THE SADDEST LOVE SONG

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Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard is one of the most poignant parts of Scripture. In it Isaiah artfully depicts the tender care that the LORD poured out on his vineyard, Israel, as well as his sadness and anger when Israel failed to produce the fruit that he cultivated and enabled them to bear. The Song of the Vineyard is the appointed Old Testament Lesson for Pentecost 20 this fall (October 26), and I hope that this study will help our pastors see the depth of God's gracious love for his people and motivate them to express it in as poignant and penetrating a manner as Isaiah himself did.

The title of this article is not intended to be a cute allusion to a genre of current popular music. It attempts to capture Isaiah's intent in portraying Israel's fractured relationship with the LORD. The Song of the Vineyard exhibits some of the best artistry available in Hebrew poetry, no doubt designed to elicit a heart-broken response from its hearers. I say "hearers" because you can't fully appreciate its poignancy unless you hear it in the original Hebrew. I encourage you to read each Hebrew phrase aloud along the way in order to get the full impact of the poetry.

I will also consider it from the angle of genre and show that it is actually a combination of genres blended together to give it its particular impact. In the introduction Isaiah himself classifies it as a love song: "I will *sing* for the one I *love* a song . . ." The first line reads:

אָשִׁירָה נָּא לִידִידִי שִׁירַת דּוֹדִי לְכַרְמוֹ

Let me sing for my loved one a song of my loved one about his vineyard.

אָשִׁירָה is the singular cohortative of the verb שִׁיר, "sing." As is frequently the case with cohortatives, it is followed by the particle of entreaty נָא, which is often left untranslated. The so-called cohortative and particle of entreaty often convey determination and emotional intensity more than exhortation or entreaty, and those connotations fit the context here. With the preposition לְ the translator is faced with the many possibilities that make translation such an art. Which of its many meanings fits best in the two occurrences here? The most common meanings are "to" or "for." Since vs. 1 and 2 describe what the "loved one" did for his vineyard and since in vs. 3-6 the loved one himself addresses the vineyard in the first person, "for" would be a better choice than "to" for the first occurrence of לְ. But לְ is sometimes used

interchangeably with עַל, especially in poetry, so here "about" or "concerning" seems to be the best meaning for the second occurrence of לְ in the verse.

A more important question is, "Who is the loved one?" It's intriguing that two different terms for "loved one" are used in the first line: יְדִיד and דּוֹד. Although not from the same Hebrew root, they were still clearly chosen for their similar sound. We today know the Song of the Vineyard well enough to recognize instinctively who Isaiah is referring to—the LORD. But try to imagine that you're reading it for the first time. Isaiah is clearly holding off from revealing who the loved one is. He doesn't explicitly say it's the LORD until v. 7. I wonder if he uses the twofold term in the first line (three times in the verse as a whole!) to awaken in the hearer the question: "Who *is* the loved one?" The question is made more striking by the fact that אָהַב, the word commonly used for God's love for us and our love for God, is not the word used here for love.

Elsewhere the first word used here for "loved one" or "dear one" is used in the (feminine) plural as a substantive connected to "song" in Psalm 45:1 (שִׁיר יְדִידֹת) "love song," similar to the next phrase here (שִׁירַת דּוֹדִי). The noun דּוֹד is used in the sense of "loved one" frequently in Song of Songs. It is also used of physical expressions of love. Because of that jarring connotation some suggest that here in Isaiah 5 דּוֹד should be translated with its secondary meaning, "uncle." However, as in Song of Songs, its usage here in connection with "vineyard" makes it obvious that it is intended in the sense of "loved one," as we'll see later.

The next term is לְכַרְמוֹ. We have already discussed the reason for taking לְ here is the sense of עַל, "about" or 'concerning."

"Vineyard" as a metaphor for the body of a female beloved is a frequent image in Song of Songs (1:6, 14; 2:15; 7:9 [8]; 8:11-12). Taken together ("vineyard" and "loved one"), there is no question that Isaiah is expressing the relationship of a male lover to his female beloved. The figurative use of a vineyard or garden or fertile soil as an image of a female beloved is frequent also in ancient Egyptian and Babylonian literature.[1] It's an allusion that would not have been lost on Isaiah's hearers. The hard work that the owner of the vineyard is portrayed as investing in it in the following verse (plowing, clearing it of stones, etc.) and the expense that he pours out on it (planting it with choice vines, building a tower and a wine vat) are all evidence of the love that he lavishes on it.

