

## Will God Pronounce Woe on Us?

Old Testament History is fascinating. Through the years I have always enjoyed learning about the prophets sent to Israel and Judah in the waning days of their kingdoms. Isaiah was sent to prophesy and send warnings of God's impending judgment to Jerusalem and Judah in the late 8th century B.C. Judah had just come off the highest pinnacle of economic and political success since the days of David and Solomon. But by Isaiah's time, Judah finds itself in a state of decline, the glory days past, and instability becoming common place. When studying the Old Testament prophets, an interesting study is to compare the similarities between 8th century B.C. Israeli culture with our own. In examining some of God's issues with His people, one must be impressed that God cannot possibly be pleased with the current trends in American culture. In Isaiah 5, God pronounces six woes on His people for behavior that if continued would result in their demise as a nation.

**In Isaiah 5:8, God condemns His people for greed and covetousness.** *Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there is no more room.* We live in the midst of an extremely materialistic society. And it does have its effect on Christians—perhaps more than we care to admit. It would do us very well to examine our lives to make sure our priorities are in place. As we work to fulfill *the American Dream*, time to spend with our families becomes lessened and time with God can be all but forgotten. It seems *the American Dream* has become nothing more than a motivation to get more and more. And to keep up with the trend, we live with a work and stress load that was unimaginable a few generations ago. Let us beware lest we gather up treasures on earth to the neglect of those in heaven. Jesus said, *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,* Matthew 6:19-21. God says punishment was coming for His people. Even the *great and fine* homes would be desolate. Their land would become unproductive. What will become of an American culture that has given over to the seductiveness of materialism?

**In Isaiah 5:11, God condemns those who pursue strong drink.** *Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!* In the verses following this God condemns the partying and constant recreational pursuits by which the Israelites neglected God's deeds and the work of His hands. Sound familiar to our own culture? We are a people with unbelievable wealth and luxury—of which has created a life of ease when compared to the rest of the world. But yet with our life of ease, the majority reject God and His word, and treat those who serve God with disdain. Look at pop culture. When the Super Bowl is played next week, how will the beer companies portray their product? What is the message they will send? Will they present the whole picture? You know the answer. In verse 14, God says that all of Jerusalem's revelry and jubilation would be brought down and the eyes of the proud would be abased. If our culture continues down the same road, we can rest assure that we will be humbled because ultimately God will be exalted and all men will come to realize their dependence on Him.

**In Isaiah 5:18, God condemns those who were enslaved in sin.** *Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, and sin as if with cart ropes.* If one reads over this verse quickly, he may miss the meaning of Isaiah's words. Sin has a way of enslaving us. The picture here is likened to a man pulling a heavy cart or wagon, loaded beyond capacity. Entanglement in sin has always made us slaves, Romans 6:16. Do we not live in a culture enslaved in sin? While God holds the answer to help people receive forgiveness of sin, some harden their heart to the point where they display a flippant and irreverent attitude toward God and His justice. This will not go unpunished.

**In Isaiah 5:20, God condemns those who call evil good and good evil.** *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness.* Sin can cause everything to be turned upside down. What is good becomes bad and vice versa. One does not have to look far in modern-day America to see this. Those who oppose abortion are looked upon as enemies who wish to deprive the reproductive rights of women. Those who stand up for justice being carried out on condemned killers are labeled barbaric and uncompassionate. Those who uphold God's law on homosexuality are branded as homophobic, ignorant, and religiously intolerant. Good and evil have been clearly defined in God's word. Are we prepared to handle it objectively and trust God in faith? Do we have the courage to stand up for the absolute truth that is revealed in His word? See John 12:46-48.

**In Isaiah 5:21, God indicates his dissatisfaction with those who are wise in their own eyes.** *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.* Going along with the previous point, it seems that everything in our culture is headed backwards. Godly wisdom and principles of righteousness are looked upon as backward and antiquated. Many look down on Christians with the attitude of *You really believe that stuff?* Worldly wisdom is held in high esteem and self deception reigns. God has said, *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts,* Isaiah 55:8-9. Jeremiah said, *I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps,* Jeremiah 10:23. Solomon wrote, *There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death,* Proverbs 16:25. We need to take these verses seriously and seek God.

**In Isaiah 5:22-23, God condemned those who perverted justice.** *Woe to those...who justify the wicked for a*

*bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right.* In Isaiah's day, judges were accepting bribes and denying the rights of the righteous. Sin has a way of piling up on itself. Coveting power, position, and prestige can make those in power become corrupt. Certainly we see parallels to this in America today.

In the later verses of Isaiah 5, God tells His people that certain and swift judgment was coming upon them. God's judgment would be as a forest fire, wreaking havoc on them for *rejecting the law of the Lord of hosts, and despising the word of the Holy One of Israel.* God will not allow evil to go unpunished. Should we think any less of this certainty today?

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