

BaptistWay Bible Series for April 22: God's dilemma

April 9, 2012

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Isaiah 5 speaks of God's confrontation of his sinful people of Judah. He loves them dearly, but they have returned evil for all God's goodness to them. God's dilemma then is what to do with this people. He loves them dearly and is committed to his covenant with them. Yet Judah repeatedly broke the covenant and opened herself to spiritual decline as evidenced by her disastrous moral climate.

Judah's spiritual situation was desperate, though the people were oblivious to it. All hope depended on God's handling of the situation. Instead of destroying the sin-focused nation, God chose to confront Judah. Perhaps people would repent and return to the Lord. Isaiah presents this message in three parts: a song (vv. 1-7), a series of woes (vv. 8-25), and a description of pending judgment (vv. 25-30).

The opening stanza of the song (vv. 1-2) contains a parable about a vineyard. The key feature of a parable is the reaction of the secondary character to the action of the primary character. Here the primary character is the Lord who owns the vineyard. The secondary character is the vineyard itself which responds to its cultivation. In this parable, the vineyard responded to its intensive cultivation by producing bad fruit. Likewise, Judah responded to the Lord's laborious care by producing wicked deeds instead of righteous works.

The song begins with the phrase "I will sing." This is reminiscent of Israel's declarations of praise (Exodus 15:1; 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 9:2 and many others). Curiously, Judah, whose name means "praise" is not found worthy

of praise. The song begins with the Lord's intent to praise Judah and comes to an awkward halt one verse later with the realization that the vineyard (beloved Judah) is producing bad fruit.

Verses 3-6 contain the Lord's direct communication to Judah. The Lord asks Judah to judge his provision for his vineyard. Thus Judah would judge the Lord's provision in her life. The Lord wants to know why Judah chose to turn from the Lord after everything the Lord did for her. An answer is not forthcoming, so the Lord announces the judgment he will bring against the vineyard. The description shows as much detail as the creation of the vineyard. It also conveys the utter devastation Judah will experience if she does not return to the Lord. Verse 7 reveals Judah is the Lord's delightful vineyard and her bad fruit is bloodshed and distress.

The second section of the chapter features six woes. The word "woe" means "trouble" and conveys the prophetic declaration of God's displeasure. Woes were pronounced by many of the prophets, especially Isaiah who uttered 20 woes, including these six. Jesus also took up the prophetic mantle and pronounced woes (see especially Matthew 11:20-21 and Matthew 23). The recipients of woes often are described by their offending behavior. A good exercise is to examine the six woes in this passage to get a picture of the Lord's view of Judah's evil activities.

The first woe (vv. 8-10) addresses the covetous wealthy who purchase the real estate of land workers. The result was the departure of the workers and the decline of the land until the properties became empty and unproductive.

The second woe (vv. 11-17) speaks to those who pursue alcohol. They give exorbitant amounts of time to the quest for drink and attending parties. The result of such behavior is disregard for the Lord and a lack of understanding about the reality of life. They will be exiled while the Lord will be exalted. Thus will arise contrasting outcomes which are opposite the

expectations of the revelers.

The third woe (vv. 18-19) answers those who mock Isaiah's warnings of pending judgment. These are nonbelievers who hard-heartedly call for judgment and taunt Isaiah by saying, "Let's see some judgment!"

The fourth woe (v. 20) addresses those who twist truth. They transform definitions of good and evil, in order to cover their involvement in sin, but they will receive trouble for their efforts.

The fifth woe (v. 21) speaks to those who live by their own authority and wisdom. The wording is reminiscent of Judges 21:25 which explains one of the darkest ages in Israelite history as resulting from people living by their own authority and wisdom.

The final woe (vv. 22-25) reveals the judgment coming for the revelers who pervert justice. Judgment will sweep though Judah like a fire. The Lord will strike his people so hard the mountains will shake.

The final section of the chapter, though outside the focus of the lesson, describes the coming judgment in terms of an invading superior nation.

God's dilemma was how to confront Judah. The easy thing would have been to destroy Judah as other nations had been destroyed. But God wanted Judah to repent. Though chapter 5 does not explicitly offer salvation, Isaiah 1:16-20 still governs Isaiah's message, especially the offer of salvation in 1:18. God prefers to "discuss" the sinful situations of his wayward people and offer salvation instead of sending devastating judgment. Perhaps, however, the greater question is whether God's people will respond with repentance or not.