Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet

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PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD
ISAIAH 5

In chapter 5, Isaiah combines parable, warning, and promise together with poetry and irony in order to portray the Lord’s work with the children of Israel. Although a self-contained message, this chapter reflects the themes developed in the first four chapters of Isaiah and serves as a transition between these chapters and the prophet’s record of his vision and calling in chapter 6. In the parable of the vineyard, Isaiah illustrates that although God has done everything possible for his people, they still reject him; this can be compared to the Lord’s tender appeals in Isaiah 1. Isaiah then lists Israel’s major sins and warns of destruction, desolation, and scattering; this echoes similar warnings in Isaiah 1 and 3. Chapter 5 concludes with the promise of an ensign to the nations, a gathering of Israel, and a mighty army of soldiers (or missionaries) bringing peace to Israel; similar expectations are found in Isaiah 2 and 4. In short, this chapter summarizes Isaiah’s earlier teachings and completes the set of introductory chapters.

Chapter 5 is easily divided into three sections:
1. Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard (vs. 1-7).
2. A series of six pronouncements upon wicked Israel (8-25).
3. Promises of an ensign, gathering, and army (26-30).

In each of these three sections, Isaiah follows a pattern of first calling upon his audience and introducing his subject matter, then describing the Lord’s dealings with them, and finally highlighting how the outcome of events is usually contrary to earlier expectations. Since this pattern of “identification/description/contrast” appears at least a half-dozen times in this chapter, it will be pointed out as the individual verses are quoted. The three components of the pattern will therefore be identified in the left hand margin of the quotations with the following notation:
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I = Identification: Isaiah introduces and defines the group to which the message will apply.

D = Description: The Lord's work, power, or judgments upon the group are described.

C = Contrast: The initial expectation of the Lord or the people does not come to pass; indeed, the opposite usually occurs.

Section 1: The Parable of the Vineyard (vs. 1-7)

Chapter 5 begins with Isaiah's famous "parable of the vineyard," the most striking example of this literary form in the Old Testament. This form is echoed throughout the scriptures. (Jer. 2:21; 12:10f.; Ps. 80:8f.; Jacob 5; Matt. 20:1-16; Matt. 21:28-32, 33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18; 13:6-9; John 15:1-8; Romans 11:17-24.) Isaiah's parable is described by various commentators as "a little masterpiece," "a passage of singular beauty and grace," and "the finest example of the prophet's art and skill in the whole book of Isaiah."

Its structure resembles that of the joyful oriental songs of the harvest or vintage festivals. It begins as a "love song" of the master of the vineyard and moves toward a description of a walled garden and fragrant orchard similar to the one described in the Song of Solomon. (Song 4:12-5:5.) The master's efforts, however, result not in sweet fruit, but in sour grapes. Therefore, after soliciting community approval, he destroys the vineyard. The parable concludes in verse 7 with Isaiah's identification of its major terms and a summary of how they apply to Israel:

5 Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard:

I 5 My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

D 2 He digged 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;

C 4 and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

I 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge, I pray you, between me
and my vineyard.

D 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?

C 5 When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

I 6 And now I will tell you
D what I will do in my vineyard.

C I will remove its branches
and break down the fence and hedge.
I will break it in pieces
and plow it with the plow of seven pairs of oxen.
I will make it a pasture for the wild oxen.
I will make it not be heded.

The parable is a fable/conjecture/Descriptive segment, Isaiah person narration about the Lord and the vineyard where the Lord's actions are described. By God, the prophet's message, the vineyard of the Lord is used to convey a message to the people. The parable concludes in verse 7 with Isaiah's identification of its major terms and a summary of how they apply to Israel.
grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

I 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.
D I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;
C 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,

The parable is divided into four segments, each with an Identification/Description/Contrast sequence. Also, in the first and last segment, Isaiah speaks about the Lord and his vineyard using third person narration, while in the middle segments he shifts to first person where the Lord himself assumes the narrative role. A shift in form such as this is fairly common in Isaiah and other prophetic writings and is employed in order to draw attention to key themes of the poem or message. By shifting to first person and using the direct voice of God, the prophet reminds his listeners that he is delivering the Lord’s message, not just his personal philosophy. Also, a pattern of third person/first person/first person/third person is a form of grammatical parallelism and chiasmus, which assists the audience to remember the prophet’s message.

