

# ISAIAH

## Chapter 5

*The Vineyard of the Lord Destroyed*

**Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!**

**5:1–30** The prophet breaks out in a song to the one he loves, who is no one else than the Lord of hosts. It is one of the most beautiful and rich images in Isaiah’s prophecy, but its beauty and richness cannot be duplicated in translation. This song and the thoughts connected to it are a kind of musical coda bringing this section of the prophecy to a conclusion (PBC)

I HAVE said that this passage concerning the pavilion and the shade should be commended to us since in these figures Christ is symbolized and set forth as our Mediator and Preserver. Then I said also that the prophets offer words of comfort after threats, the latter for the sake of the ungodly, the former for the sake of the godly, fainthearted, and troubled. Now, the promises and consolations concerning Christ are repeated so often for this reason, that the flesh cannot believe that anyone is justified by another person’s righteousness. (Luther)

**5:1–7** This skillful parable was likely proclaimed at the Feast of Booths (Lv 23:34–43; Dt 16:13–15), when Israel celebrated God’s blessings of the harvest. It begins in the style of a joyful love song, filled with harvest imagery, but soon turns into an indictment (v 3). Parables of this type are designed to get listeners to pass judgment upon themselves. The narrator elicits his listeners’ outrage at a hypothetical injustice. Their response is then applied to a real situation involving the audience. Only then do they realize that the story is about them (cf Mt 21:33–46). (TLSB)

**5:1** *let me sing* – It is a characteristic of the ungodly that no matter how much Scripture is set before them they do not fear God, they are not frightened by His threats nor stirred by His promises. And what is worse, the ungodly, that is, the self-righteous, insist that the promises apply to them, but the threats to the heretics, that is, the truly godly. Thus that word of the psalm is altogether true: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” And even when they experience some suffering in their body, there still is no fear but boasting that they are being punished for righteousness’ sake, not for the sake of their sins. Therefore when the prophet saw that neither threats helped them nor promises stirred them, he said: “Well then, we shall sing; maybe they will take my song to heart.” (Luther)

*loved one.* God. (CSB)

It was the Lord who inspired the prophet to sing this song. The prophet read the song right out of God's mind. (Stoeckhardt)

*vineyard.* Israel (see v. 7; 3:14; Ps 80:8–16). Jesus' parable of the tenants (Mt 21:33–44; Mk 12:1–11; Lk 20:9–18) is probably based on this song. See Jn 15:1–17. (CSB)

Israel, whom the Lord "planted" in the Promised Land (Ex 15:17; Ps 80:8–18; Jer 2:21; Mk 12:1–9). (TLSB)

God had made Israel His people, had separated it from other peoples. God then had also purged this planning and driven out the heathen. Ps. 44:2. Israel's land and inheritance, Canaan, was a fertile headland. Because of its rocky heights and mountain strongholds it was a secure, well-protected country and a very fertile land flowing with milk and honey. (Stoeckhardt)

*fertile hillside* – Vineyards were usually located on hills and mountains where they could obtain a lot of sunshine. Every mountain peak had fertile soil. It was the nature of mountain soil to be fertile and productive. (Stoeckhardt)

Lit, "on a horn, a son of oil." This phrase, used only here in the OT, describes a geological formation that is superabundant in fertility. The vineyard is positioned for maximum productivity. (TLSB)

They call an elevated and protected place a "horn." Horn is understood to mean the power and kingdom and dominion of the Jews, which under divine protection was sound and strong enough to crush all nations, a land commanding and victorious, a hill towering over all other realms. This hill is also a "son of oil." This is an expression like son of one year, that is, one year old. The hill is given this name because it is rich with oil. A son of perdition, or son of death, is one who has damnation and death; a son of oil, one who has oil and is rich with oil; a son of the right hand, that is, of what your right hand is or has. In Hebrew, a son of oil is one who is described, as to origin or makeup, rather than merely referred to by demonstrative pronoun; thus a son of death, namely, he who belongs to death. A hill of oil is one that has olive oil, that is, one that is fertile. It is as if he were saying: "God gave this land complete fertility, wealth, fatness, etc., but He gave them for a good use and for His own glory." (Luther)

**5:2** *dug it up and cleared it of stones* – He grubbed out the rocks, he cleaned it up. All this is said allegorically. In this clause he wants to say: He took good care of the vineyard. Some interpret the fence to refer to the protection of the angels, which is not unacceptable to me. However, it is more satisfactory to construe the fence as being the Law, which Paul explains thus in Eph. 2:14: He has destroyed the wall of hatred through the Law, so that without the Law we might grow together into one body. By the Law the Jews were isolated from all other nations, and this, I say, was their prerogative, that from the Law they were informed regarding the will of God. (Luther)

Tilled the ground. This may have been done by hand instead of with an animal-drawn plow because vineyards were sometimes planted on steep hills. (TLSB)

*choice vines.* Cultivated vines known to produce excellent fruit. The varieties are unknown. (TLSB)

*watchtower.* Contrast the more modest "shelter" of 1:8. God's vineyard had every advantage (see Mt 21:33). (CSB)

To protect the vineyard from animals or thieves. (TLSB)

A watchtower is centrally located to enable the watchman to guard against theft at the time when the grapes ripen – a piece of standard equipment for a good vineyard. (Leupold)

The tower, Israel's defense system, is the royal citadel in Jerusalem, the government of David and the house of David. (Stoeckhardt)

Some refer it to the temple. But I would prefer to interpret it of the entire worship that was held either in the temple or in the tabernacle or wherever they came together to the Word of God. This is the tower, that the name of the Lord was there, the promises, the mercy seat, the Word of God. Solomon also has this in mind: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower" (Prov. 18:10). This was the place of refuge for the Jews, because God dwelt there. Concerning this we read in Deuteronomy (12:5): "You shall seek the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there." (Luther)

