judah. This image is not flattering.

→ Isaiah 4:2-6

ISA 4:2 In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. ³ Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. ⁴ The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. ⁵ Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. ⁶ It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

--Final Words of Promise

--The “Branch” (Hebrew *semach* צֶמַח)

--The “branch” is used in a messianic sense in Jer. 23:5, 33:15 & Zech. 3:8, 6:12. In those verses, the “branch” is identified as the messianic descendant of king David.

--Scholars debate whether the meaning here is purely messianic. The lack of reference to David & the failure to make kingly reference to the “branch” make some deny messianic meaning. However, given the context of the eschatological age, at least messianic overtones are called for in this passage (as Childs points out).

--The “fruit of the land”

--Here the student sees the theme of the renewal of the land. The land that is left desolate in judgment will be renewed. The fruit of the land will grow in an

extraordinary way (cf. Is. 40-43 *passim*). God will renew the land of promise, returning it to its pure state as in the time of conquest (i.e. Numbers 13).

--Washed & Cleansed

--Here the renewal of the people is described. Not only will leadership and land be renewed, but the people will also be made clean & holy. Remember that only God is holy, and only He can make something else holy. Just as the burning coal cleansed Isaiah in his commissioning vision, so here the fire will cleanse the people that they can again be His holy people.

--“Create” (*bara’* בָּרָא)

--Only God “creates” in the OT. Thus, the picture here is that God is re-creating His people. They will be sheltered & protected by God, as were Adam & Eve in the Garden. Also, the cloud and fire will be over them as it led them in the wilderness. This is an apparent return to the times of beginning—both humankind and Israel. It is a new beginning.

--Childs compares this picture of future blessing to the description of the New Heavens and Earth in Rev. 21:22-27. Note the comparisons: glory of God, light/fire, purity, & book of life. This would seem to the messianic/eschatological kingdom to which Isaiah is prophetically referring.

REV 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

→ Isaiah 5:1-17

--The Introduction of the Vineyard

ISA 5:1 I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard:

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

ISA 5:2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines.

He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.

Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

--5:1-7 would appear to be a literary unit, one that sounds like a love song, at least initially, but becomes a parable, or Hebrew *mashal*. Whether Isaiah was literally singing a love song about a friend and applied to Yahweh and Judah is unknown. However, certainly the use of the love song genre would have been a unique homiletic method to get the attention of his listeners in a favorable way before turning to more serious matters (cf. Amos 1-2 & the many parables of Jer. & Ezek. for other examples of this method). --Isaiah tells the story of his friend's vineyard. The friend did everything for the vineyard: planted it in fertile ground, cleared stones, planted choice vines, and built a watchtower for protection. Then he stepped back to watch the vines grow to fruitfulness. After all, that's what the farmer would expect to see!

--But, the vineyard produced only bad fruit. Note that the vineyard did indeed produce fruit, but it was bad, worthless fruit (cf. Paul's fruits in Galatians 5). This went against nature, so Isaiah carries the parable to the people for judgment.

--The Evidence against the Vineyard

ISA 5:3 "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

ISA 5:4 What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?
When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

--Now the speaker changes to the vineyard owner himself.

--He is calling witnesses for a judgment & presents his evidence against the vineyard. He is defending his own work in preparing and caring for the vineyard. Since a judgment against a vineyard would not be expected, the hearers must have begun to suspect that this story was going somewhere other than the obvious.

--Judgment against the Vineyard

ISA 5:5 Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard:

I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed;

I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.

ISA 5:6 I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated,
and briers and thorns will grow there.

I will command the clouds not to rain on it."

--Since the vineyard produced only bad fruit, the owner passes judgment against it: he will dismantle the protection and allow the vineyard to revert to wilderness.

--Since only God can "command the clouds," the true identity must be slowly coming into view, even for the original hearers of this text.

--Note that the destruction is more passive than active. The vineyard refused to do that for which it was built and will therefore be abandoned and left to take care of itself. In the modern western culture of self-sufficiency, an important lesson can be found here. If we are unfaithful to our mission as believers, God can leave us for ourselves, unprotected and open for destruction by our enemies (ultimately **the enemy**). Just as the vineyard needed the help of the farmer, so today we need God's leadership, protection, and power in our lives, ministries, and churches.

--Does God help those who help themselves? NO! He helps those who admit they are helpless! (See below for the people's self-sufficiency and greed as a cause for judgment.)

--The Identity of the Vineyard

ISA 5:7 The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.

And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

--After the brilliant introduction, the true point of this prophetic word is given. The vineyard is God's people (Judah & Israel!), and the "friend" is the "LORD Almighty"

(*YHWH ts^eba'ot* יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת).

--“LORD Almighty” or “Lord of Hosts” (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) is used 50 times in Isaiah, all in chapters 1-55.

--The image invoked by the name appears to be military in nature. The “hosts” are the angelic armies of God. The term implies his all-powerful nature in ruling the universe.

--The people of Israel and Judah are the “garden of his delight,” literally the “plant of his delight” or “planting of his delight.” The form of “delight” is intensive. God planted Israel in its land with the joy of a new parent. He loved them and gave them everything that they needed. Yet they became a rebellious child.

--The fruit that God desired was justice and righteousness, the watchwords of prophetic expectations.

--“Justice” represented “fairness” or “equity.” Everyone should have been treated fairly. Justice must be blind, so to speak. This also means that the needs of the helpless must be cared for, to give them a fair chance in life.

--“Righteousness” refers to conformity to norms, in this case probably obedience to the covenant. This also carried ethical connotations since the covenant between Yahweh and Israel included expectations of fairness and charity, as summed up in the word “justice.”

