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Dissonance in the Song of Vineyard: Socio-Literary Exposition of Isaiah 5:1-7

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Abstract

The Song of Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 well reflects the socio-economic situation of 8th century Judah. The prophet Isaiah seriously accuses unlawful landlords of their misappropriation of estates and violation of the tenant's rights. The upper class of Jerusalem and Judah monopolized the economic goods and even deprived the property of the powerless. In this process, peasants are at the losing end with maximum risk and minimum security of tenure. The consequence of *latifundialization* is the steady deprivation and impoverishment of the peasantry. Yahweh, however, is at the side of the powerless. He works on behalf of the oppressed. He intervenes to defend the weak and the defenseless and to restore the order and fa-

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milial solidarity of the covenant community. He breaks through the walls and hedges surrounding the vineyard that alienated the peasants from the landlord.

• Keywords
Isaiah 5, Latifundialization, Conflict, Capitalism, Peasant, Private Property, Mode of Production, Socio-Literary Criticism, Prophecy

I. Introduction

The present study purports to analyze the so-called "Song of Vineyard" in Isaiah 5:1-7 regarding social class conflict[1] and pre-capitalistic mode of production.[2] It has been argued that the class and capitalistic elements are not determining factors when investigating ancient societies such as ancient Israel. These sociological approaches have been thought to be inadequate and misleading, because they can bring anachronistic assumptions to bear up on a non-western, pre-industrial society. In pre-exilic Israel there is little evidence of a large private market, a large pool of surplus laborers, or a widespread monetization of relationships as found in the modern societies. So, many scholars make pejorative references to a capitalistic understanding of ancient Israel as being described in the Bible.

Even though there is no clear evidence of capitalism, it is also undeniable that the biblical texts suggest, albeit implicitly, the existence of capitalistic tendencies in ancient Israel. In the eighth century B.C., Israel especially is said to have developed into a capitalistic society.

1 Concerning the social class conflict and the conception of ideology in the prophetic books, see N. K. Gottwald, "A Hypothesis about Social Class in Monarchic Israel in the Light of Contemporary Studies of Social Class Stratification," in *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours*, ed. N. K. Gottwald (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 139-64; *idem*, "Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies," JBL 112 (1993): 3-22; idem, "Ideology and Ideologies in Israelite Prophecy," in *Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of G. M. Tucker*, ed. S. B. Reid (JSOTSup 229; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 136-149.

2 D. Jobling argues that mode of production is "based on the model of base and superstructure, it extends the latter to include every aspect or 'sector' of the working of a society (law, art, religion, etc.) considered in terms of the systems of implication that them together." D. Jobling, "'Very Limited Ideological Options': Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, eds. S. D. Moore and F. F. Segovia (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 193.

Prophetic books such as Amos and Micah stress the importance of private property as a cause for class tension. While analyzing the economic situation reflected in the book of Micah, M. Chaney found that elites of Israel and Judah in the 8th century B.C. were able to initiate change in their political economies. They exported agricultural surplus in exchange of luxury goods, military technology, and raw material. As he points out, "imports benefited the elite few, but their cost in exported foodstuffs cut deeply into the sustenance of the peasant majority."[3]

As J. A. Dearman points out, the prophets are perceived as representing *Urkommunismus* or protest against private property, for their reforming views consisting of a utopia that is similar to communism.[4] H. –J. Kraus argues that pre-capitalism had already begun from early monarchy. According to Kraus, pre-capitalism was introduced when Solomon constructed the palaces and houses, and had further developed through increments of agricultural productivity and commerce with various countries.[5] D. N. Premnath has an analogue argument with that of Kraus. He points out that Isa 5:8-10 reflects the transition from a subsistence to a market economy in the process of land accumulation in the hands of a few wealthy landowners to the deprivation of the peasantry.[6] Isaiah seems to be well aware of and opposes

3 M. L. Chaney, "Micah-Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. P. F. Esler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 147.

4 J. A. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets* (SBLDS 106; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 7-12.