In the first segment (vs. 1-2), Isaiah describes the preparations of his friend for the vineyard. The master of the vineyard follows five steps to ensure a productive harvest: (1) choice of fertile soil, (2) cultivation of the soil, (3) selection of good stock, (4) protection of the crop, and (5) preparation for harvesting and storing the crop. His extreme care is evidenced even more in the original language. In Hebrew, the hill chosen for the vineyard is literally translated as “a horn, the son of oil,” indicating that the vineyard was located on the summit of a very fertile hill. Special grapevines (soreq) were used instead of the more common variety (gephon). The soreq grapes produce a red wine famous for its bouquet and taste.

Other indications of the vineyard master’s efforts include the
clearing out of stones and the building of walls and a watchtower. He obviously anticipates a plentiful harvest because he also “hews” a winepress or vat in the middle of the vineyard. Such a wine vat consists of two basins or pits carved out of the rocks. The upper pit, where the grapes are trodden out, is shallow and large enough to accommodate the workers. A trench carries the pressed-out juices to a lower, deeper pit, where the wine accumulates until it is stored in clay jars or skin bags. The construction of this type of press is usually undertaken by wealthy landowners or by those who press grapes for many farmers. Thus, the fact that the master of this vineyard builds a vat in the middle of his own field indicates that he expects his harvest alone to justify its construction. To his disappointment, however, his vines yield only wild, sour grapes.

In the second segment of the parable (vs. 3-4), Isaiah speaks for the master of the vineyard and asks the people of Judah to judge between him and his vineyard. These people, of course, knew about grapes, and many of them owned and cultivated grape vines themselves. They would have judged the master correct in all his efforts and empathized with his disappointment in the small, bitter grapes.

Finally, the master resolves that he will destroy the vineyard (vs. 5-6). Rather than uprooting the vines and planting new stock, however, he tears down the protecting walls and allows animals and travelers to trample the vines. He then stops tending the vines and commands the clouds to cease their rainfall, thus giving the first indication that he has more power than a normal, mortal landowner.

The master’s true power and identity are disclosed by Isaiah in the last segment of the parable (v. 7). The Lord of Hosts is the owner, and his vineyard is the house of Israel. His process of abandoning the vineyard exemplifies the judgments of God, who usually does not destroy or severely punish a wicked person; God simply leaves him alone to face the challenges of life and buffeting of Satan without the protection of the Spirit, whose withdrawal is adequate immediate punishment.

The justification for God’s action is found in the last part of the verse—the people receive a punishment commensurate with their sins. Isaiah uses striking word play to highlight the irony of the situation. Through similar sounds in words of opposite meaning, he accentuates the contrast between the expected “justice” (mishpat in the Hebrew) and resulting “bloodshed” (mispach). And instead of “righteousness” (tsedakah), the people bring forth a riotous “cry” (tse’akah). A simila following translation antithesis and allite

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The Lord looked for true measures, but behold, massacres: the right, but behold, riots.¹

This type of literary device had a profound effect on the Hebrews, for they felt there was a power inherent in words that are mysteriously linked by similarity and contrast.

The style of this parable, in which the audience unknowingly condemns itself with an early judgment, is sometimes called a "Trojan horse" story, for the speaker disguises his intent until the end. By then, the unsuspecting listeners have already passed sentence on the characters in the parable before realizing that they, themselves, are the ones being spoken about. This technique was used by Nathan as he described an unjust man to King David, who assented to his own guilt as he rebuked the wicked selfishness of the man. (See 2 Sam. 12:1-8, 13.) Similarly, Jesus used this technique when he confronted the wicked chief priests and Pharisees and compared them to the wicked husbandmen. (Matt. 21:33-45.)

The precise setting and background of this particular parable is unknown, although many scholars believe that Isaiah delivered it as crowds of Israelites assembled in Jerusalem during the annual Feast of Tabernacles (**Sukkot**, meaning booths, or huts), for during this joyous autumn holiday, many harvest and vintage songs similar to the song beginning the parable were sung.