--In place of “justice” (*mishpat* מִשְׁפָּט) God found “bloodshed” (*mispach* מִשְׁפָּח).

This could mean murder and abusive treatment of people. It could also refer to unauthorized or impure sacrifice. Note the wordplay here and in the second pair of words below. Wordplay & alliteration is often used by the prophets for emphasis. It is a powerful technique, as seen in the modern use of the same techniques in preaching and teaching.

--In place of “righteousness” (*ts^edaqah* צְדָקָה) God found “cry of distress,” lit.

“outcry” (*ts^e‘aqah* צְעָקָה).

--Note the comparison in Psalm 80:

⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹ You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.

¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.

¹¹ It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River.

¹² Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

¹³ Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it.

¹⁴ Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see!

Watch over this vine,

¹⁵ the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself.

¹⁶ Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish.

¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God Almighty;

make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

--One should also note the New Testament use of the vineyard image.

--Matthew 21:33-46—The Parable of the Wicked Tenants—The tenants refused to repay the owner, builder, and protector of the vineyard and even killed his son. This parable uses many of the same terms as Isaiah 5:1-7.

--John 15:1-11—The only source of good fruit is the Lord. He alone is the owner and farmer of the vineyard. And the ultimate source of fruitfulness is the vine itself, i.e. the trunk, which is Jesus Christ Himself.

--The issue here is election. Israel had been chosen as God's elect. They had entered into covenant with Him. They were indeed privileged.

--But this privilege had heavy responsibility, summed up in the terms of justice and righteousness.

--The people came to believe that the privilege of election superseded their own actions. This became the theology of the "Inviolability of Jerusalem/The Temple." They believed that God would not allow His temple of city to be destroyed. This led to the excessive, self-absorbed behavior one finds in the prophetic writings.

--The prophets inform the people that their privilege only extends as far as their faithfulness. Judgment will come on the unfaithful! Believers today must also heed this word!

--The Evidence against Judah

ISA 5:8 Woe to you who add house to house
and join field to field till no space is left
and you live alone in the land.

ISA 5:11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks,
who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine.

ISA 5:12 They have harps and lyres at their banquets,
tambourines and flutes and wine,
but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD,
no respect for the work of his hands.

--Isaiah 5:8-17 consists of two "Woe" oracles (8-10 & 11-17). "Woe" oracles are basically judgment oracles in the prophetic corpus. In this type of speech the prophet (i.e. the LORD) denounces or passes judgment upon the people, or a segment thereof, normally including the reason for the coming judgment.

--The first "woe" (8-10) is pronounced against greedy land-grabbers. The wealthy landowners bought, or acquired through debt foreclosure, all of the land surrounding them until only the wealthy owned the land.

--This went against the laws of ownership by Yahweh (Lev. 25:23) and inheritance (Num. 26:55ff). They were breaking the law by allowing their own greed to take precedence over God's clear instruction concerning land.

--This problem is also addressed in Micah 2:1-2:

MIC 2:1 Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!

At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

MIC 2:2 They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them.

They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.

--The second "woe" (11-17) is a judgment against "sinful indulgence." These people (probably many of the same subjects as the 1st woe) were spending their time in drunken feasts.

--Drinking alcohol per se is not condemned in the OT, but drunkenness is consistently condemned, as it is here.

--Drunkenness is excess. It shows a lack of concern for the normal things of life, especially of those less fortunate. And it causes one to seek more and more excess!

--As it dulls the mind and sense, the drunken person loses any sense of God's perspective. In a drunken state, one can recognize and enjoy the music of the party but miss the work of God.

--Calvin: Drunkenness causes one to voluntarily become like an animal, not able to direct the mind toward the things of God. And remember that Isaiah has already said that the people of Judah and Jerusalem were not as smart as the ox and donkey, who at least knew their owner and master!

--The Judgment

ISA 5:9 The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing:

"Surely the great houses will become desolate,
the fine mansions left without occupants.

ISA 5:10 A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine,
a homer of seed only an ephah of grain.

ISA 5:13 Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding;
their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst.

ISA 5:14 Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit;
into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.

ISA 5:15 So man will be brought low and mankind humbled,
the eyes of the arrogant humbled.

ISA 5:16 But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice,
and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.

ISA 5:17 Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture;
lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.

--The judgments passed relate directly to the deeds deserving judgment.

--Those greedily dispossessing the poor will find their houses desolate. Their lands will no longer be able to produce a harvest. They will produce only a small portion of their expected crop.

--Note that this is exactly what had happened to God's vineyard. When they cease to produce as God's vineyard, their own lands will also cease to produce.

--Those proudly feasting in drunkenness into the late night will find themselves in exile dying of hunger and thirst. They failed to recognize ("understand") the Lord, and they will therefore lose their place as the privileged people of God.

--Note that "grave" (=Sheol, the place of the dead) has an appetite even greater than their own. No amount of privileged and excessive living can achieve the appetite of the grave. The message would seem to be that everyone dies, and we need to live our lives in such a way that we are prepared for that eventuality. No one is above the ultimate judgment that death brings.

--Thus verse 16 relates a final important truth that these rich leaders had forgotten: the Lord of Hosts would be exalted. In other words, He would be recognized as the Lord. They could neglect His word and His ways, but as Isaiah 2:2-4 pointed out God will be Lord of all.

--Verse 17 concludes with a statement of the totality of the judgment. The sheep and lambs (or “strangers,” depending on the variant in the Hebrew text) will graze alone on the land as if they themselves owned it. The rich landowners, who had greedily grabbed the land and celebrated with late-night parties, would eventually be gone and their land lost.