5 H. J. Kraus, "Die prophetische Botschaft gegen das soziale Unrecht Israel," *EvT* 15 (1955): 298.

6 D. N. Premnath, "Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10," in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Crit-*

the dangers of private property. He is especially concerned with acquisition of private property (Isa 3:12-15; 5:8; 10:1-2). He seriously accuses unlawful landlords of their misappropriation of estates and violation of the tenant's rights.

As described in the Book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah understands doing justice as the response of the people of God to what God had done for them.[7] This is clear from the Song of Vineyard. Isaiah knows well that the people of Judah and Israel which failed to establish had to face the accusation of God. We can hear his decisive voice from the text. To do this, we will read closely the text and analyze it with a socio-literary model.[8] Socio-literary criticism studies the biblical texts for understanding society and its force. The literature expresses and represents social life through the written medium, as Wellek and Warren defines, "literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation … literature represents life; and 'life' is, in large measure a social reality, even though natural world and inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation."[9]

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icism, ed. D. J. Chalcraft (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 301.

7 The book of Isaiah consists of the prophetic documents which have been gathered from more than 500 years. This main collection attributes directly or indirectly to Isaiah son of Amoz; however, scholars generally agree that this book was not written by one writer who was known as Isaiah of Jerusalem in 8th century B.C. At least one third of the book was supposedly written by the anonymous disciples of Isaiah, other prophets, and interpreters of the first or second temple. J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 105.

8 Concerning the socio-literary model for the Hebrew Bible, see N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) and a review by D. Jobling, "Sociological and Literary Approaches to the Bible: How Shall the Twain Meet?" JSOT 38 (1987): 85-93.

9 R. Wellek and A. Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company,

II. Literary Analysis of Isaiah 5:1-7

1. Translation

1. Let me sing, I pray,[10] about my beloved, a song of my beloved, about his vineyard
   A vineyard of my beloved was on a very fertile hill
2. He dug it up and cleared the stones, then planted it with choice vines[11]
   He built a tower in its midst and even a wine-vat he hewed out in it
   Then he looked for it to bear grapes, but it made sour grapes
3. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah!
   Judge, I pray, between me and between my vineyard
4. What more could have been done for my vineyard that have not

1942), 94.

10 The particle na which is attached to the verb is repeated in verse 3 and 5; however, this is dropped from the NRSV. Clark argues that its occurrence here at the beginning of the discourse suggests that it has some function at the discourse level as an opening marker. D. J. Clark, "The Song of the Vineyard: Love Lyric or Comic Ode? A Study of the Oral and Discourse Features of Isaiah 5:1-7," in *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures*, ed. E. R. Wendland (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 134; Waltke, however, explains that the imperative as such can also convey a request (cf. 2Kgs 5:22; Ps 82:8). B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1950), 573. Thus, it is likely that this particle na functions like a cohortative and emphasizes the content of verb.

11 Sometimes the Hebrew word *śōrēq* denoting vine is used in names of places. For example, Judg 16:4 mentions the *naḥal śōrēq* (valley of Sorek). Wildberger argues that *naḥal śōrēq* was famous of its high quality of grapes which flourished there, though I cannot establish whether there was any connection between *naḥal śōrēq* and a choice vine. H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 181. See also J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1981), 253.

done?
Why, when I looked for it to bear grapes, it bore stinking grapes?
5. And now, let me make known, I pray, to you what I am about to do to my vineyard
I will remove its hedge, then it shall become devoured,
I will break down its wall, then it shall become trampled
6. I will place it in desolation, it shall not be pruned, and it shall not be hoed
And thorns and thistles will grow up
And the clouds I will command not to send rain on it
7. For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts [is] the house of Israel
And the men of Judah [are] the planting of his delight
And he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed
For righteousness, but behold a cry