During the harvest season, most Israelite farmers and their families moved into huts in the fields and orchards. During the eight days of Sukkot, which usually fall during our month of October, they decorated the huts with flowers and vines to commemorate the use of tents by their ancestors during the exodus. They also brought tithes, offerings, and other gifts to the temple.

Ancient Israel was commanded to celebrate Sukkot each year to commemorate how the Lord brought them out of Egypt to Mount Sinai and gave them his laws during the autumn of their first wilderness year. (Lev. 23:39-43; see also the description of the Feast of Tabernacles under BD "Feasts," p. 673.) By Isaiah's time, almost seven centuries later, the Feast of Tabernacles was corrupted by

¹Modified from an example in IB Isa. 5:198.
pagan ideas and practices in conjunction with excessive revelry and merrymaking. The riotous celebration prohibited the Israelites from properly observing the true spirit of Sukkot and distracted them from the fasting and rededication rites they had performed just a few days earlier during the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

The Day of Atonement was a serious time of prayer and fasting. Observed five days before Sukkot, it provided an annual opportunity for recognition of sin and encouraged the Israelites to bring their transgressions before the Lord and seek his forgiveness. It was a somber time of recommitment and rededication as they renewed their vows with the Lord. (See the description of the Day of Atonement under BD “Fasts,” p. 671.)

Unfortunately, the Israelites quickly forgot their vows and lost the spiritual benefits of prayer and fasting as they drank, sang, and danced to excess a week later during Sukkot. This condition seems to be the context for Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard; his song and analysis of Judah’s sins (following in vs. 8-25) fit very well in this setting. The vintage song beginning the parable is in the mood of the Sukkot festival, while the didactic lesson at the parable’s conclusion would remind the people of the commitments they made on the Day of Atonement.

Section 2: Six Woes upon Israel (vs. 8-25)

Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard condemns Israel for failing to serve the Lord. Isaiah presents evidence for this accusation by describing six “woes” that illustrate Israel’s wickedness and hypocrisy. He also pronounces three major punishments that are to fall upon the wicked—the desolation of their land, their scattering throughout the world, and the hell of spirit prison. He follows the pattern established earlier in the parable by first identifying (I) different models of wickedness and then describing (D) dire consequences or results that are in contrast (C) to what the people expect.

His first pronouncement of “woe and judgment” is found in verses 8-10:

1 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:
10 For ten acres of vineyards
shall yield
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(RSV)

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shall yield but one bath,

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This judgment falls upon wealthy landowners who buy up all the property they can until their lands border one another. This results in a monopoly of property that should be divided among others, especially the poor. This practice violates the spirit of the Law of the Jubilee, the property law of ancient Israel, which states that “the land shall not be sold forever.” (Lev. 25:23.) Instead, land was to remain within families and clans as a perpetual inheritance. (See 1 Kgs. 21, in which Nebo Refuses to sell his ancestral lands to King Ahab.) The hoarding of land described in verse 8 was in violation of this law, for when all property was purchased by a few wealthy individuals, there was no place for the original families to dwell. Having no homeland, they were forced to move to the cities or live on the property of the owner as indentured servants or slaves. Although drought, sickness, or economic setbacks might require a farmer to sell his land or indenture himself and family to cover losses, the Year of Jubilee every fifty years was instituted to correct the perpetual loss of land and the slavery of people by guaranteeing the periodic return of land to the original owners. Obviously, this law was severely abused by the landowners of Isaiah’s time. (See Young, The Book of Isaiah 1:207.)

Verse 10 describes the impending judgment upon the property of these selfish landowners. As the cursed land loses productivity and refuses to yield enough to support the population, “houses without inhabitants” will be found throughout the land. The empty “houses” might be either literal dwelling places or figurative representations of families and clans. The emptiness, in turn, might result from either the drought spoken of in verse 6 or the impending Assyrian invasion and destruction mentioned in verses 24-30. Still, even without external interference, farm productivity generally declines when the poor move to the cities or remain as oppressed tenants of absentee landlords.

