

Reflect:

- They could understand the Lord's judgment of other nations – but them? What was the special tragedy of the Lord's vineyard in chapter 5? How does the song in chapter 27 offer hope?
- In what ways do these two songs challenge us today? Do we want the Lord to give us peace – but not to “these others”?

Verse 6 looks forward – “In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.” The reference is not only to the coming “Root of Jesse”, but to the Lord's people again being blessed to be a blessing.

This surely refers beyond the Biblical Israel to all who are the Lord's people by faith in Christ. We are reminded of the words of Jesus, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (Jn 15.1-2,5,8).

Reflect again:

- We are back to where we began – why does the farmer keep on farming? There are undoubtedly many reasons, but, through it all, he is looking for a harvest. Why does the Father continue to cultivate and prune us?
- What is the harvest he is expecting to see in and through us? What do we have to do about it?

Study 5 – Restoration, Comfort & Joy Reading: Isaiah 32.1-8;35.1-10;40.1-11,27-31

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Studies from the book of Isaiah
by Peter J Blackburn
4. A Fruitful Vineyard
Reading: Isaiah 26.1-8,12-15;27.1-6

Farming is a very demanding occupation. There are very few jobs that require as much forethought, skill, ingenuity, time and hard work.

If the market prices are unfavourable and the seasons too wet or too dry and the pests and diseases barely manageable with permitted pesticides... why does the farmer do it? Many farmers have asked themselves that – and come to the conclusion that it is “in their blood,” this passion to see things growing.

As winter sets in, the orchardist looks at his trees. He knows how many there are. Each twig has to be pruned for the health of the tree and to ensure a good crop. There is a real art in pruning a fruit tree, but – how many hundreds does he have to do?

Tractors are more comfortable than they used to be – padded seats, air-conditioning. Some farmers get a real “buzz” driving the powerful machinery to plough their paddocks. And being up in the night to change the irrigation?

Reflect:

- A great deal of effort goes into farming. Even when the financial rewards are down, the farmer doesn't give up. Why?
- There is hard work throughout the year. Then at harvest time the work load is even more demanding. Yet that is the very time when harvest festivals are held. Why is that so?

Shalom Shalom

Read: Isaiah 26.1-8

Isaiah records prophecies against a number of the surrounding nations – Babylon, Assyria, the Philistines, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Arabia, Edom, Tyre... (chs 13-24). But the Lord's people are not immune from his

judgment – Jerusalem (chs 22,29), Ephraim (ch. 28 – representative of the Northern Kingdom). The Southern Kingdom foolishly proposes an alliance with Egypt (chs 30,31).

In the midst of all these “woes”, the Lord promises deliverance. “We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. You will keep in perfect peace (*shalom shalom*) him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD (*Yah Yahweh*), is the Rock eternal” (26.1b-4).

Read: Isaiah 26.12-15.

“Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us” (v. 12).

Peace – wholeness, well-being, prosperity – is God’s gift. Our part is to receive it.

As the singers look at their national life, they are aware that any positive advances they have made “you have done for us.” We make a mess of things. God establishes peace.

Reflect:

- We long for peace – especially in times of conflict. What do we mean by “peace”? How can we kept in *shalom shalom* – God’s perfect peace (someone called it “double peace”)?
- What difference does it make when we look at what God has done instead of just focusing on all our achievements?

A Fruitful Vineyard

Read: Isaiah 27.1-6

There will be a day of judgment (26.21). On that day God will make an end of the gliding, coiling serpent Leviathan. This obscure sea-creature appears in only five passages in the Old Testament. In Ps 104.26 we read, “There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there” – generally thought to be a

whale or dolphin. Psalm 74.13,14 says that it was God who “broke the heads of the monster in the waters” and “crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert” – the context is the Exodus from Egypt. In Ezekiel 29.3-5 the reference is to Pharaoh and the Egyptians – the description makes it clear that a crocodile is intended. The longest description of Leviathan is Job 41 where most scholars agree the creature is a crocodile.

In Isaiah 27.1, Leviathan is “the gliding and coiling serpent” and is here symbolical of their enemies – most probably it alludes to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and thus to the empires of Assyria and Babylonia through which they flowed.

In chapter 5, Isaiah says, “I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit... The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress” (vv. 1-2,7). The passage goes on to speak of God’s judgment on his people.

But now in chapter 27, the Lord speaks of his vineyard again, “Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it” (vv. 2-3).

In 5.6 “briars and thorns will grow there.” But in 27.4 the Lord says that “if only there were briars and thorns confronting me! I would march against them in battle; I would set them all on fire.” These would be intruders into the Lord’s vineyard – fit for destruction. But in reality God’s grace extends beyond the chosen people. Even so-called enemies can respond to grace – “let them come to me for refuge; let them make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me” (v. 5).

This is a powerful message following the prophecies against the nations earlier in Isaiah. They face divine judgment – but so do Jerusalem and Ephraim. The Lord offers reconciliation and peace to these other nations – as also to his chosen people. There is nothing here of the exclusiveness which so often marked – and marred – the Lord’s people.