

Isaiah 2:4-7 + 5:1-6

As a commentary on the section in **Deuteronomy 21:10-15** - "When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies..." about taking a female captive in time of war as one's wife, this passage foresees a time "in the last days" (**Isaiah 2:2**) when all war will be over.

Isaiah 2:4 - "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

- **Psalms 72:7** - "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."

The rabbis said this describes the future Days of Messiah (Babylonian Talmud, Sabbat, fol. 63. 1.)

Believers should always work for peace, if it's at all possible. Mediation is better than fighting; to reconcile is better than to win. Turning the other cheek and blessing your enemies is a vital part of Jesus' teachings.

- **Matthew 5:9** - "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Although the Gospel of Peace can influence both us and our neighbors toward peace and away from war, Jesus also prophesied that there would be "wars, and rumors of wars," and "nation should rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," as well as "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" before the end (**Matthew 24:6-7**).

War Transformed into Gardening

One Psalm that accompanies this same Deuteronomy reading is **Psalms 129:3**. There, the Messiah cries out that, "The plowers have plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows."

The association of swords with plowshares reveals a deeper meaning here.

Israel's outward wars will cease with the coming of the Messiah - this primarily looks toward the end of time. Tools of war will be turned into peaceful pursuits after God defeats all His enemies and puts down all rebellion.

But it also concerns us now, to whom the Gospel has come, along with the Kingdom of God.

But now that same warlike zeal is directed toward ourselves, in an inner process of "revenging the disobedience" we find in ourselves - in our own thoughts and our "evil inclination," subject to influence by the "spirit of the age."

- **Ephesians 6:12** - "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Of course, Paul talks about spiritual warfare in military terms, putting on the armor of God, etc. But the metaphor here is different. The military weapons are seen as transformed into tools of the Master Gardener and Husbandman, tending to and encouraging spiritual growth and maturity.

Harrowing

The ideas of affliction and plowing come together in the English term "harrowing," used for plowing. "Harrow" is a form of "to harry," a military term meaning to "make predatory raids or incursions."

Instead of war waged against outer enemies, spiritual warfare is seen as plowing and pruning - overturning to produce yieldedness to God, and pruning away unneeded, harmful, extraneous, dead or overgrown things in our lives that hinder our growth in Christ.

Like surgery, it has a form of violence but is actually a healing process.

The images of plowing a field and pruning a tree picture the affliction and discipline that God uses to show us our need to bring us closer to Himself.

- **Jeremiah 4:3** - "For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."

- **Hosea 10:12** - "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness."

"Fallow ground" is a field not plowed and harrowed, "uncultivated land" - hard or stony, unsuitable for planting until it is broken up by plowing. Thorns and weeds can take over fallow ground and choke the seed.

Jesus talked about this in the Parable of the Sower.

- **Matthew 13:20-23** - "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

The older versions of the Apostles' Creed contained a section called "the harrowing of hell," describing Christ's descent into the underworld and victory over Satan and death,

bringing the Patriarchs and Old Testament saints from the grave into Paradise, and taking captive enemies and those in rebellion against God, leading them in triumph display.

The popular image is that Christ threw open the doors of Hades for all eternity, allowing the souls of the faithful to ascend to Heaven.

- **Psalm 68:18** - "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men..."

- **Colossians 2:15** - "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

- **Ephesians 4:9** - "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?"

This was seen as the fulfillment of Jesus' words to Peter: "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (**Matthew 16:18**)

This was the ultimate illustration of "plowing" in the sense of overturning, as well as "harrowing" as an actual attack.

Pruning Hooks

"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (**John 15:2**)

The plowing and pruning that God does often comes as pain or affliction:

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (**James 1:2-4**)

Isaiah 2:5 - "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD."

i.e. seeing how God has triumphed and peace reigns, the house of Jacob is invited to walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:6 - "Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers."

Targum: "because your land is full of idols, as of old and they walk in the laws of the people (Gentiles)"

Rashi - The prophet addresses the Shechinah and says, "For until now You have forsaken Your People because of their iniquity. ... for they are full of [witchcraft] from the

East. Their hosts have become full of the deeds of the Arameans who dwell in the East, who were sorcerers and used the name of pagan deities. They cohabit with the daughters of the heathens and mingle with them, and they would bear children to them, with whom they are always pleased, and they occupy themselves [with them] and long for them and bother with them.

[This could also be a commentary on taking a foreign captive as a wife in **Deuteronomy 21**]

Isaiah 2:7 - "Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots"

Rabbi David Kimchi says this refers to the days of Solomon, when the land abounded with gold and silver, with horses and chariots, and with idolatry also, in the latter part of his life. That idolatry set the stage for the eventual backsliding and downfall of the exile.

The Vineyard

Isaiah 5:1-2 - "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes."

This is the natural outcome of a vineyard, orchard or field that is not well tended, looked after and pruned or plowed - from the previous metaphor.

But God is saying that even though He provided Israel with the proper care and pruning, fertilizing and watering, they still produced sour grapes.

The rabbis saw symbolism here:

God "fenced it" with His Law, "gathered out the stone" i.e. the idols of the Canaanite nations, planted it with the choicest vine - the seed of Abraham, Joshua, and Caleb; "built a tower," meaning "I built my sanctuary in the midst of them" and also made a winepress therein, which the Targum explains as "my altar I gave to make an atonement for their sins." But they brought forth sour grapes. The Targum says "I commanded them to do good works before me, and they have done evil works."

The Mishnah says the word for sour grape signifies a kind of bad grape, and a small one: evil works are meant by them.

Sometimes, the vines would send shoots from the branches down into the ground. This would sap the vine and hinder the production of fruit. So the vinedresser would put rocks under the branch to lift it away from the ground.

Also recall Jesus' metaphor - "I am the vine, you are the branches." There are many levels of meaning in this type of the vine.

Isaiah 5:3 - "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard."

God again submits Himself to a judicial procedure, asking for a fair and reasonable judgment about His complaint against Israel.

Isaiah 5:4 - "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

Targum: "what good have I said to do more to my people, which I have not done to them? and what is this I have said, that they should do good works, and they have done evil works?"

There is no response or explanation. The result would be destruction and abandonment of the vineyard.

Isaiah 5:5-6 - "And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it."

Targum: "and now I will declare to you what I will do to my people; I will cause my Shechinah, or Majesty, to remove from them, and they shall be for a spoil; and I will break down the house of their sanctuary, and they shall be for treading."

The expected fruit was righteousness and justice. Instead they produced oppression and the "cry" of the oppressed.

Isaiah 5:7 - "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

"oppression" = mispach - literally means "bloodshed"

This could also look forward to the unjust trial and bloodshed of Christ's crucifixion, and the consequential destruction of Jerusalem again in 70 A.D..

These passages of scripture encourage us to look through our trials to see the face of Jesus, to embrace our suffering as the needful chastening, plowing and pruning of the Lord. If we do that, we will see the fruit of the Spirit come forth in our lives.