

eDevotions for Growing Christians

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Expected But Not Forced

Isaiah 5:1-7 *I will sing for the One I love a song about His vineyard: My Loved One had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ²He 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. ³Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. ⁴What more could have been done for My vineyard than what I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵Now I will tell you what I am going to do with My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed. I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. ⁷The 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.*

Read all of Isaiah 5

Background Notes:

We don't know whether or not Isaiah could sing well, but in chapter 5 of his prophetic book we have his "Song of the Vineyard." This song has three stanzas, found in verses 1-2, verses 3-6, and verse 7. Some translations of the Bible indicate this by putting spaces between the stanzas. Notice that in Stanza Two the song moves from the second person, "He," to the first person, "I," as God speaks directly to the nation of Judah.

What did God want to communicate to the people of Judah in the Song of the Vineyard? It's obvious that the Song is actually a parable. In the parable God planted a vineyard and it's clear from verse 7 that the vineyard represented Israel, and specifically the Kingdom of Judah. But God was not pleased with the results of His vineyard, and in this parable both Israel and Judah were denounced for their failure to bring forth fruit.

At the time Isaiah wrote this inspired parable, Israel and Judah had been separate nations for about 200 years. After King Solomon's reign the united monarchy split into the northern kingdom of Israel with Samaria as its capital, and the southern kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital.

Both kingdoms had turned away from the Lord without producing much spiritual fruit. The northern kingdom of Israel had even set up two golden calf idolatrous shrines. Although the southern kingdom of Judah continued the “worship of the Lord” at the Temple in Jerusalem, much of it was mere religious ritualism without repentance and little spiritual fruit.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points:

1. God expects His people to produce fruit. In the parable, God did everything possible to help His vineyard produce good fruit. In fact, verse 2 says that He expected it to produce good grapes. He chose fertile soil on a hillside where there would be plenty of sunshine and rainfall. He cleared away the stones—which is no small task in the land of Israel! The Lord placed Israel in its own land, and promised them that He would clear the land of pagan influence if they would trust Him and remove the pagan inhabitants. The Lord planted His vineyard with the choicest vine of Abraham and the patriarchs. For protection and security, He planted a hedge and built a wall around the vineyard, and built a watchtower in the center. In addition, He hewed a winepress and vat out of the bedrock in anticipation of a bountiful harvest. The Lord gave Israel multiple promises of abundant blessing if they would follow and serve Him alone. But the good grapes never appeared! God gave His people every advantage and opportunity to produce good fruit. However, Israel produced nothing but the worthless fruit of wild grapes.

As the Song continues, the sad consequences of Israel’s worthless fruit were made known to God’s people. In sorrow and disappointment, the vineyard keeper decided to turn away from His vineyard and allow it to go to waste. He would no longer cultivate and protect it, and it would become overgrown with briars and thorns. Certainly this part of the Song is a prediction of what lay ahead for the nation of Judah. God would remove His hand of protection from the nation, and would literally allow briars and thorns to overtake the land when His people were killed or taken into captivity by the pagan Babylonian Empire.

There are several other “vineyard passages” in the Old Testament. Israel is likened to a vine or vineyard in Psalm 80:18-19, Jeremiah 2:21 and 12:10, Ezekiel 15 and Hosea 10:1. In every one of these passages God’s people were expected to produce fruit. In fact, Ezekiel belabors the point that producing fruit is the only purpose for a vine! A vine is not good for lumber or even for pegs or firewood. It’s good only for producing fruit—and it’s expected to bear good fruit!

God expects His people today to bear good fruit. In John 15 Jesus said, “*I am the Vine; you are the branches. If any man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing*” (v5), and “*This is for My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit..*” (v8). Are we meeting God’s expectations and bringing Him glory—or disappointing Him by just existing as dormant fruitless vines? God expects His people to bear fruit!

2. God will not force His people to produce fruit. The Lord did everything possible to prepare and help the vineyard of Israel and Judah to

produce spiritual fruit. Fertile soil, choice starter vines, protection, cultivation, etc. What more could they have asked for? But God did not force His people to produce fruit. Producing good fruit was a matter of Israel's will, and they willfully made bad decisions and sinful choices.

In verse 7, God uses a powerful play on words to emphasize the contrast between the fruit God was seeking and the worthless fruit he found. In our English text we read that God looked for justice but saw oppression or bloodshed, and for righteousness but heard cries for help, or cries of distress. In Hebrew, the words for "justice" and "bloodshed" sound very similar, and the words for "righteousness" and "cries of distress" sound similar. To capture this play on words in English, one commentator translated this verse as follows: "God waited for equity but behold inequity. He waited for right, but behold riot!"

God expected His people of Israel and Judah to produce fruit, but He did not force them, and the same is true today. Again, in John 15 we read that God will prune and protect His branches, but He will not manipulate them against their will. God will not force His people to bear fruit!

Practical Application:

What more can the Lord do for you?

In Isaiah's Song, God's vineyard willfully produced only wild, worthless, unusable fruit—in spite of the fact that God did everything that could possibly be done to assist it to produce a glorious harvest.

What does the fruit in our lives look like? We should make frequent checks of the harvest we're producing for God. Are we producing good grapes or wild grapes? And if we find ourselves answering, "worthless grapes," whose fault is that—God's fault or our fault? If we're honest, we must admit that if we're producing a poor harvest, it's our fault—it's because of our bad decisions and our wrong choices.

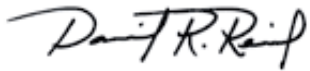
God has provided us with everything we could possibly need to produce good fruit for His glory. He starts us with new life, in and through the Choicest Vine, His Son. God nourishes us as we live in relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit protects us, prunes us, sends us warnings, gives us counsel and encouragement through His Word, and brings godly mentors into our lives, and much, much more. God does everything possible to assist us in producing a glorious harvest of good fruit in our lives!

And yet, in spite of the fact that God has done everything possible for us, so often we choose to please our sinful natures. As a result we end up producing the wild grapes of selfishness, pride, jealousy, ambition, criticism, greed, discontent, bitterness, anger and worse. Is it possible for believers to produce these sad, ugly and ungodly fruits in their lives? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Just take a look at Galatians 5:17-21 and Colossians 3:5-9, for example.

Well, we may say, I would certainly produce more fruit if God were to change my circumstances! Think again! Do you really believe you would produce more pleasing fruit for God if He were to place you in a "better"

church, or give you more money, or a different boss, or a more loving family situation, or a bigger home, or more free time? No! God has already provided us with everything we need for good fruit production (2 Peter 1:3)! God knows what's best for each one of us. He places us and nurtures us in the situations and circumstances which will bring forth the best harvest of fruit in us. It's up to us to choose to grow and produce good fruit by His Spirit.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us... So make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to your goodness, knowledge; and to your knowledge, self-control; and to your self-control, perseverance; and to your perseverance, godliness; and to your godliness, brotherly kindness; and to your brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive..." (2 Peter 1:3 and 5-8). Think it through. What more can God do for you than what He has already done?



Further Study:

If you would like to hear more about bearing good fruit, go to these links on our website: (<http://www.growingchristians.org/rfgc/john/john15a.html> and <http://www.growingchristians.org/rfgc/john/john15b.html>). If you would like information on how to purchase the set of tapes or CDs containing this teaching in audio or purchase other GCM material, please go to our web store (<http://www.growingchristians.org/cgi-bin/store/agora.cgi>).

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