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[1]John T. Willis, "The Genre of Isaiah 5:1-7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (vol. 96, no. 3, 1977), 345-346.

Verse 1b:

כֶּרֶם הָיָה לִידִידִי בְּקֶרֶן בֶּן־שָׁמֶן׃

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

Isaiah fleshes out the relationship between the loved one and his vineyard. The לְ this time is clearly one of possession: The loved one *had* (הָיָה לְ) a vineyard. The verb is perfect. The relationship existed in the past. In a certain sense the relationship continues to exist. But as the rest of the song will reveal, something has happened to the relationship that makes the singer sing of it as something existing in the past.

The second half of the line indicates the location of the vineyard, but the vocabulary is strikingly odd: "on a horn the son of fatness." Evidently it means "on a fertile hill." Perhaps Isaiah chose to use the word קֶרֶן because it sounds like כֶּרֶם, the first word in the line. As for בֶּן־שָׁמֶן, Hebrew loves to use construct phrases with בֶּן to describe people, places, and things. So the striking vocabulary in this phrase no doubt was intended as a poetic touch that highlights the uniqueness and exquisiteness of God's love for Israel.

The poetic artistry continues in the first line of v. 2.

וַיְעַזְּקֵהוּ וַיְסַקְּלֵהוּ וַיִּטָּעֵהוּ שֹׂרֵק

He dug it up carefully and freed it of stones; he planted it with choice vines.

The first two verbs are rare in Hebrew and both are Piel, whose intensive "spin" is so fitting here for describing the exhaustive care that God had shown to Israel. עָזַק is a hapax legomenon in the Old Testament meaning "dig about." The second one (סָקַל) is more common. It has several meanings all having to do with stones, including "to stone a person to death." But here it clearly has the meaning "to free from stones." A similar use of the so-called privative Piel occurs with the root חטא with the connotation "de-sin". The third verb is the common Hebrew verb for "plant" (נָטַע, here in Qal). All three verbs have the masculine direct object suffix referring back to the vineyard. The last one (נָטַע) has another object (שֹׂרֵק) which must be rendered in English with a preposition ("*with* choice vines"). שֹׂרֵק is used only here and in Jeremiah 2:21, though it does occur frequently as a place name. The uniqueness of the vocabulary in these last two lines is no doubt a way of describing Israel's exquisite uniqueness.

Another feature of the first half of v. 2 is its alliteration, assonance and rhythm. Read it again out loud:

וַיְעַזְּקֵהוּ וַיְסַקְּלֵהוּ וַיִּטָּעֵהוּ שֹׂרֵק

The first two words are very similar in sound and rhythm, obviously carefully chosen by Isaiah. Their vowels and rhythm pattern in

fact are identical. Then notice what happens in the second half of the phrase. The sounds and rhythm of וַיְעַזְּקֵהוּ are similar to the first two words and yet clearly not as close as the first two are to each other. This one has five syllables rather than four (as in each of the first two words), interrupting just slightly the rhythm that has been set. Then finally the rather galloping rhythm of the first three words is punctuated by two long vowels—שֹׂרֵק—that clearly bring the line to an end. The poetry supports the meaning of the words. The owner has been working away so diligently on his vineyard (digging, removing stones). But the line wants us to pause a second to consider what his goal is for all his hard work—to plant this land with *choice vines.* There's no doubt what the choice vines are intended to represent. Modern Israelis still use clusters of grapes as a symbol of the people of Israel.

The owner's work resumes in the second line of the verse (2b).

וַיִּבֶן מִגְדָּל בְּתוֹכוֹ וְגַם־יֵקֶב חָצֵב בּוֹ

He built a tower in the middle of it and even dug a winepress in it.

Since the vocabulary is a little more common here, let me comment on just a couple of things. This vineyard was clearly valuable to the owner since he built a watch tower in it from which to guard it. And it's clear that he wants to get wine (that source of gladness) out of it since he digs a winepress in it, no doubt cut into one of the larger rocks that couldn't be removed from it. In the days when allegorical interpretation was common, each of these features was interpreted as an individual item that the LORD used by which to interact with Israel. But as we'll see later, the song shows evidence of being a parable, and parables were not intended in biblical times to have each of their details tied to a specific interpretive feature. The details contributed rather to one overarching point.

In the third line of v. 2 the focus shifts from the owner's work on the vineyard to his expectations for it, which end in disappointment.

וַיְקַו לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲנָבִים וַיַּעַשׂ בְּאֻשִׁים׃

He looked for it to produce (good) grapes, but it produced rotten ones.

