

The prophet Isaiah ben Amoz 740-700BC

Isaiah scroll 1-39

08. Isaiah 5-9



Introduction to Isaiah 5

Chapter five functions as a prologue to chapters six to twelve. It begins with an accusation sung by a friend of someone who is a cheated lover. Following an ancient literary convention, the vineyard is used as a metaphor for the female body.

‘Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards — for our vineyards are in blossom’(Song of Songs 2:15).

‘Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits’(Song of Songs 4:16).

‘My vineyard, my very own, is for myself’(Song of Songs 8:12).

The owner of the vineyard is a ‘dear friend’(yādîd) of the singer. The owner’s beloved is Israel, his vineyard (see 1:8, 3:14).

Isaiah 5:1-7 : God's vineyard (compare Jesus' parable: Mark 12:1-9)

Isaiah 5:1-2 : Isaiah speaks

Let me sing for my dear friend
my love-song concerning his
vineyard:

My dear friend had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

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;

he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded bitter grapes.



Isaiah 5:3-4 : YHWH speaks

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done?
When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?



Isaiah 5:5-7 : YHWH continues

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.
I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;
I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of YHWH of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting.
He expected justice, but saw a cover up;

מִשְׁפָּט

מִשְׁפָּח

righteousness, but heard a cry of distress!

צִדְקָה

צַעֲקָה

Isaiah 5:8-25 : The woe oracles

Hans Wildberger in his commentary on Isaiah 1-12 (*A Continental Commentary*; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1991, page 216-217):

“The broad range of Isaiah’s interests are mirrored in the collection of woe-oracles. The disastrous economic development, which led to the degradation of the weaker members of society, reducing them to the level of outcasts, roused him to indignation, just as did the failure of the officials who were responsible for preserving justice. He saw the frivolous nature of those who wanted to live a pleasure-filled life, to the accompaniment of wine and music. He was shocked by the arrogance of the mockers and the self-conceit of the wise. He was most deeply upset that there were leaders, in responsible positions, who misused their abilities by changing the laws in a way which would benefit them ...

Wildberger continued

However, Israel's sins were not simply disregard for the letter of the law or the teachings of wisdom; and they were not due to a lack of social sensitivity or to failing to recognise that there is danger inherent in the dolce vita. Rather, Israel's sins were rooted in its pride which caused it to fail to see the plan and action of the Holy One of Israel and to take it to heart ... Isaiah is a passionate theologian, continually speaking about the obligations Israel has towards its God. He is not merely announcing the consequences of a way of life which goes against established order. He is speaking about the intervention of the Holy One of Israel who executes his function of judging with righteousness ...

Indeed 'they have rejected the instruction of YHWH of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel'(5:24)."

Isaiah 5:8-10 : Economic Injustice

Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field,
until there is room for no one but you,
and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!

YHWH of hosts has sworn in my hearing:

Surely many houses shall be desolate,
large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.

For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath 30 litres
and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah.

donkey load

1/10 homer

Isaiah 5:11-12 : Economic Injustice

Ah, you who rise early in the **morning** in pursuit of strong drink,
who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine,

- **Morning** = court in town square. Pursuing luxury, not justice

whose feasts consist of lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine,
but who do not regard the deeds of YHWH,
or see the work of his hands!

Consequences of Economic Injustice : Isaiah 5:13-17

Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge;
their nobles are dying of hunger,
and their multitude is parched with thirst.

Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite
and opened its mouth beyond measure;
the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude go down,
her throng and all who exult in her.

People are bowed down, everyone is brought low,
and the eyes of the haughty are humbled.

But YHWH of hosts is exalted by justice,
and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness.

Then the lambs shall graze as in their pasture,
fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.

Isaiah 5:18-19

Ah, you who drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood,
who drag sin along as with cart ropes, who say,
“Let him make haste, let him speed his agenda that we may see it;
let the plan of the Holy One of Israel hasten to fulfilment,
that we may know it!”

Those perpetrating this injustice are cynical of anyone who speaks to them of YHWH's 'agenda' or 'plan'. As grounds for their cynicism, they have used the fact that God does not immediately punish injustice.

