

The Six Woes and Judgments of Isra'el ~ Part 1

Yesha'yahu 5:8-17

In my last post, we examined **The Parable (or Song) of the Vineyard** in **Yesha'yahu 5:1-7**. In this post, we begin to explore the **Six Woes and Judgments of Isra'el** in **Yesha'yahu 5:8ff**. Today, we will cover the first two of six woes **Yesha'yahu** declares to **Isra'el**.

The previous passage described **Isra'el** as a vineyard that produced worthless grapes. The six woes that follow illustrate why **Isra'el** was so worthless with judgments to follow.

⁸ Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there's no room for anyone else, and you live in splendor alone on your land. ⁹ Adonai-Tzva'ot said in my ears, "Many houses will be brought to ruin, large, magnificent ones left empty; ¹⁰ for a ten-acre vineyard will produce only five gallons of wine, and seed from five bushels of grain will yield but half a bushel."

The first woe pronounced upon **Isra'el** deals with corrupt capitalism. Capitalism can become corrupted just as surely as socialism, communism, or any other form of government. Here, God is saying essentially, *"People have taken over properties, homes, and fields to build their empires."* And, because they were motivated only by money, God indicts them. *"You're not going to get away with this indefinitely,"* He says. *"A day of reckoning will come when all of your efforts to increase your empire will backfire. The land won't produce. The resources won't be released."*

Expansion of real estate holdings in the ancient world was usually at someone else's expense. Bad harvests over several seasons could necessitate giving up ownership over the property to pay off or work off debt. In **Isra'el** this was a theological as well as an economic crisis. Since God had given them the land as a benefit of the covenant, each family considered its landholdings as its little share in the covenant. Therefore, what otherwise would be a financial tragedy (often with an oppressive dimension) also served to deprive family members of their part in the covenant. Additionally, the decision-making body in any community was comprised of landowners (as it was originally in the United States).

A vineyard would typically be expected to yield at least one thousand gallons of wine per acre. Harvests of grain in irrigated areas across the ancient Near East yielded a normal seed to crop ratio of about one to ten (though higher yields are attested in the literature). Therefore, a bushel of seed would usually be expected to yield ten bushels of grain. Here the ratio is reversed as ten to one.

¹¹ Woe to those who get up early to pursue intoxicating liquor; who stay up late at night, until wine inflames them. ¹² They have lutes and lyres, drums and flutes, and wine at their parties; but they pay no attention to how Adonai works and never look at what His hands have made. ¹³ For such lack of knowledge, my people go into exile; this is also why their respected men starve, and their masses are parched from thirst. ¹⁴ Therefore Sh'ol has enlarged itself and opened its limitless jaws - and down go their nobles and masses, along with their noise and revels. ¹⁵ The masses are lowered; the nobles are humbled - proud looks will be brought down. ¹⁶ But Adonai-Tzva'ot is exalted through justice, God the Holy One is consecrated through righteousness. ¹⁷ Then lambs will be able to feed as if they were in their own pasture, and those wandering through will eat from the ruined fields of the overfed. ~ Isaiah 5:8-17 (CJB)

The second woe is hedonism - the pursuit of pleasure above all else. So too, our own country seems to be in a relentless pursuit of hedonism. Nothing can stand between us and our pleasure. We spend fortunes on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling; on bigger houses and faster cars, but don't have money or time to help the poor.

As God's people indulged themselves with drink and food, so **Sh'ol** will open its large mouth and swallow them. **Sh'ol** refers to the grave and in some contexts signifies the underworld. The idea of **Sh'ol** swallowing its victims did not originate with the Hebrews but may stem from the Canaanite story that describes the god of death swallowing his victims.

In my next blog, we will continue to examine **The Six Woes and Judgments of Isra'el ~ Part 2** in **Yesha'yahu 5:18ff**.