The meager harvest is graphically portrayed in verse 10. The phrase “ten acres” is derived from the Hebrew phrase “ten yokes,” meaning the amount of land ten yoke of oxen can plough in a day. Ten acres or “yokes” would equal about five acres. (ABC, p. 642.) A harvest of grapes from this much land would normally yield dozens of gallons of wine. For the cursed land of Israel, however, this large area produces only one “bath,” or from four to eight gallons of wine.
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Similarly, a “homer” of seed (about six bushels, also called a “donkey’s load”) yields only one ephah of harvest (four gallons or twenty-two litres). The complete irony of the situation can be seen in this last comparison, since ten ephahs equal one homer. Isaiah is promising that the harvest will be only one-tenth of the original planting. (See BD “Weights and Measures.”) Instead of the soil yielding thirty, sixty, or one hundred fold, it produces only a fraction of the seed originally planted. This is such a drastic contrast from what is expected that if a farmer wanted food for the next year, he would be better off not to plant at all.

Isaiah turns from the selfish landowners and addresses drunkards and revelers in his second “woe” and judgment:

I 11Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them! 12They have lyre and harp, timbrel and flute and wine at their feasts; but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands.

D 13Therefore my people go into exile for want of knowledge; their honored men are dying of hunger, and their multitude is parched with thirst.

C 17Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins. (RSV)

The Lord here condemns not only drinking, but the riotous lifestyle associated with it (v. 12; see also D&C 59:20-21). Verse 13 tells us that this type of behavior leads to captivity and thirst. It could be a pronouncement of a physical captivity and destruction to come upon the people, or of a spiritual captivity that leads to “hell,” with the idea of “thirst” representing a lack of the Spirit. (See Amos 8:11-12; John 7:37-39.) Verse 14 then promises a definite spiritual punishment: the word hell in He world,” or “spirit.

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word hell in Hebrew is sheol, meaning “grave,” “underworld,” “spirit
world,” or “spirit prison.”

Verses 13-17 describe the judgment coming upon the merrymak-
ers who are the subject of this “woe.” But while verses 13-16 are quite
straightforward in describing the humiliation to come upon the drink-
ers, verse 17 is a bit confusing. The destruction portrayed in the earlier
verses has now become so complete that where the “vineyard of the
Lord” once stood, lambs now graze. The “waste places of the fat
ones” (KJV) probably refers to the now desolate lands of the once rich
and prosperous. Some translations describe “kids” (see translation
quoted above) or goats eating in the land, while others record that
“strangers” will feed in the area. The term used depends upon which
early Old Testament version is followed—the Hebrew Masoretic text
uses the word for “aliens” in this verse, while the Greek Septuagint
has the word for “young goats.” An interpretation differing from the
verses quoted above is found in this alternate translation:

Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture,
And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy. (ASV)

The warnings and judgments of this verse echo the words given by
Isaiah in chapter 1 (v. 7), and by Moses in Deuteronomy. Moses told
Israel that the Lord was giving them a bountiful land for which they
did not need to work. Because it was a free gift, he warned them to
“beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of
the land of Egypt, from the house of Bondage.” (Deut. 6:12.) He later
promised them that if they did forget the Lord, then:

The Lord shall bring a nation against thee … And he shall eat the fruit of
thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not
leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or thy increase of the kine, or flocks of thy
sheep, until he have destroyed thee. (Deut. 28:49, 51.)

This is the first time in the Old Testament that this warning and
its attached curse is pronounced. In Isaiah, the ancient law is again
pronounced upon the people: because of their wickedness, their food
will be eaten by grazing flocks, strangers, and foreigners. In contrast
to the Israelites enjoying their own vineyards, outsiders will eat and
drink the fruits of Zion.

As Isaiah continues his woes and judgments in this section of
chapter 5, he progresses from the covetousness or selfishness of the
first woe to the mindless revelry of the second, and finally to the
deliberate distortions and wickedness of the last four. He lists these
last perverted woes together and then pronounces a series of severe punishments, which include desolation, scattering, and eternal judgment:

I 18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes,
who say: "Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it;
let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!"

I 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!

I 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
and shrewd in their own sight!