Isaiah 5:20-24 : Judicial Injustice

Ah, you 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!

Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your own sight!

Ah, you who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant at mixing drink,
who acquit the guilty for a bribe,
and deprive the innocent of their rights!

Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble,
and as dry grass sinks down in the flame,

so their root will become rotten, and their blossom go up like dust;
for they have rejected the instruction [torah] of YHWH of hosts,
and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 5:25 : YHWH's anger

Therefore the anger of YHWH was kindled against his people,
and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them;
the mountains quaked,
and their corpses were like refuse in the streets.
For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.

Isaiah and his contemporaries assumed that God controlled everything that happened. Disasters such as the growing threat from Assyria was seen as God's punishment. Since God is just, this much be the result of sin. Isaiah did not have the privilege of seeing God as God is revealed by Jesus. Neither he nor those who treasured his oracles realised how faulty (and, in the final analysis, dangerous) their concept of God was. Their aim was a noble one: to warn their readers to be attentive to God's will, and not to repeat the sins of the past.

Isaiah 5:26-30 : The Assyrian Threat

He will raise an ensign for a nation far away,
and summon a people at the ends of the earth;
Here they come, swiftly, speedily!
None of them is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps,
not a loincloth is loose, not a sandal-thong broken;
their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent,
their horses' hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind.
Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar;
they growl and seize their prey, they carry it off, and no one can rescue.
They will roar over it on that day, like the roaring of the sea.
And if one look to the land – only darkness and distress;
and the light grows dark with clouds.

Isaiah 6:1-4 : Prophetic Commission

In the year that King Uzziah died [734], I saw YHWH seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

The prophet is taken into the inner circle of God's heavenly council

Seraphs [bronze 'serpent'] were in attendance above him, each with six wings:

With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their body, and with two they hovered.

And they were calling to one another:

'**Holy**, holy, holy is YHWH Almighty; [see Apocalypse 4:8] the whole earth is full of his glory.'

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

'Isaiah saw his glory and spoke about him'(John 12:41).

Isaiah 6:5-8 : Prophetic Commission (continued)

And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips,
and I live among a people of unclean lips;
yet my eyes have seen the King, YHWH of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphs flew to me,
holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.
The seraph touched my mouth with it and said:
“Now that this has touched your lips,
your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

Isaiah 6:9-10 : Prophetic Commission (continued)

And YHWH said, “Go and say to this people:
‘Keep hearing, without comprehending;
keep seeing, without understanding.’

Make the heart of this people **callous**.
Stop their ears, and close their eyes,
so that they may not see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and change their ways and be healed.”

The Greek Version has
‘the heart of this people
has become callous’ etc.

quoted Mark 4:10-12;
Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:40.
For Luke see Acts 28:26-27 (Paul).

The failure of Isaiah's mission posed a problem. If YHWH sent Isaiah on a mission, how could the mission fail?

For people who understood God as controlling whatever happens in the world (see Isaiah 3:1-5; 10:5-6,15; 29:9-10), this must mean that God willed it to fail. Since the fault was not Isaiah's it must have been the hardness of heart of those to whom Isaiah was sent.

Furthermore (such is the logic of the argument), if their heart is hardened, God must have willed things this way for God's own purposes. An obvious parallel is with Moses' mission to the Pharaoh of Egypt where we hear YHWH say: 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart'(Exodus 7:3).

In this case, as the previous chapters have made clear, God's purpose is understood as being to get Assyria involved, to punish Judah for the injustice that pervaded the lives of the rich and powerful, as a way of bringing them to change their ways.

Isaiah 6:11-13

Against Isaiah's advice the leaders of Judah will call on Assyria.
This will lead in 701 to terrible devastation and exile.

Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"

And he said:

"Until cities lie waste without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
until YHWH sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.
Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will revert to pasture,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing when it is felled."