Notice the subtle change in focus from the owner's *work* on the vineyard to his *expectations* for it (וַיְקַו, Piel of קָוָה, "and he looked eagerly for"). It's worth noting that vs. 1-2 as a whole focus the hearer/reader on the owner's loving care and unfulfilled expectations more than on the actual vineyard. The owner looked for the vineyard to produce (good) grapes, but instead it produced rotten, stinking grapes. בְּאֻשִׁים is the plural passive participle of the verb בָּאַשׁ, "to stink." (The modern Hebrew word for skunk is בּוֹאֵשׁ, i.e., "stinker.") The owner did everything necessary to make the vineyard produce abundantly, but something went terribly wrong.

Verse 3 takes a decided turn. This pericope is most often referred to as a song, but it actually displays characteristics of several genres. Only vs. 1-2 strictly speaking belong to the genre of song. Beginning with v. 3 the poetry displays a different tone.

וְעַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב יְרוּשָׁלַ֙͏ִם וְאִ֣ישׁ יְהוּדָ֔ה
שִׁפְטוּ־נָ֥א בֵינִ֖י וּבֵ֥ין כַּרְמִֽי׃

But now, inhabitant of Jerusalem and man of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

The opening particle of v. 3, עַתָּה, invites the reader to take stock—to consider the situation—to draw a conclusion from what has just been presented. The prophet calls on the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah, each in the singular. The verb however is a plural imperative. It's followed by the particle of entreaty which adds a note of urgency and then by the double preposition בֵּין, "between me and between my vineyard." This Hebrew construction helps to highlight the opposition between the two parties.

The shift in this verse is toward courtroom language. The central portion of the song (vs. 3-6) will be a courtroom plea, a רִיב ("dispute," "case" or "lawsuit"). Note too that the speaker has changed. Whereas in vs. 1-2 the prophet was telling the story of "his loved one," suddenly now the owner of the vineyard ("the loved one") is speaking, and he is dramatically addressing the people of Jerusalem and Judah, individuals who up till now had not been clearly referred to in the song. He is looking for a decision from them: Who is in the right? And who is in the wrong?

Then follows the poignant use of rhetorical question—two of them as a matter of fact (v. 4):

מַה־לַּעֲשׂ֥וֹת ע֛וֹד לְכַרְמִ֖י וְלֹ֣א עָשִׂ֑יתִי בּ֔וֹ
מִדֻּ֣עַ קִוֵּ֔יתִי לַעֲשׂ֥וֹת עֲנָבִ֖ים וַיַּ֥עַשׂ בְּאֻשִֽׁים׃

What is still to do for my vineyard that I have not done with it?

Why did I look for it to produce (good) grapes and it produced rotten ones?

As is typical of rhetorical questions, no answers need to be stated. Or as Marvin Sweeney says,

> Although the form of the questions presupposes an answer, the content indicates that no answer is possible. In fact, the questions do not seek an answer but intend to establish that the owner has exhausted all possible alternatives and should expect good grapes for his efforts.[2]

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[2]Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 126.

Another עַתָּה introduces the next section (vs. 5-6) in which the owner of the vineyard announces the punishment he will impose on his vineyard. (Note, as will be demonstrated below, that the particles in the song play an important role in signaling the progressive steps of the "case" that the author is presenting.) Verse 5a:

וְעַתָּה אוֹדִיעָה־נָּא אֶתְכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה לְכַרְמִי

And now let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

The verb אוֹדִיעָה is the Hiphil cohortative of יָדַע. Because of the Hiphil's causative nature, it creates a situation when used with this verb that requires two direct objects: "to cause *someone* to know *something*." אֶתְכֶם (you, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah) is the first object. The second is the relative clause introduced with אֵת, the direct object marker. As often with Hebrew participle, עֹשֶׂה has a future sense in the relative clause. And then comes the content of what the owner of the vineyard says he will do to it. Verse 5b:

הָסֵר מְשׂוּכָתוֹ וְהָיָה לְבָעֵר פָּרֹץ גְּדֵרוֹ וְהָיָה לְמִרְמָס׃

(I will) remove its hedge so that it will be for burning;

(I will) break down its wall so that it will be for trampling.

The main verbs of the two clauses are actually infinitive absolutes, which can at times substitute for practically any verb forms, here perhaps to emphasize the immediacy of the owner's intention. The first one, הָסֵר, is the Hiphil infinitive absolute of סוּר, "turn aside." The Hiphil of this very common verb serves as Hebrew's way of expressing "remove." מְשׂוּכָה is a hapax. So it's difficult to say what kind of hedge it represents. However the next clause makes clear that its purpose was to stave off fire. A waw-consecutive perfect that follows a future-oriented verb can sometimes have a purpose or result nuance, as וְהָיָה appears to have here ("so that it will be . . ."). Here it's followed by a Piel infinitive construct (לְבָעֵר, "so that it will be for burning"). The second half-line has virtually the same grammatical make-up except that the final element is a noun (מִרְמָס, "trampling") rather than an infinitive. A גָּדֵר is a lower wall than a city wall (חוֹמָה). Such walls were intended to keep wild animals as well as human beings out of places like vineyards.

Verse 6a:

וַאֲשִׁיתֶהָ בָתָה לֹא יִזָּמֵר וְלֹא יֵעָדֵר וְעָלָה שָׁמִיר וָשָׁית

And I will make it a waste land.

It will not be pruned and it will not be hoed so that thorns and thistles will grow up.

The first form is a waw-conjunctive imperfect. Though it might first appear to be a waw-consecutive, remember that when a conjunc-

tive waw is followed by an initial letter vowel with a schwa beneath it, the schwa that would otherwise be under the waw must become a vowel (here a patah by attraction because of the following aleph). So the phrase is literally, "and I will place it as a waste."

The rest of the line has interesting assonance and alliteration. Read it aloud to appreciate the effect. The verbs (יִזָּמֵר and יֵעָדֵר) are both Niphal imperfects, having a passive sense with "vineyard" as the assumed subject. The two phrases, לֹא יִזָּמֵר וְלֹא יֵעָדֵר, are virtually identical in rhythm and vowel pattern, creating a striking effect that can't be captured in translation. Perhaps the repeated cadence is intended to drive the message home: "not pruned, not hoed." Notice how this type of pairing *within* a half-line goes beyond the Hebrews' love for parallelism *between* half-lines. The vineyard will not be pruned and not be hoed so that (note the purpose nuance of the next waw-consecutive perfect) thorns and thistles will grow up in it. The pair וְשָׁמִיר and שָׁיִת are an alliterative pair, just like our thorns and thistles, often used by Isaiah (7:23, 24, 25; 27:4; fig. 9:17; 10:17).

But Isaiah saves the most dramatic consequence for last (v. 6b):

וְעַל הֶעָבִים אֲצַוֶּה מֵהַמְטִיר עָלָיו מָטָר׃

And upon the clouds I will command not to rain rain upon it (the vineyard).

Perhaps Isaiah saves this last detail for the end because he has not yet revealed who the owner (the "loved one") is. In this final half verse, before he reveals who the vineyard is, he gives a hint as to who the owner is. It is the one who controls the weather.

צָוָה of course always occurs in the Piel. So here too. The מִן on the front of מֵהַמְטִיר captures the sense that this is what God commands *not* to happen. The Hiphil infinitive construct expresses the causative sense of the verb "to rain" (with an unnamed subject). The verb is followed by the cognate accusative noun (מָטָר) related to it.

Now it's time for Isaiah to reveal *who* the owner is and *who* the vineyard is. V. 7a:

כִּי כֶרֶם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה נְטַע שַׁעֲשׁוּעָיו

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the man of Judah is the planting of his delight.

We're familiar with all the vocables already except for the final two. נֶטַע (here in its construct form, נְטַע) is the noun related to the common verb for "to plant" that occurred in v. 2. שַׁעֲשֻׁעִים is an interesting noun that always appears in this intensive plural form. It's related to the verb שָׁעַע, which usually appears in the Pilpal (thus explaining its unusual noun form). It means "delight" in the sense of "the planting that he delighted in."

In this last verse of the song, Isaiah finally reveals who is meant by the various "characters" of the song, signaling his intent with the particle כִּי. The "loved one" צְבָאוֹת is יְהוָה. And who is the כֶּרֶם? Answer: בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה. Here is the final "aha moment." Isaiah waits till the end of the song to reveal explicitly who the vineyard represents and who the owner of the vineyard is. Artistically he has drawn the people of Jerusalem/Judah into his tale. Using the tenderness of a love song and the logic and appeal for fairness natural to a רִיב, he has drawn his audience into this case and left them with no alternative but to join him in demanding justice. And now (signaled by the final כִּי) he delivers the final payload toward which he has been building. It is they themselves who have been so unresponsive to their "loved one." Isaiah highlights the injustice of the situation in the most poignant fashion with the final words: They were the "planting of his delight." And so he expected justice from them, but instead got bloodshed; he expected righteousness, and instead got an outcry.

Verse 7b:

וַיְקַו לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִנֵּה מִשְׂפָּח לִצְדָקָה וְהִנֵּה צְעָקָה׃

And he looked for justice, and look—bloodshed; for righteousness, and look—outcry!

In a striking use of the figure of speech called paronomasia, Isaiah, who delights in wordplay, uses two pairs of words that sound very similar and yet have completely different meanings (מִשְׂפָּח/מִשְׁפָּט, צְדָקָה/צְעָקָה). God expected justice from his people. In response to all the tender care that he had lavished on them, one would expect that they would love God more than anyone and love their neighbors as themselves. But instead God saw and heard the same thing in this case that he saw and heard when Cain killed Abel. He saw bloodshed. He heard the cries of those whom his people had oppressed. Modern translators have been so struck by this artistic touch that they have tried to render it in our modern languages. The Zurich Bible renders it: "Er hoffte auf Guttat, und siehe da Bluttat, auf Rechtsspruch, und siehe da Rechtsbruch." It's a touch that allows the song of the vineyard to end of with a special punch.

There are really three styles or genres contained in the song. It starts as a love song. Tenderly Isaiah draws the hearer/reader into his tale (vs. 1-2) by showing the extreme care that the "loved one" has poured into his vineyard. In the middle portion (vs. 3-6) he lets the owner of the vineyard express his grievance against the vineyard in the first person. The owner uses courtroom language to state his case ("judge") and to render his verdict and punishment against the offending party (vs. 5-6). But in the final verse (7) he uses an approach that

Jesus would often use centuries later in his parables. After drawing his hearers into his tale, Isaiah reveals to them that they themselves are the perpetrators of the thankless, heinous actions that he has just described to them. The art of the parable is clearly something that was developed in Jewish circles long before the days of Jesus. As we will see in the next section, it is this device of revealing at the end that the *listeners* are the *subjects* of the tale that gives the parable form of public speech such impact.

Parallels in the Old Testament

There are three places in the Old Testament that bear a marked resemblance to Isaiah 5:1-7. We will consider them in the following order of importance: 2 Samuel 12:1-14; 2 Samuel 14:1-20; Deuteronomy 32:1-27.

Second Samuel 12:1-14 is the account of Nathan confronting David with his sins of murder and adultery in connection with Bathsheba. Nathan presents the case in an artful way, telling a pastoral tale with a sad outcome, not unlike that presented in the Song of the Vineyard. A man with only one little ewe lamb (the family pet) is robbed of his lamb by a rich man who serves up the lamb as a meal for a traveling guest rather than using any of his own sheep. The account is cleverly told by Nathan in vs. 1-4.[3] It is clear that Nathan purposely approaches his task from this angle, rather than confronting David directly, in order to arouse David's anger over this injustice before revealing to him that he is the perpetrator of the crime. Here we see the very essence of this type of parable: A case is artfully presented to get the transgressor, who might otherwise evade his guilt, to see the injustice of his actions, so that when the meaning of the parable is revealed in the end the perpetrator will realize that he stands convicted.

The success of Nathan's approach is of course obvious. David burns with anger. He invokes the Lord as his witness that he will bring justice to the wronged. And then Nathan confronts David and says, "You are the man." What is intriguing about the similarities between this account and the Song of the Vineyard is that they share structural literary cues that signal the progression of thought. In most of these cases particles introduce the various stages of the unfolding parables. In v. 9 for instance, Nathan uses rhetorical question: "Why (לָמָּה־זֶּה, as in Isaiah) have you despised the LORD and done what is evil in his sight . . .?" Nathan begins the indictment of David with וְעַתָּה, "And now the sword will not depart from your house . . ." (v. 10). In v. 11 Nathan lets the LORD himself pronounce the consequences (1st per-

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[3]BHS prints these verses in poetry form though they lack the poetic parallelism so common in biblical Hebrew.

son as in Isaiah 5:3-6), "Thus says the LORD, 'I will raise up against you evil from your own house . . .' And finally the reason why the consequences are meted out is introduced (as in Isaiah 5:7) with a כִּי, "For you did it in secret . . ."

It is clear that the author of the 2 Samuel account is following the same schema as Isaiah 5, that is: 1) an artfully told account intended to incense the hearer about a case of injustice; 2) use of rhetorical question to highlight how the hearer cannot draw any other conclusion than the speaker's; 3) announcement of consequences for the wrong-doer (signaled by וְעַתָּה); and 4) interpretation of why things have turned out as they have (signaled by the final כִּי). Nathan's parable is clearly the closest that Scripture has to offer in comparison to the Song of the Vineyard.

The next account we will consider shares some of the same telltale signs, though not as many and with a few different features (2 Samuel 14:1-20). When David's son Absalom murdered his brother Amnon, David allowed Absalom to live in exile in Geshur for three years, but would not reconcile with him, until his general Joab created a ruse to get David to allow Absalom to return. Joab convinced a "wise woman" (אִשָּׁה חֲכָמָה) from Tekoa to go and appeal to the king. Dressed in mourning clothes, she told a story (invented by Joab) that her two sons had been fighting and the one killed the other. Now, she claimed, the people of her clan wanted to have the remaining son put to death for the murder of his brother. She pleaded with David that he intervene so that she would not be robbed also of her surviving son and that her husband would not be left without name or inheritance in Israel. When David, moved by her tale, promises to step in and stop the killing of the other son, she confronts him with the fact that this is what he has done to all Israel by not allowing Absalom to return from banishment. She speaks hyperbolically about how destitute Israel is currently without Absalom ("We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again," v. 14). In response David relents and allows Absalom to return.

Though the parallels may not be as clear in this account, they do exist. An invented story is told to get the hearer (David) to see the injustice of what he is doing to Israel. When the king is drawn into the woman's heart-rending tale and promises to help her get justice, she turns the tables on him and reveals that he is the one who is preventing the right thing from being done. This account too uses rhetorical question ("Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God?" v. 13a) and introduces an explanation with final כִּי ("For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again," v. 13b).

Deuteronomy 32, the Song of Moses, is sometimes also mentioned as resembling the Song of the Vineyard,[4] though its similarities are along different lines than the two accounts from 2 Samuel. Here again we have a *song,* which adds a certain touch of pathos to the lesson being taught. Here too the point is that Israel has been unfaithful to its faithful God. The Song of Moses begins with the tone of a ריב. The singer calls heaven and earth as his witnesses to whom he presents his case (v. 1 is very reminiscent of the beginning of the book of Isaiah, 1:2). The LORD's care for his people is emphasized, though the imagery is different from that in Isaiah 5. He has been an eagle caring for his nesting young (v. 11). He has fed them richly with honey, oil, foaming wine, etc. (vs. 13-14). But they are like a fattened calf who kicks and rebels against him (vs. 15-18). When it comes time to announce the consequences of their sins, the singer changes to 1st person, as in Isaiah 5, to allow the LORD himself to pronounce the punishments of abandonment and destruction that will be visited on them (vs. 21-27).

These three parallels from the Old Testament show traits of the three genres employed in the Song of the Vineyard. The three genres are not so evenly mixed within the parallels, and the fact that Isaiah combines the three to such good effect may be a sign that he has gleaned and is skillfully interweaving the approaches of past prophets in a new and powerful way. In any case, it's clear that the Song of the Vineyard displays a combination of the genres of *song* (which helps the prophet to express the loving care that the LORD showed Israel), the judicial *case* (ריב, to express the indignation and appeal for justice that Israel's treatment of the LORD called for) and the parable (which is ideal for withholding the revelation of who the song is about until the addressed hearers will accept the heinousness of their own actions).

Though the song has often been interpreted allegorically in past centuries, recent exegetes such as Willis[5] and Graffy[6] have argued against interpreting it as allegory. They point out that in allegory each detail is intended to represent a separate thing, whereas a parable posits only one salient truth and all its details are intended to contribute to that one overarching point. Indeed, there have been many attempts over the centuries to define what the vineyard's wall stands for or its watchtower, etc. Willis makes a compelling case for why this was not what Isaiah intended. The allegorical method was not developed until centuries later under Greek influence.[7] Verse 7 of the Song

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[4]Gale A. Yee, "The Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (vol. 43, no. 1, January 1981), 31.

[5]Willis, 353.

[6]Adrian Graffy, "The Literary Genre of Isaiah 5:1-7," *Biblica* (vol. 60, 1979), 402.

[7]Willis, 356.

of the Vineyard makes it clear that there is only one point intended: Israel has not fulfilled God's righteous expectations.

The song appears to come from early in Isaiah's career (before the Syro-Ephraimite conflict in chapter 7 and the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in chapters 36-39). It would then have been a rather early call to repentance, a compelling call issued when there was still a chance for a change in attitude and behavior, a call strengthened by the use of all three genres that we have outlined here.

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