I 22 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine,
and valiant men in mixing strong drink,
who acquit the guilty for a bribe,

and deprive the innocent of his right!

D 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 rotteness, and their blossom go up like dust;
for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and they 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 smote them,
and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets.

G For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still. (RSV)

Through the preceding analysis of Judah's sins, she learns that she has abandoned the Lord and deceived others. Through the announcement of doom, she finds she will be abandoned to the most severe judgments.

The promised judgments are introduced in verse 24. Isaiah uses imagery to describe them, moving quickly from the metaphor of "fire" to that of "rotteness" and then concluding with a justification for these punishments. This style vividly impresses upon the listeners the rapidity with which the judgments will come, one after another.

Isaiah’s final declaration that Israelites first continued to ignore recognizes that of apostasy.

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Isaiah’s final analysis of Judah’s sins is aptly summarized in the declaration that “Israel has rejected the word of the Lord.” Ancient Israelites first rejected Isaiah’s counsel, and later generations continued to ignore the warnings of Isaiah and the other prophets. Isaiah recognizes that the root of Israel’s weakness is the spiritual rottenness of apostasy.

Isaiah concludes the drastic punishments and physical manifestations recorded in verse 25 with a twofold promise that the Lord’s “anger is not turned away” and his “hand is stretched out still.” These parallel warnings appear to be synonymous and thus stress the fact that the Lord’s judgment remains over Israel. On the other hand, the two ideas could also be considered antithetic to each other, meaning that although the Lord’s punishment or justice hangs over the people, his hand is always stretched out to help them out of their desperate situation. If Isaiah had described the Lord’s hand more carefully and revealed whether it carries a sword of vengeance (see Isa. 34:5-6) or remains open to aid Israel (see Isa. 11:1; 48:13; 51:16; and especially 59:1), then we could more easily understand what the outstretched hand represents. (See Isa. 9:12; 17, 21; 10:4.) However, Isaiah may have wanted this verse to have a dual meaning—the Lord’s hand of anger will stretch out to the people until they repent and then it will strengthen and protect them. In any case, the hand of the Lord will bring upon most Israelites consequences that they are not expecting.

Section 3: Promises of Ensign, a Gathering, and an Army (vs.26-30)

Chapter 5 of Isaiah concludes with the prophecy of the Lord raising an ensign or signal to a people who will quickly assemble in Zion. The speed of this gathering is described and the contrasting conditions of light and dark that surround these events are illustrated in the following verses:

I 26He will raise a signal for a nation afar off;
and whistle for it from
the ends of the earth;
and lo, swiftly, speedily it comes!
37None is weary, none stumbles,
none slumbers or sleeps,
not a waistcloth 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.

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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.

They will growl over it on that day,

like the roaring of the sea. And if one look to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds. (RSV)

Taken in historical context, these verses probably describe Assyrian soldiers in all their terrible power. They come with speed, need no rest, and do not even pause long enough to take off their shoes. Their weapons are ready, their roar is like that of the lion, and, when they lay hold of their prey, none can stop them. The destruction is so swift and complete that even in daylight, darkness (perhaps from the smoke of burning cities) and gloom (or defeat) hangs over the people. If these verses describe the Assyrian army and the fear and destruction it inflicted upon its enemies, this judgment was fulfilled upon Israel and Judah during Isaiah’s day. In 722-721 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel, carrying the Ten Tribes into captivity, and in 701 B.C. she destroyed most of Judah and besieged Jerusalem. (See Isa. 36-37.)

In addition, the raised signal or ensign may represent the assemblage of a future spiritual force rather than an ancient political army. The ancient American prophet Nephi placed this chapter in a latter-day context when he quoted it in 2 Nephi 15. Numerous references in modern scriptures also tell of an ensign in the last days that will be raised up in conjunction with the Restoration and the gathering of Israel.