The **holy seed** is its stump. [Addition: the exiles returned from Babylon]

Introduction to Isaiah 7-9

As noted in the Introduction, the reign of King Tiglath-pileser III (744-726) was a period of Assyrian expansion. At first King Rezin of Syria had no choice but to submit to Assyria as a vassal state. However, he took the opportunity of Assyria's concentration on its eastern borders with Urartu and Media to break away and to organise an anti-Assyrian alliance, which King Pekah of Israel joined. In 734 the Assyrian army made a victorious sweep all along the Mediterranean coastline, conquering the Philistine cities and reaching to the borders of Egypt. Syria and Israel were now vulnerable from east and west, and King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel brought pressure to bear on Jotham, king of Judah, to join the alliance (see 2Kings 15:37-38). When Jotham died that same year, and was succeeded by his young son, Ahaz, Syria and Israel decided to invade Judah in order to depose Ahaz and set up a puppet regime. They besieged Jerusalem.

This was the situation that provoked Isaiah's intervention. His message was straightforward. It was YHWH's will that Judah remain neutral and put its trust in YHWH, neither joining the anti-Assyrian alliance nor inviting Assyria's protection. Not joining Syria and Israel was excellent advice in every way, but then Ahaz and his advisers showed no signs of doing that in any case. In fact, the siege had to be lifted because in 733-732 Assyria attacked and conquered Syria, and took Dor, Galilee and Gilead from Israel. Israel saved itself by a coup which replaced Pekah with Hoshea who favoured accommodation with Assyria. It would have been suicidal for Judah to align itself with the ill-fated alliance.

The other half of Isaiah's advice, Ahaz chose to ignore. He decided to put his trust in Assyria, and to submit to the overlordship of Assyria, which involved paying tribute and opening Judah to Assyrian imperialist influence.

Isaiah 7:1-4

In the days of Ahaz son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not mount an attack against it. When the house of David heard that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

Then YHWH said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub ['a remnant will return'], at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field, and say to him, Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smouldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah.

Isaiah 7:5-6

Because Aram – with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah – has plotted evil against you, saying: Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it.

Isaiah 7:7-12 (selections)

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: It [the plot] shall not stand;
it shall not come to pass ...

If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.

im lo' ta'amînu ki lo' te'âmenû

אם לא תאמינו כי לא תאמנו

Again Yahweh spoke to Ahaz, saying: Ask a sign of YHWH your God;
let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.

But Ahaz said: I will not ask, and I will not put Yahweh to the test.

It is not clear why Ahaz is declining to ask for a sign. Are we to understand that Ahaz is uttering a pious phrase in an attempt to mask his lack of interest in listening to God's word?

Isaiah 7:14-16

LXX παρθένος, parthenos (virgin)

Matthew 1:23

YHWH himself will give you a sign.



Look, the young woman [‘almah, הַעַלְמָה], pregnant and carrying a son, will name him Immanuel.

He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows enough to reject what is wrong and choose the good. For before the child knows enough to reject what is wrong and choose the good, the land of the two kings whom you dread will be deserted.

It is possible that Isaiah is referring to King Ahaz's young wife. If that is so, the reference is to Hezekiah (born 732). God will be with us ('Immanuel'), and within a few years Syria and Israel will be deserted.

Isaiah 7:17-25

Isaiah goes on to warn Ahaz that if he relies on Assyria instead of on YHWH, YHWH will summon Assyria to punish Judah. He refers back to the traumatic time that followed on the death of Solomon. Judah was left isolated when the other tribes rejected the king of Judah and set up their own king in Israel

Isaiah 8:1-4

Another sign that it won't be long before Damascus and Israel will be devastated by Assyria

Isaiah 8:5-10

A warning to those who favoured putting their trust in Assyria that Assyria would devastate their land. Their only hope is to put their trust in YHWH.

Isaiah 8:11-15 : YHWH's judgment

YHWH will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel [those favouring alliance with Assyria and those favouring alliance with Syria-Israel] he will become a rock one stumbles over – a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.

‘As it is written, “See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall’(Romans 9:33).

‘Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls’(Luke 20:18; compare 1Peter 2:8).