*wine vat.* A trough into which the grape juice flowed (see 16:10). (CSB)

Anticipating a good harvest, the owner hollowed out a rock that would serve as a winepress. Aphrahat: "*I surrounded it with a fence of heavenly Watchers and I built its tower, the holy Temple. And I dug out its winepress, the baptism of the priests. And I brought down rain upon it, the words of My Prophets. And I pruned it and trimmed it, from the works of the Amorites*" (NPNF 2 13:360). (TLSB)

The wine-vat is hewed out in advance in anticipation of the harvest, this vat being strictly speaking, the lower container cut in solid rock into which the juice after it had been trodden out in the upper and larger container flowed through a small opening. (Leupold)

The winepress is the temple. There flows the delicious wine of the Word of God. (Stoeckhardt)

If you want to refer this to the altar of burnt offerings, I have no objection. But I myself think it refers to the mortification of the old man, of whom Rom. 12 speaks. Here also our body becomes an altar of burnt offerings, on which we bring the sacrifice of a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). *Tower* is for the sake of the use of faith, *winepress* for the sake of the use of mortification. (Luther)

*he looked for ... but.* The interpretation (v. 7) uses the same expression. (CSB)

Inferior fruit that does not reflect the effort of the beloved. (TLSB)

It produced sour grapes. The term used is a bit stronger: "stinking grapes." (Leupold)

The grapes are wild, of sour taste. "Are grapes gathered from thorns?" asks Christ (Matt. 7:16). Therefore the grapes represent works, good grapes are good works, bad ones are evil works, the kind the Jews did, who killed not only the prophets but also Christ, and were adulterers, robbers, etc. This song reproves the Jews, who were well built up from the beginning and yet did not produce good fruits. So we turn Christ's best bounties to bad use, while one preaches Christ for his own glory, another for his belly, another to gain many followers, as Paul says (Phil. 3:19). Such acts are not grapes but wild grapes. (Luther)

In Matthew 21:43 Christ refers the parable of the vineyard to the kingdom of God which was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. Thus with the words of this song we have a right to portray the Christian Church. What is stated here of the Lord's vineyard applies in a marked degree to the New Testament church. Christ's church is a planting of the Lord. The Lord Himself has prepared His church, sanctified and separated it from the world. The church has been planted upon a fertile mountain citadel. It is firmly established upon Christ, the everlasting Rock. It is endowed with all manner of blessing. Christ, its Lord and King, is its guardian. Here in the church of Christ flows the delicious wine of the Gospel. The Lord has given His church leaders, apostles, evangelists, teachers, and pastors. And there the Lord has a right to expect good fruit. (Stoeckhardt)

**5:3** *now* – God Himself takes up the conversation. The parable of the vineyard, the lament of the Beloved, had applies to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the men of Judah. They themselves now should be arbiters in this problem the Lord is having with His vineyard. They should themselves pronounce sentence. They must, if they want to deal justly, agree with God's judgment. (Stoeckhardt)

The Lord begins to speak. The hearers are asked to pass judgment on the fate of the vineyard that yielded sour fruit. (TLSB)

**5:4** *what more was there to do* – The inhabitants of Judah-Jerusalem must admit that the Lord has shown them every possible grace, goodness, and faithfulness, that He has, as it were, exhausted His love on them. (Stoeckhardt)

*why did it yield wild grapes* – The inhabitants of Judah-Jerusalem must, if they wish to follow the voice of conscience, confess that they alone are at fault, that they disappointed the hopes of their God, had repaid His rich goodness with ingratitude. That is always the case when God remonstrates with sinners, with the rebellious. Sinners must, if they are honest, acknowledge that God has been good to them, that He has meant it well with them, that He has left no stone unturned, that they are the ones at fault, that they have despised God's goodness and repaid God's goodness with evil. (Stoeckhardt)

**5:5** *My vineyard*. Common description of God's relationship to His people. (TLSB)

*I will remove its hedge...break down its wall* – Vineyards were often encircled by thorn-hedges, which then were surrounded by a low stone wall. After the removal of this double defense system the vineyard will become a pasture and be trampled underfoot. Animals will graze on it and eventually tread it underfoot. See Psalm 80:13. The meaning is given in Psalm 80:6. God will withdraw His protection from the sinful people. And the result will be that the heathen will invade the Lord's inheritance and plunder Israel and ultimately trample it completely and ruin it. The fulfillment of this prophecy began already during the days of Isaiah. Assyria, the world empire, invaded Judah. Then followed Babylon, the Greek. Finally came the Romans to take away land and people. Yes, God will complete the ruin of His people. (Stoeckhardt)

*hedge ... wall*. Protective barriers around the vineyard. *trampled*. Lacking a wall, the vineyard becomes an open field to be grazed by animals or damaged by people. (TLSB)

**5:6** *not be pruned or hoed* – *To prune* is to rebuke, convict, and condemn the unbelieving and to revive faith, namely, to trim off what is unneeded and useless. *To hoe* is to plow the land so that it may receive the seed and the rain and not be hindered in bearing fruit either by stones or by the native hardness of the earth. This, then, is the preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of

sins, namely, through the Law and the Gospel. The heretics, Turks, and many nations teach many things, but they do not clear the ground and do not plow, but they trample the ground and burn it up. They appear to be cultivating the land, but in reality they are laying it waste. (Luther)

*briers and thorns*. This pair occurs five more times (7:23–25; 9:18; 27:4). (CSB)

Cultivated land, once neglected, grows the worst kinds of weeds. (TLSB)

Where the Law is not truly preached, unrecognized sins cannot be reprov'd. Because of the force of the Law, sins are of necessity disregarded, and whatever is thorns and hides sins is of necessity overlooked; thus the cure cannot be applied, and grace cannot be preached. If one preaches man's own merits, when will he preach repentance and grace? What is not evil does not need the Gospel and therefore neither the revealing of sin nor the revealing of the cure. Therefore the thorns are certain excellent men and such as reason calls saints, yet they are without the Spirit and faith, they know neither works nor the goal of faith, and they vex wretched souls. Thereafter they will be deprived not only of prophets and priests of their own nation but also of apostles and their successors, who are the clouds sailing around the world. Paul says, "Behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). The wholesome rain is the Gospel. The matter is self-explanatory. (Luther)

The result will be that thorns and thistles will thrive. No longer is fruit able to develop. (Stoekhardt)

*not rain upon it*. The withholding of rain constituted a curse on the land. See Dt 28:23–24; 2Sa 1:21; 1Ki 17:1. (CSB)

God withholds rain, a sign of judgment. Cf 1Ki 17–18. (TLSB)

Then God denies rain, commands the clouds to send no more rain upon the vineyard. (Stoekhardt)

God will have nothing more to do with the sinful people that has frustrated all His former work of love. He will withhold rain and blessing. He will let the wicked people to its own devices. And thus the unrighteousness will take over completely. Thus will wickedness ripen to maturity. Thus will it ripen to wrath and judgment. This pictures the further development of Israel's history to the final catastrophe which occurred in the year 70 A.D. (Stoekhardt)

Thus God heals with sinners, with the rebellious, with those who have scorned all of God's goodness, patience, and long-suffering and have absolutely refused to repent and bring forth fruits of repentance. He withdraws His hand from them. He discontinues His work in them. He withdraws His protection, His blessing, Spirit, and grace from them. He gives them over to their obdurate mind. And so they pile sin upon sin and heap up for themselves wrath unto the day of wrath and the revelation of God's righteous judgment. Cf. Romans 2:3-4. (Stoekhardt)

**5:7 Israel ... Judah**. Though Isaiah's audience is the Southern Kingdom, these words apply to all of God's people. (TLSB)

The song of the vineyard (vv. 1–6) is now interpreted. A powerful play on words makes the point: The words for "justice" and "bloodshed" (*mishpat* and *mišpaḥ*) sound alike, as do those for "righteousness" (*šedaqah*) and "distress" (*še'aqah*). (CSB)

The Lord had embraced this people as a mother her son. Therefore he calls it a branch and pleasant planting, attractive and delightful. This is justice, that the Law takes its course, that the innocent are not mistreated and the criminals do not escape punishment. “Gold and silver make the straightest things crooked.” “Power, partiality, and money prevent just verdicts.” Righteousness is what imparts benefits and renders good to the deserving. (Luther)

*behold an outcry* – Instead of justice and righteousness we find there confiscation. The higher-ups among the people are robbing and plundering. And the cry of the distressed rises up to heaven. (Stoekhardt)

Pleas for help. Israel is not hearing the cry of the oppressed. (TLSB)

**5:1–7** The Lord describes Israel’s unfaithfulness and unfruitfulness. Consider what care and instruction the Lord has permitted for your life. Does the fruit of your service match the generosity of His nurture? Purge the wild fruit! Through the Spirit’s work, the Lord brings forth in our lives fruit worthy of repentance (Gal 5:22–23). • Though the world goes wild, O Lord, make me a garden in which You delight, secure in Your righteousness. Amen. (TLSB)

*Woe to the Wicked*

**8 Woe to those who join /house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. 9 The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing: “Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. 10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.” 11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! 12 They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands. 13 Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honored men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst. 14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exults in her. 15 Man is humbled, and each one is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are brought low 16 But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. 17 Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich. 18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, 19 who say: “Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!” 20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! 22 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, 23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right! 24 Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. 25 Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. 26 He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth; and behold, quickly, speedily they come! 27 None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken; 28 their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses’ hoofs seem like flint, and their**

**wheels like the whirlwind. 29 Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey; they carry it off, and none can rescue. 30 They will growl over it on that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds.**

**5:8-30** God condemns six sins: (1) exploiting others (vv 8–10); (2) drunkenness (vv 11–12); (3) taking pride in sins (vv 18–19); (4) twisting moral standards (v 20); (5) conceit (v 21); and (6) perverting justice (vv 22–24). Because of these sins, He will discipline Israel (v 25), using the Assyrian army (cf vv 26–30). (TLSB)

**5:8–23** A series of six woes are pronounced (vv. 8, 11–12, 18–19, 20, 21, 22–23), followed by three judgment sections (vv. 9–10, 13–15, 24–25). (CSB)

Some of the bad fruits are enumerated. There follows a six-fold woe concerning incorrigible sinners. The same picture of more degeneracy painted here is what is confronting us in the generation of these last days. For that reason the same woe of God and His prophets applies. The statement in its final clause becomes a passionate appeal. (Stoeckhardt)

**5:8** *house to house ... field to field.* Land in Israel could only be leased, never sold, because parcels had been permanently assigned to individual families (see Nu 27:7–11; 1Ki 21:1–3). (CSB)

The wealthy used various means to take more houses and farms until no more property was left for the small landowner to call his own (Am 5:10–13). They refused to follow God's property laws (Lv 25:23–34; cf 1Ki 21). (TLSB)

The first woe condemns greed, or covetousness. Greed is an idol in opposition to faith. We may acquire houses and land, but the rich acquire more and more. They are never satisfied and constantly look to build great mansion, tend expansive vineyards, and cultivate large tracts of land. Perhaps it would not be stretching things to conclude that the rich took advantage of the poor to acquire land and houses. The desire for material possessions is insatiable. The greedy and covetous would be willing to take the sun from the poor if they could. (PBC)

He now continues with the rest of his discourse in a straightforward manner, in plain words, without allegory. This is a wild grape, the greed of priests and princes. Paul in Eph. 5:3 and Col. 3:5 calls greed a worship of idols. Christ sets Mammon in opposition to God (Matt. 6:24). Greed is an idol in opposition to faith; as if the prophet were saying: "You want to possess the whole city, yes, you buy all the houses, one after the other, without compunction, and you do not regard it as sin. God's justice is different from that of the world, which does not punish greed but rather regards it as a virtue. God, however, does not want the poor to be thrown off their property but that they be helped by a grant or by a loan. But now princes are expelled and deprived of their property, if not by plunder, then by the idol, and thus they do not possess their own things but those of others *until there is no more room*, that is, until there is no home or field left to the poor and no one is permitted to buy anything of theirs ahead of you." (Luther)

**5:9** *Lord of hosts has sworn* – The Lord of Hosts has spoken into the prophet's ear, that means, has in a clear, distinct manner revealed to him how the wealthy, insatiable landowners will fare. They are now a large number of fine houses standing on the land. But these houses will certainly all go to ruin and will not be lived in. Easy come, easy go. Even the fruitful estates of the wealthy will be dealt with harshly. (Stoeckhardt)

These are the words of one taking an oath or of one making a deposition with some pledge. As punishment, he says, for that greed which you consider a virtue, it will happen that very many of those houses will be laid waste. (Luther)

**5:10** *ten acres*. A vineyard this size should produce a great volume of wine. (TLSB)

*one bath*. Several vines would normally yield this much wine, but not in these bleak conditions. (TLSB)

*ephah*. A tenth of a homer. Meager crops often accompanied national sin (Dt 28:38–39; Hag 2:16–17). The amount of wine and grain is only a tiny fraction of what a ten-acre vineyard and a homer of seed would normally produce. (CSB)

Not enough to turn a profit. Not enough to keep one person alive through the winter. (PBC)

Already on earth God punishes men's greed and covetousness with poor harvest, drought, war, devastation, destruction, and other plagues. (Stoekhardt)

**5:11–13** See Am 4:1–3; 6:6–7, where a style of life characterized by drunkenness and revelry is likewise condemned. (CSB)

**5:11** *who rise early...tarry late* – The second woe pertains to the pleasure-seeking masses which have a lust for life. The prophet points next to the hard drinkers, who rise early in the morning and go in pursuit of a strong drink and late in the evening are still drinking wine and becoming drunk. (Stoekhardt)

More wild grapes. The greedy are very rarely drinkers, very rarely openhanded and spend-thrifty, except those who came into their abundance of money by inheritance, not by work or effort. The prophet employs some blazing words. (Luther)

*run after strong drink* – In this he spares Noah and Solomon. Proverbs 31:6 says: "Give wine to those in bitter distress." Misuse and excess are forbidden. The Jews have been dispersed among the nations and have learned carousing, etc. Though they have drunk much in the evening, they get up in the morning and start drinking all over again. And so it is always: Night, Love, and Wine counsel nothing in moderation. Wine inflames to many evils, but especially to thirst and more drinking. Theirs are not feasts of joy but feasts of pigs. It is all right to eat and to drink, but to cultivate drunkenness is evil. (Luther)

Exhibited, accordingly, is a joyous carousel, consisting of wine and noisy music. The world lives amid pomp and circumstance, riotously, and pays no heed to the work of the Lord, to the judgment that stands before the door and which is already prepared. (Stoekhardt)

**5:12** *have lyre and harp* – They spent money on diverse entertainment, but their priorities were misplaced; they pursued pleasure rather than seeking the Lord and doing His work. (TLSB)

Music is a gift of God. Elisha says: (2 Kings 3:15) "Bring me a minstrel, etc." Amos 6:5 says: "Like David [they] invent for themselves instruments of music." Certainly if you make use of music as David did, you will not sin. (Luther)

*work of his hands* – In their stupor, the revelers gave no thought to the wonders God had done for them (Ps 78:11). (TLSB)

The work of the Lord is that whatever He commands be done, namely, to believe and to worship God and to serve one's neighbor; or, that there be punishment, which is inflicted on the ungodly, and reward, which is given to the godly. The work here applies to those who were disrespectful, etc., that is, such will be the reward of these men in Job. "Work" is often used in place of "reward." The ungodly do not care whether the Lord does or commands good or evil. For that reason they are taken captive. The prophet assigns individual punishments to individual sins. (Luther)

**5:13** *therefore* – Lakhen, introduces a threat of punishment. (Stoekhardt)

*my people go into exile* – The prophet sees punishment as an accomplished fact. The Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and exiled the royalty and upper citizenry. (TLSB)

Into the land of the heathen. (Stoekhardt)

*lack of knowledge* – They lack knowledge of righteousness: what pleases God. (TLSB)

Judah is not aware of the Lord's work, does not know the Lord, and wishes to know nothing of God and divine things. They are just as artful and cautious and eager to engage in works of the flesh as they are blind and indifferent to the spiritual. Just because they do not know God, God takes from the earthly portion, their good land. (Stoekhardt)

They do not understand the Lord, His judgment, or anything spiritual. Death levels all classes of people. In the face of death, all humans are like grass. WE spring up in the morning, and by evening we are dry and withered (Psalm 90:5-6). This reality the brawlers, revelers, nobles, and common people did not understand. (PBC)

1 Corinthians 2:14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they spiritually discerned."

*honored men go hungry...parched with thirst* – All the arrogant defiance by men and women was, and is, just so much empty talk. Imagine what a greedy person will think when death reduces him to the same level as every other human. (PBC)

The refined world and the ordinary hangers-on contend with one another in gorging and boozing, in diversion and amusement. Thus both are subjected to the same punitive fate. They are wretches, starving and dying of thirst. Hunger and thirst, living in shame and disgrace, this is the final lot which is often shared already here below by the world's pleasure-seeking children. (Stoekhardt)

Everything that such a person so passionately acquired will suddenly become worthless on the day God's judgment. Jesus made this point with a question, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Jesus also responded to the "eat, drink, and be merry" philosophy when He told the parable of the rich fool who had stored up things for himself but was not rich toward God (Luke 12:13-21). (PBC)

**5:14** *Sheol*. The grave has an insatiable appetite (see Hab 2:5). (CSB)

Death is like an insatiable beast (cf 1:19–20). In Semitic mythology, death opens its mouth with lips touching heaven and earth. No one can escape. Here, Sheol, the land of the dead, serves the Lord. (TLSB)

“Nephesh” is the throat, the organ that craves. The perfects also indicate here what obviously is impending. There is a lot of room in hell, and so hell, and so hell opens its jaws up wide. It is a great throng that it wishes to swallow. And so the people of this mass descend into hell with their pomp and their tumult and their turmoil and whatever else there is of mirth in them. (Stoekhardt)

He is describing the seriousness of the pestilence and starvation, which became a reality through the Romans above all. Earlier it will appear to have shown so much food, but now it will seem to be gulping it down with an insatiable appetite. לִיָּאֵץ, that is, the lower world and sometimes death, more often the grave and the pit. Now, the appetite which he here attributes to Sheol denotes either the excessively large opening or its insatiable hunger, as if the appetite of death could not be sated. (Luther)

*nobility.* Wealth cannot overcome death. (TLSB)

*revelers.* Those just described, who celebrate in sin while neglecting righteousness. (TLSB)

**5:15** *man is humbled...brought low* – This noisy, joyous throng, singing songs and with bands playing, will go down to hell. And then once and for all the wild noises and joyous shouts of earth will fade away into dead silence. Yes, laughing and rejoicing turn then into cries of woe, howling, and gnashing of teeth. (Stoekhardt)

This is the way they will be taught good behavior; they refuse to be corrected any other way. The fool has to be deloused with a club. The unrepentant are not at all moved by words; with a stiff neck they refuse to believe but prefer to find out for themselves. “Then,” says He in Prov. 1:28, 26, “they will call upon Me, but I will not answer” and “I also will laugh at your calamity.” The pleasure-bent people despise God and act arrogantly, the prophets are brought low, but finally the little wheel comes full circle. (Luther)

**5:16** *LORD of hosts is exalted.* This justice glorifies God. He alone is worthy of such exaltation. (TLSB)

Only after man’s cheap pride will have been cleared out of the way can there be room for what is destined to be high and exalted, namely Yahweh of hosts Himself. (Leupold)

Justice itself will exalt Him. When He smashes and avenges this ungodliness, then people will say: “He is the mighty Lord, but meanwhile He also looks after the godly who have been made to suffer by the ungodly, as in the case of Lot, and thus He is hallowed in the godly, whom He raises up to justice, that is, because of their faith. And these are the sheep that have been fed, that is, those who are moved by meditation. And because of the Jews other ungodly people are frightened. The prophet must here be understood as speaking not of something physical, but of wolves, that is, of destroying the ungodly but protecting and nourishing the godly. (Luther)

*justice ... holy in righteousness.* Parallel concepts, repeated for emphasis. (TLSB)

**5:17** *ruins of the rich* – The city becomes a wasteland; anyone can enter and do what he wills. Some versions follow an alternate reading with a change of one Hbr letter that reads “kids shall eat,” which repeats the thought from the first line of the verse. (TLSB)

Pleasant cities will become ruins. The surrounding countryside will become wilderness. Across this wilderness area nomadic shepherds then drive their herds. (Stoekhardt)

So often we travel to distant places to see the ruined monuments left behind by previous generations. Greek, Roman, English, Aztec, Chinese, Indian, and Egyptians civilizations have left such ruins. They are now silent museums or deserted spots for animals. (PBC)

Thus Christ says in Matt. 8:11 f.: “Many will come from east and west ... while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out.” The wealth of the Word of God has become a state of want for the Jews. There is no gain for them, no comfort; but there is for the Gentiles. (Luther)

**5:18** *woe to those who draw iniquity with cords falsehood* – They want to sin and voluntarily pull sin closer. (TLSB)

The third woe concerns impudent mockers. The class of men the prophet has in mind is presented as though it were a draft animal, harnessed to a heavily loaded wagon and having to pull this wagon, this burden behind it. The men spoken of are yoked to the punishment prescribed for them, as though they were pulling it along behind them. They cannot possibly free themselves from the punishment, nor will they escape it. (Stoekhardt)

This is the third kind of wild grapes. Not only are you smug in luxury and abandon the Word of God, but you also blaspheme openly, you scoff at both promises and threats, you stubbornly persist in sinning, you are arrogant in the righteousness of the flesh. Just as horses hitched to a wagon always pull even when they are tired, so also we. Hosea 10:11 says: “Ephraim was a trained heifer that loved to thresh.” The teachers drive the people as teamsters do, and so they remain in a state of ungodliness. They do not actually question the Lord’s power, but they do not believe what is proclaimed through Isaiah. They do not disdain the Lord in Himself but maintain Him in the Word and in preachers and in displays of the Law, yet they proceed from stubbornness to blasphemy. So it is impossible to refute a hypocrite. Therefore they do not draw righteousness but iniquity. (Luther)

*cords of falsehood* – Sin is ultimately a lie: promising pleasure but bringing suffering. Luther: “*Cords* are laws and statutes. Elijah was called father, chariot, and driver (2 Kings 2:12). So the priests and magistrates were chariots and drivers, but such as were empty and void. As a result there were empty cords, empty laws; and the formula of these people is: ‘Isaiah, let not that which you mention below in chapter 28 come; ‘We have made a covenant with death, etc.’ (Is. 28:15), we are God’s and Abraham’s children.’ So all prophets are judged to be liars. The reason for this is self-righteousness, which puffs up” (AE 16:64). (TLSB)

“Abhoth is something that is twisted together. (Stoekhardt)

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Contrast Hos 11:4, where God leads his people with “cords of human kindness.”

*cart ropes*. They defy God to do something about their sin, to which they are bound like animals to a cart. (TLSB)

**5:19** The Hebrew for the words “hurry” and “hasten” corresponds to that of the first and third elements of the name “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz” (see NIV text note on 8:1). When Isaiah named his son (8:3), he may have been responding to the sarcastic taunts of these sinners. God did bring swift judgment, according to v. 26. (CSB)

They challenge Isaiah to enact the threats in the preceding chapters. (TLSB)

These insolent men do not believe and they deny that the word of the Lord, the Lord’s counsel, meaning God’s judgment, or the great day of the Lord will come. Yes, they ridicule the Holy One of Israel and His judgment. They ridicule God’s prophets, who proclaim the day of the Lord to the people. If there be such a day about which the prophets are speaking, a day of judgment, ah, then let it come. And we hope that it will come soon and quickly so that we shall be able to see it. Then shall we believe it. Those who ridicule and blaspheme thus have already drawn upon themselves God’s judgment. Like a thief in the day of the Lord will come upon this impudent generation. (Stoekhardt)

The same unbelief, the same mockery is rebuked by the prophets in other passages. E.g. Jer 5:12ff; 17:15; Ezek 12:22ff. In 2 Peter 3:33ff in similar words St Peter describes the scoffers of the Last Times who say: “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” Then he states further that in truth what men regard as delay is not delay, that God simply has patience so that all might come to repentance. (Stoekhardt)

They do not say this to provoke the Lord, because they regard themselves as thoroughly holy, but they speak up against the prophet and do not fear for themselves. The cry of all the ungodly is: “Peace and safety” (1 Thess. 5:3). They say: We know what the Holy One of Israel has in mind, and we think the devil is speaking out of Isaiah. Disregard of the Word of God is certainly a great enough crime, but to attribute it to the devil, this puts an end to the game, this makes the earth quake, either as about to fall into ruin or as about to be reshaped with great loss of life. (Luther)

**5:20** Sin brings the ultimate confusion. God’s counsel condemns human folly and wickedness. (TLSB)

*woe to those who call evil good* – The entire verse brings out the contrast between good and evil. The figurative expressions describe the good and evil according to their inner essence and origin, as well as according to their results and effects. The good is light, is of heavenly, divine origin. The evil is darkness. It originates from hell, from the devil. The good is sweet. The righteous will fare well. On the other hand, evil is bitter. Vain delight in sin changes ultimately into bitter woe. (Stoekhardt)

Here threats are issued to false teacher who pervert moral principles. False teachers humor wanton sinners and place sin in a favorable light. On the other hand, they cast suspicion on the good and are at enmity with the truly upright. They present sin, for instance, greed, sensuality, worldly pleasure, as innocent, harmless things, yea, as things so necessary that without them a person is unable to pull through and get on in this world. On the other hand, the righteous, who

live a godly life and are content, who shun and flee the world and its pleasure, they ridicule and condemn as a people of gloom and hateful, as a proud, haughty clique of human beings, as a plague on human society. Woe to those arch-deceivers! They are heaping upon themselves severe condemnation. For they confirm sinners in their wickedness and bring them to the point where they despise and scorn all that is holy. They lead all who give them ear to destruction, to hell. (Stoeckhardt)

The perverters of truth presented sin as being harmless, making it appear as fun and good. They still do. That process has been going on since Satan made disobedience to God appear attractive in the Garden of Eden. (PBC)

This passage depends on the last one, for it refers to blasphemy, and this is the way all ungodly and all men of the flesh act. But the prophet is here speaking not of matters subject to the senses but of the Word, which is good and useful, a light brightening and guiding on all ways, teaching right things, restoring consciences, etc. Therefore he accuses the pestilent teachers through the Word of God; they blaspheme and rail at it but proclaim their own ungodly ideas and the wisdom of the flesh, things which are never good. Creatures are indeed at times put to good use. A lie is always evil. God can put up with sins, and when sins have been acknowledged, God can easily take care of them. God cannot put up with the blasphemer. (Luther)

**5:21** *wise in their own eyes* – Those who are wise and clever in their own eyes could be the worldly wise who have an answer for everything. They took pride in their intelligence, knowledge and expertise, but they missed the one thing value – God’s grace in the Messiah. (PBC)

Solomon says (Prov. 3:5, 7): “Do not rely on your own insight.... Be not wise in your own eyes.” This, too, refers to blasphemers, and we include both teachers and disciples. Their excessive wisdom makes them oppose the Word of God. Christ performed many miracles, but He never made folly look like wisdom. This unquestionably most difficult work and burden-some task He has left for us to carry out together with those who love themselves, so that they might become wise. Whatever is said to them, this they fight against and disparage. One must certainly walk in fear and humility, and we must first give up our own ideas. Then let us see whether what we have heard conforms to the faith. Let our wisdom be brought low and let us walk in fear. (Luther)

**5:22** *woe to those are heroes* – What kind of heroes and champions? They only excelled in drinking to excess. The society of Isaiah’s day valued those who could drink and party. (PBC)

The same beginning, about which I have commented above.<sup>13</sup> But this passage seems to me to refer to the common people, the earlier one to the princes, whom the common people imitate. They not only drink to excess, but, like the Greeks,<sup>14</sup> they also brag about their drinking. They are bold soldiers when it comes to draining mugs and glasses (beer knights). They live in smug security and for their own pleasure. Frequently one finds also others in the prophets, because bribes are taken for the purpose of cheating justice. Moses forbade such things. Security gives birth to many evils. There follows the threat of a plague that strikes all, princes and people, at the same time. This so diminishes and weakens them that the tongue, that is, the flame, could not call them less stable. (Luther)

*mixing drinks.* Spices were added to beer and wine (see Pr 23:30). (CSB)

A deriding judgment. They think themselves great, but their “greatness” is sinful. Their “heroism” is drunkenness. (TLSB)

5:23 Judges and other authorities do not serve justice but themselves. (TLSB)

*acquit the guilty for a bribe* – For love of money they subvert justice and vindicate and defend the godless while the righteous receive no justice from them. When such men are holding office, in government or within the church, obvious gluttons and mammon-worshippers, who acquit and absolve the wicked while, on the other hand, they oppress the righteous, God’s judgment cannot fail to appear for very long. (Stoekhardt)

Greed and dissipation that know no bounds, delusion that does not see the work of the Lord, impudent mockery and blasphemy, corruption of morals and justice in reverse, these are positive forebodings of judgment. (Soeckhardt)

5:24 *tongue of fire devours the stubble* – How quickly stubble is consumed! Yet that is what he calls this powerful nation that is to be laid waste so quickly. (Luther)

*dry grass sinks*. Grass “sinks” as it dies and falls to the ground, where it is quickly burned. (TLSB)

*go up like dust*. As plants die and decay into dust, so wickedness will perish. (TLSB)

*root will be as rotteness* – “Root means the leaders; *blossom* denotes the subjects, particularly the young people. Old and young, parents and children, king and people will perish. Nor is their being rather deeply rooted and their rather extensive blossoming something that they might offer as an excuse. (Luther)

A picture of a tree, whose roots turn to mold, whose blooms disappear in dust, meaning, which from top to bottom, totally, vanishes into dust. A tree that finally disintegrates into mold and dust has prior to this decayed totally. (Stoekhardt)

*despised... the Holy One of Israel*. Hbr *torah*, “instruction,” the Word of God. (TLSB)

With other sins God can call up grace, and the punishments of other sins can be turned and drawn to repentance. But blasphemy of the Word is usually followed by devastation and desolation. (Luther)

Despising God’s Word is the evil root which gives rise to the evil fruits and deeds named before. It is the Word of the Lord of Hosts, of the Holy One of Israel. The more exalted and holy God is, the God who has revealed Himself to His people, all the heavier weighs the sin, that sinners despise the Word that is preached to them. Wanton sinners despise God’s Word with the whole heart. (Stoekhardt)

Matthew 12:31, “And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.”

Note on Matthew 12:31: The context (vv. 24, 28, 32) suggests that the “unpardonable sin” was attributing to Satan Christ’s authenticating miracles done in the power of the Holy Spirit (see note on Mk 3:29).

## The Unforgivable Sin

The sin against the Holy Spirit is directed against the work the Holy Spirit is doing in the heart of the person committing the sin. It consists in this that such a person from sheer spite and malice rejects and blasphemes those truths of which the Holy Spirit is convincing or has convinced him. If a man blasphemes divine truth of which he is not convinced in his heart, he has not committed this sin. If he is convinced, and he rejects and blasphemes them from fear of men, as did Peter, from love of the world, from pride, selfishness, self-righteousness, the unpardonable sin has not yet been committed, for it is possible that all these are eventually overcome by the influence of the Holy Spirit. When pure contrariness, spite, and malice against the Holy Spirit, whose influence he feels in his heart, dictates his action, then it is simply impossible for the Holy Spirit to win that person; for every attempt to draw him to Christ is resisted with more vehement malice and blasphemy.

In Matthew 12 Jesus casts out a devil. The Pharisees had to recognize it as the work of God. But they said that Jesus was devil casting out devils. Christ warns them, lest their hatred of him could turn to spite and malice could wind up resisting the Holy Spirit. He does not say that they had actually committed this sin.

We should not charge anyone with this sin, since we do not know whether or not a person is really of the truth he blasphemes, nor can we tell whether he is doing it from spite and malice; we cannot look into his heart. Those who are disturbed in their minds that they might have committed this sin, have definitely not committed it, because their very fear proves there is no spite and malice in their hearts.

The reason why this sin cannot be forgiven is not that it is too great – though great it is – but that it makes repentance impossible, since it is directed against every effort of the Holy Spirit to convert man. (A Summary of Christian Doctrine – Edward W. A. Koehler)

**5:25** *stretched out His hand.* God acts in judgment. Cf Ex 6:6. (TLSB)

*The mountains quaked.* When God takes action, even the mountains tremble (see 64:3; Jer 4:24–26). This is the language of theophany (a manifestation or appearance of God). (CSB)

The Creator's power shakes the earth. Israel lies on a major fault line. (TLSB)

So great is the calamity, even before it comes. The mountains represent human beings. They say: A stone could feel sympathetic. (Luther)

*corpses were as refuge...streets* – So Ps. 83:9 f. speaks of Sisera and others. This was done to completion by the Romans. After the saints and the wheat had first been taken out, the chaff was scattered, namely, the Jews, who neither are alive nor have they died. (Luther)

The judgment will leave dead bodies in the street like so much garbage waiting to be picked up. (PBC)

*his hand is stretched.* A refrain repeated in 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4. (CSB)

God would not bring this judgment a single time; He continues to punish sin. (TLSB)

Since they do not stop sinning and do not return to Him who is smiting them but still appear wise and just to themselves, therefore God also does not stop being incensed against them and scourging them. (Luther)

Despite all of the punishment mentioned above, wrath does not turn away. Wrath hangs on. The hand of the Lord is stretched out still. Final wrath endures into eternity. (Stoeckhardt)

*quaked.* The Creator's power shakes the earth. Israel lies on a major fault line. (TLSB)

**5:26** *raise a signal.* A pole with a banner was often placed on a hill as a signal for gathering troops (13:2) or for summoning the nations to bring Israel back home (11:10, 12; 49:22; 62:10). (CSB)

This should by all means be understood as referring to the Romans, who are to be the scourge of the vine that bears wild grapes. And it will be given, he says, to a people that bears fruit. (Luther)

*nations far away.* Such as Assyria, whose armies struck Israel and Judah in 722 and 701 B.C., and Babylon, which began its invasions in 605. (CSB)

*whistle for them* – God uses the pagan Assyrian army. He “whistles” and, as an animal obeys its master, they come equipped for battle. (TLSB)

He will whistle for them the way we might whistle for our pet dog. (PBC)

It means that He will at hiss at “it.” As a bee-keeper hisses at the bees and so lures them from the hives, so will the Lord hiss at the heather and call them forth from the ends of the earth. (Stoeckhardt)

He will give them the will to fight against the Jews. To convert this people the prophet employs fiery eloquence, the pressure of an act of war, and a grandeur of words as though he were making a display of a matter of growing importance. (Luther)

*from the ends of the earth.* Nations like Egypt and Assyria. (CSB)

During Isaiah's lifetime, the Assyrians came at God's call to carry away Israel into captivity and to ravage the Judean countryside and surround Jerusalem. The northern ten tribes never returned. Over a century later, the Babylonians invaded Palestine and carried away Judah into captivity. Finally, after the Messiah had come and God's people had rejected Him and killed Him, the Romans came and leveled Jerusalem, not leaving one stone upon another. (PBC)

Although neither the Assyrians nor the Babylonians nor the Romans understood God, His plans, or the judgment they inflicted, they served God's plan. God is in control of history, and He marshals world powers to do His bidding. Just as Roman government policy brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, so the aggressive military ambitions of Assyria, Babylon and Rome served God's purpose. (PBC)

**5:27** Describes the tireless Assyrian army. (TLSB)

*None is weary.* Cf. the use of these terms in 40:29–31. (CSB)

The prophet describes that the Romans are unconquered and persistent. That the Roman name struck great terror everywhere is attested by the Acts of the Apostles, especially chapters 16 and 22. Particularly, when Paul was being scourged, he said, “The Romans will do what they have determined beforehand.” (Luther)

*not a sandal strap broken* – That is, the sword of that nation will never stop, they will always be under arms, and they will never strip their boots and spurs from their feet, which signifies constant attention to war. Then also, that there will be abundant equipment of the highest quality weapons. (Luther)

Within the enemy army there is not a single soldier who becomes weary or falls down from exhaustion. None has his belt loose about his battle-dress. None has a broken thong on his sandals. The Lord God, who has summoned and driven the heathen to battle, gives them strength, courage, and tenacity. He lends encouragement and grants success to all his ventures. And so the enemy is anxious to do battle. He moves restlessly forward and does not even grant himself a night's rest. (Stoekhardt)

**5:28** *arrows are sharp* – The enemy is well armed. In ancient times horses were not shod. For that reason a firm hard hoof was the mark of a good horse. (Stoekhardt)

**5:29** *roaring is like a lion* – The enemy is compared to a roaring lion that pounces upon its prey and carries it off to a spot where it cannot be torn away. The war-cry and the rumbling sound of the enemy army advancing to the attack resemble the roaring and growling of a lion. And the enemy seizes and pounces upon its prey, Judah and does not let go. He takes Judah away and no one come to its rescue, neither God nor man. Judah is irretrievably lost. This is final wrath. (Stoekhardt)

*like young lions* – They are remarkably aggressive and more rapacious than the adults. (Luther)

**5:30** *like the growling of the sea* – Overwhelming roar, like an ocean storm. (TLSB)

This is a description of the sadness and mourning of the Jews. Then they would gladly be covered by the waves, but they will not be able to. (Luther)

*darkness and distress.* Similar words describe the horrors of war in 8:22. (CSB)

The terror and commotion of death. The Jews will be seeking caves in the fields in which to hide themselves and will not find them. But the shadow of death will be everywhere. The sun and moon appear to turn black, a symbol of desperation. They have not been able to call upon God. These things have been written down also for us, if we in like manner blaspheme the Word. (Luther)

In the Judaic-Roman war millions of Jews were killed. This was the end of the Jewish state. Since then Judah lives scattered among the Gentiles. All these hostile attacks, all the harm that the heathen nations had done to the people of Israel during the course of centuries, the prophet sees here compressed into a single picture and sees Judah finally overpowered by the might blows inflicted by world power. (Stoekhardt)

**5:8–30** Because Israel will not repent, the Lord will send Assyria to punish them with conquest and exile. Today, popular culture longs to be “bad,” and our “heroes” corrupt basic morality. Reject the excuses of pop culture and instead revel in the community of faith, which knows right from wrong. The Lord our Counsel will guide us to true joy and lasting pleasure in the goodness of life. • Lord, snap the tethers of sin that hold me back and rob me of genuine freedom in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)