Zion in the last days shall be known as “an ensign unto the people, and there shall come unto her out of every nation under heaven.” (D&C 64:42.) The word ensign means a standard or flag, a rallying point. The gospel covenants and teachings are one rallying point in a metaphorical sense—“to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it.” (D&C 45:9.) In addition, the powers of the priesthood, including missionary work, serve in this dispensation as “an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days.” (D&C 113:6.) Also, the religious records of ancient American prophets have come forth as a signal in the last days—Nephi testifies that the Book of Mormon will “hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel.” (2 Ne. 29:2; compare Isa. 5:26.) From these and numerous other scriptures, we see the gospel, mission (See BD “Ensisg whole work, an the world, as th

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tasures, we see that an ensign in the last days can refer to Zion, the gospel, missionary work, the gathering, and the Book of Mormon. (See BD “Ensign.”) In short, the term ensign encompasses the Lord’s whole work, and all aspects of his Church serve as his “standard” to the world, as these verses testify:

Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations; and that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth.

(D&C 115:5-6.)

These two verses describe a general setting of danger and wrath in which the gospel light comes forth and the gathering takes place. The same gloomy setting and glorious promises are found in Isaiah 5:24-30.

As promised in verses 26-30, the nation and people who are gathered to Zion will come so quickly that they will require neither rest nor a change of clothing. During Isaiah’s day, any long journey required frequent rest stops and resulted in worn out clothing and sandals. Yet today, missionaries and converts can travel great distances without getting dusty or tired. Apostles of this dispensation have praised advances in modern transportation, and some have suggested how these advances might fulfill Isaiah’s words in chapter 5. For example, Elder LeGrand Richards says:

“Since there were no such things as trains and airplanes in that day, Isaiah could hardly have mentioned them by name, but he seems to have described them in unmistakable words. How better could “their horses’ hoofs be counted like flint, and their wheel like a whirlwind” than in the modern train? How better could “Their roaring ... be like a lion” than in the roar of the airplane? Trains and airplanes do not stop for night. Therefore, was not Isaiah justified in saying, “none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of the loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken”? With this manner of transportation the Lord can really “hiss unto them from the end of the earth,” that they shall come with speed swiftly.” (MWW, p. 236.)

Whereas verses 26-28 vividly describe nations (or missionaries) coming swiftly and powerfully from afar and verse 29 says that they will seize their prey (or converts) and take them safely away, verse 30 provides a perplexing conclusion to this section when interpreted in this way. It says that the nations will roar (or speak with authority) against their prey “in that day” (in the last days), and as one looks upon the earth, there is “darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof” (Isa. 5:30, KJV.) The “darkness
and sorrow” might refer either to physical or spiritual conditions as destruction and apostasy rage upon the earth. The light “darkened in the heavens” seems to suggest the gospel or the Messiah himself coming forth out of obscure darkness. The verse describing the contrast between light and darkness follows the verse in which the ensign is raised by the Lord to the nations. Whereas one would expect that the ensign (v. 26), the manifestation of the Lord’s army (vs. 27-29), and other events of the Latter-day dispensation would bring forth glory and brightness over the whole earth, instead much evil and darkness will shroud the light of God’s work in the last days (v. 30).

Summary

Isaiah skillfully combines his prophetic gifts and poetic talents in this chapter.

He presents three messages:
- Parable of a vineyard (vs. 1-7).
- Pronouncements of woe (8-25).
- Promises of an ensign and the Lord’s army (26-30).

Each follows a similar pattern:
- Identification of group being addressed.
- Description of the Lord’s work with that group.
- Contrast of the final results with the earlier expectations.

He deals with three major themes:
- A. Zion, her land and people.
- B. The Lord’s work with his children.
- C. Punishments coming upon Israel and the wicked.

These three themes follow each other in a chiastic pattern, A-B-C-B-C-B-A, with the second half of the parallelism (C-B-C-B-A) repeated for further emphasis. This pattern can be outlined as follows:

A. Zion prepared as a fruitful hill (vs. 1-2)
B. The Lord and his vineyard to be judged (3-4)
C. Destruction upon Zion (5-6)
B. The Lord’s expected justice not received (7)
C. Woe to the selfish
   Emptiness in the land
   Woe to the drunkards (8-12a)
B. The Lord’s works not considered (12b)
C. Scattering and spirit prison (13-15)
B. The Lord’s sentence to be pronounced (16)
A. Zion desolated as grazing lands (17)
poetic talents in

26-30).