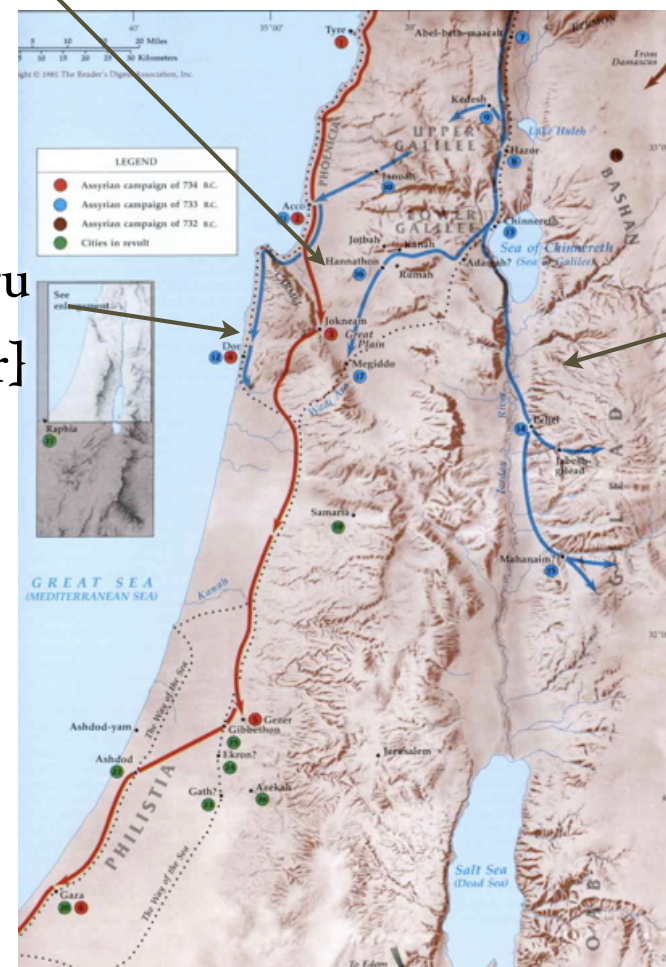
Isaiah 8:21 - 9:1

He [a nameless refugee] wanders across it [a nameless land], oppressed and hungry. Starving and desperate he curses his king and his God as he turns his face upward. Downward to the earth he looks. Nothing but anguish, darkness, swirling oppression, confused gloom. There is no glimmer of light for an oppressed land: the humiliation of the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; oppression in the Way of the Sea [Du'ru, Dor], in Transjordan [Gal'azu, Gilead] and in the Galilee of the nations [Magidû, Megiddo].”.

Description of the aftermath of the Assyrian Invasion, 732BC

Assyrian 'provinces' in conquered Israel

(Magidû [Megiddo]).



Du'ru [Dor]

Gal'azu [Gilead]

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those dwelling in a land of deep darkness –
light has dawned.

Matthew 4:15-16

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea [Dor],
across the Jordan [Gilead], Galilee of the Gentiles [Megiddo] —
the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those
who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in
darkness, but will have the light of life’(John 8:12).”

‘God who said “Let light shine out of darkness” has shone in our hearts
to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of
Christ’(2 Corinthians 4:6).

Isaiah 9:3-5

You have enlarged the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken
as on the day of Midian [Judges 6 ; Numbers 31].

For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child is born for us, a son given to us.

Isaiah 9:6-7 : Isaiah looks forward to the ascent of the king's son, Hezekiah, to the throne of Jerusalem (his 'birth' as king, 715BC).

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
authority rests upon his shoulders.
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually, and
there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his
kingdom. He will establish and uphold it
with just decrees and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of YHWH of hosts will do this.

(see Luke 1:32-33)

One who shares in the power of Yahweh to work wonders, to establish plans that can lead the people to recognise Yahweh's way and to discover his will.

Filled with the numinous power of God [El] against external enemies.

Divinely appointed protector of the fatherland.

He will establish the land in security, prosperity and political stability, because of the wholesome state of mind of the people, based on their obedience to God's revealed will.



O come, O come,
Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel.