

2 Nephi 15 — Isaiah 5 — The Song of the Vineyard, the Six Woes, the Ensign to the Nations

The vineyard that produced wild grapes, the six woes against social sin, the ensign lifted to the nations and the swift gathering, c. 740–700 BC.

One of the OT's most rhetorically virtuosic chapters. Opens with a love-song to the Beloved's vineyard that unmasks as Israel's indictment (vv. 1–7); delivers six woes (vv. 8–25); closes with the ensign lifted to a distant nation and the swift hisser (vv. 26–30). Christ's parable of the vineyard, Jacob 5's olive allegory, and 3 Nephi's gathering language all rest on this chapter.

Ten Insights

1. **Song of the Beloved (v. 1).** Deliberately ambiguous opening — love-song? court-poet's praise? Isaiah plays the double-voicing all the way to the unmasking in v. 7.
2. **Five vineyard-investments (v. 2).** Fenced, gathered stones, choicest vine, tower, wine-press. Maximum investment; the failure cannot be blamed on insufficient provision.
3. **Wild grapes (v. 2).** *Be'ushim* — stinking, rotten grapes. Not merely poor fruit; actively malformed. Untended sin doesn't stay neutral; it stinks.
4. **Mishpat / mispach pun (v. 7).** *He looked for mishpat (judgment) and behold mispach (oppression).* Two pairs of near-identical Hebrew words; meanings diametrically opposite. The covenant's intended and actual outcomes differ by one consonant.
5. **Wo I — join house to house (v. 8).** Real-estate consolidation contradicting Jubilee-redistribution (Lev. 25). Modern wealth-concentration via property monopolization falls under the woe.
6. **Wo III — cords of vanity (v. 18).** Pulling iniquity along behind oneself with the cart-rope of vanity. The chapter diagnoses sin's underlying motivation as ego, not desire.
7. **Wo IV — call evil good (v. 20).** Six diametric pairs of moral inversion. The OT's clearest moral-realism statement — relabeling does not change reality.
8. **Wo V — wise in own eyes (v. 21).** Self-confident wisdom as covenant-failure. Parallel to 2 Ne. 9:28's *when they are learned they think they are wise*.
9. **Ensign to the nations (v. 26).** *Nes* — standard-banner / miracle. The Restoration's missionary work; the magazine *Ensign* takes its name from this verse.
10. **Swift hisser (v. 26).** *Sharaq* — shepherd's whistle to the sheep. Modern LDS missionary system literally fulfills the prophecy of rapid gathering from distant nations.

Cross-References

Lev. 25 (Jubilee); Deut. 28:23–24 (covenant drought); 2 Sam. 12:1–7 (Nathan and David); Ps. 1; Ps. 80 (vineyard); Prov. 3:5–7; Eccl. 12:13; Isa. 11:10–12 (ensign to the nations); Isa. 18:3; Isa. 27:2–6 (vineyard restored); Jer. 2:21; Jer. 25 (cup of wrath); Ezek. 15; Hos. 4:1–3; Joel 1; Amos 2:6; Mic. 2:1–2; Hab. 2:6; Zeph. 1:13; Mal. 3:15; Matt. 21:33–46 (vineyard parable — direct citation); Mk. 12:1–12; Lk. 20:9–19; Jn. 15:1–8 (I am the vine); Rom. 11:17–24 (grafted in); Gal. 5:22–23 (fruit of the Spirit); Jas. 5:1–6 (woe to the rich); Rev. 5:5 (Lion of Judah); Rev. 14:18–20 (vine of the earth); 1 Ne. 22; 2 Ne. 9; 2 Ne. 27 (Marvelous Work); Jacob 5 (olive allegory — direct expansion); Mosiah 14 (Isaiah 53); Alma 32:28–43 (seed of faith); Alma 34 (great and last sacrifice); 3 Ne. 16; 3 Ne. 21; 3 Ne. 22 (Isaiah 54); D&C 1:14, 23 (ensign); D&C 64:42; D&C 86:1–7 (Husbandman); D&C 89 (Word of Wisdom); D&C 101:39–42 (salt savor); JS—H 1 (ensign of the Restoration).

Apocryphal Correlations

Psalms 80. *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt* — Psalter parallel; same vineyard-as-Israel image.

Jeremiah 2:21. *I had planted thee a noble vine... how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant?* — direct canonical parallel.

Ezekiel 15. Vine-wood good for nothing except burning — bleak parallel to the wild-grapes image.

1 Enoch 95–98. *Wo unto you who acquire houses through wrongdoing* — direct parallel to Wo I (vv. 8–10).

Wisdom of Solomon 1–2. *Wo to the ungodly... let us oppress the poor righteous man* — closest Wisdom-tradition parallel to the chapter's six woes.

Sirach 13:20–22. *Humility is abomination to the proud; so is the poor an abomination to the rich* — parallel to Wo I and Wo VI.

4 Ezra 16:46–53. *Whoever sells, let them sell as those who shall flee* — collapse-imminence parallel.

2 Baruch 70–72. Dark waters of the latter days — closest extra-canonical parallel to the full chapter.

Hebrew Word Studies

be'ushim (בְּעֹשִׁים, **wild / stinking grapes**) — vv. 2, 4. From the root *ba'ash* (to stink). Not just poor; actively rotten. Covenant-failure as active malformation.

mishpat / mispach (מִשְׁפָּט / מִשְׁפָּח, **judgment / oppression**) — v. 7. Hebrew pun differing by one consonant; meanings diametrically opposite. The covenant slips into corruption by the slightest moral deviation.

tzedakah / tze'akah (צְדָקָה / צַ'עֲקָה, **righteousness / a cry**) — v. 7. Second of the chapter's celebrated phonetic-puns. Same root differing by one consonant — opposite moral meanings.

shechar (שִׁכָּר, **strong drink / intoxicant**) — vv. 11, 22. Akkadian *shikaru*. The chapter names intoxicant-pursuit as covenant-displacement. Restoration's Word of Wisdom (D&C 89) instantiates the doctrine.

nes (נֶס, **ensign / standard / miracle-banner**) — v. 26. Tall pole-mounted banner visible from a distance. Same word means *miracle* in later Hebrew. The Restoration's gathering is itself the miracle-ensign.

Personal Application

Three practices. First, test the six woes against your own life. Each woe is a self-examination question. Am I accumulating beyond justice? Am I substance-pursuing? Am I dragging iniquity with cords of vanity? Am I inverting moral categories for cultural convenience? Am I wise in my own eyes? Am I trading judgment for reward? Six annual questions. Second, recognize yourself as the vineyard. Read prophetic indictment as personal, not as commentary on others. The chapter's rhetorical trap (vv. 1–7) is teaching the disciple a reading-posture. Third, honor the ensign in your own missionary life. Whether full-time or member missionary, the disciple's life is the ensign's living continuance. Carry it concretely — speak of the gospel, share the Book, post Christ-centered content, live visibly.