2. Structure

R. E. Clements argues that the Song of the Vineyard in 5:1-7 is the new redactional unit which begins with 5:1 and extends as far as 14:27.[12] Isaiah 5:1-7, however, makes up a complete poem that may be isolated from the surrounding verses. The prose verses with strong eschatological coloration that precede it, Isa 4:2-6, and the woe oracles that follow it, Isa 5:8-30, set off the song about a vineyard as a distinct unit. Furthermore, Isa 5:1-7, at least initially, appears to be a coherent poem, not a fragment or an anthology.[13] This poem can be divided according to the following contents:

11 R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCBC; London: Eerdmans, 1980), 55.

12 D. L. Petersen and K. H. Richard, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 81.

v. 1a	Introduction
v. 1b-2	Story of the Vineyard
v. 3-4	Appeal for a Verdict
v. 5-6	Declaration of the Verdict
v. 7	Decision

From another viewpoint, the structure of the Song of Vineyard looks like a picture in a frame. When we look at the structure of this text from a literature-aesthetic viewpoint, we can find that this text has dual frameworks (a framework within a large framework). This text is made of the frame story (v. 1a and v. 3-7) and the inner story (v. 1b-2). And again, v. 3-6 is located outside of v. 1b-2. Thus v. 3-6 functions as an inner frame which defines the inner story (v. 1b-2) and at the same time functions as an outer "inner story" which is defined by the whole framework (v. 1a and 7). Thus, this text appears as a duplicate framework which contains a smaller inner frame. Through this duplicate framework, we feel as if we see a film within another film. Figuratively speaking, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah see a film entitled "A Song for My Beloved"; however, they are not actual spectators but are just spectators inside the film.

There is also the inconsistency of time between the inner story and the inner frame. It takes about 5 years to plant vines, to clean the stones, to build a hedge and tower, and then to produce the grapes (See Lev 19:23-25); however, it takes only about 5 minutes to tell the story concerning the vineyard. Through this inconsistency between the narrated time and the real time, listeners at that time with Isaiah can feel the historical reality and its dramatic tension. Even the present readers accept this story as the more dynamic and realistic.

Through the dual structure and inconsistency of time, Isaiah could proclaim God's judgment more effectively as the audience could understand the meaning of the parable more clearly.

3. Genre

There is no scholarly consensus about the answer to questions concerning genre even though many suggestions exit. J. T. Willis provided a catalog of these assumptions: (1) an uncle's song, (2) a satirical polemic against Palestinian fertility cults, (3) the prophet's song concerning his own vineyard, (4) the prophet's song expressing sympathy for his friend Yahweh, (5) a drinking song, (6) a bride's love song, (7) a groom's love song, (8) a song of the friend to the bridegroom, (9) a lawsuit or accusation, (10) a fable, (11) an allegory, and (12) a parable. After surveying a number of assumptions Willis concluded that Isa 5:1-7 must be understood as a parable.[14] G. A. Yee has agreed with Willis that of all the genres that have been proposed, only that of the parable is satisfactory.[15] Yee has moved beyond Willis, in arguing that Isa 5:1-7 constitutes a specific type of parable, namely, that of the juridical parable, which in Isa 5:1-7 has been introduced as a song.[16]

I suppose that the notion of *Mischgattung* is the best way to think about Isa 5:1-7. Song, introduction to song, statement of judgment using cursed language, and allegorical elements seem undeniably present.[17] Isaiah's song uses the analogy of a disappointing harvest from the vineyard to call attention to the justness of God's judge-

14 J. T. Willis, "The Genre of Isaiah 5:1-7," *JBL* 96, no.3 (1977): 337-362.

15 G. A. Yee, "The Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 30-40.

16 Yee, "The Form-Critical Study," 40.

17 Petersen, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 82.

ments. Thus, Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard can be understood as an instance of the juridical parable genre.[18] Using the literary form of song and the legal form of lawsuit, Isaiah accuses the ruling classes. Isaiah employs the lyrical song in order to set off the accusation (v.7), through which he severely criticizes the contemporary leaders and their social corruption. With this paradoxical parable, we can feel a dramatic tension, though it is written in the form of the short poem.

4. Social Location (*Sitz im Leben*)

Sitz im Leben is with the title of this text, "song." It has often been suggested that Isaiah delivered this song when a large number of people from Jerusalem and the Judean countryside assembled in Jerusalem for a vintage or harvest festival.[19] Israel celebrated and reflected upon her election. It was on this occasion that the Israelites recounted God's mighty acts of leading them out of Egypt and slavery and into the promised land. In celebrating the grape harvest, the Israelites celebrated their election.

However, the question of the occasion on which Isaiah pronounced this oracle cannot be decided with certainty. One may think that this song was recited in front of an assembly of the ruling group in the royal palace (cf. Jer 36:20-21). As many scholars think, Isaiah was an

18 C. A. Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12," *BZ NF* 28, no.2 (1984): 82. See also P. Bovati, "Le langage juridique du prophéte Isaïe," in *The Book of Isaiah: Les oracles et leurs relectures unité et complexité de l'ouvrage*, ed. J. Vermeylen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 191. Bovati suggests several examples of juridical parable: 2 Sam 12:1-7; 1 Kgs 20:35-43; Jer 3:1; Ezek 23; Isa 1:2-3.

19 J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapters I-XXXIX* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1951), 34; A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapter 1-39* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1973), 48; Evans, "On the Vineyard," 86; G. B. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX* (ICC; Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1956), 83.

aristocrat. Different from other prophets who were, for the most part, "derived from proletarian or negatively privileged or uneducated strata,"[20] Isaiah regularly uses language from the wisdom tradition, suggesting that he may have been educated at the court. Also, "he was a gifted poet and had knowledge of history and current events."[21] He is described as having access to the king and leading members of the royal court.

Isa 5:3 addresses that the song was recited in the presence of inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah who probably were functionaries of the royal palace and of the ruling class of Judah. Therefore the *Sitz im Leben* may be taken to be an assembly of socio-political elites of Judah, especially of Jerusalem. Isaiah appears before the ruling class of the Davidic kingdom of Jerusalem and Judah, gathered either for a religious feast or for an official occasion. A favorable oracle or helpful counsel might be expected from him, but he comes with his message of doom.

III. Critical Exposition

1. Identification of *dōd* (v.1a)

dōd as a singular noun means "lover" or "beloved".[22] However,

20 M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 277.

21 B. V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What is New and What is Old* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 33.

22 According to *BDB*, *dōd* has several meanings such as "beloved one," "uncle" (Lev 10:4; Num 36:11), "relative," "friend" (Am 6:10; 1 Chr 27:32), but in the plural "love" in the abstract (Ps 7:11). *BDB*, 187. For me, "beloved one" is the most adequate interpretation. In Ugarit, *ydd* or *mdd'il* "Beloved of El" is a standard epithet of Mot and Yam. As the Arabic cognates show,

when this word is used as a plural, it means abstract "love."[23] So J. Skinner determines to interpret *šîrat dōdî* as "My Song of Love" according to the title of Ps 45.[24] On the other hand Watts argues to interpret it as a "Song of my Friend" because the word *dōd* implies the meaning of a male friend.[25] However, G. Fohrer supports that this song was sung by a bride to her bridegroom as a "Wedding Song" (*Hohenlied*).[26] And Junker argues that *dōd* is a "mediator" (*Vermittler*) who carries all the messages between a bridegroom and his bride in the process of a wedding.[27] However, there are problems from each hypothesis. For example, though *dōdîm*, the plural form of *dōd*, means "love", this word is used for sexual desire and satisfaction. And the interpretation "The Song of my Friend" makes it impossible to interpret v.3 and the following, because the third personal subject is changed into the first personal one. And the "mediator" has no traditio-historical evidence as Junker himself points out.[28]

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the factor of friendship is most central in the verbal root *ydd*. *NRSV*, also, interprets this word "beloved one." See Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 179-180.

23 In the Old Testament, *dōd* is interpreted in three ways: 1) the beloved of woman (Song 1:13f., 16; 2:3, 8-10, 16f.; 4:16; 5:2, 4-6, 8-10, 16; 6:1-3; 7:10-12, 14; 8:5, 14), 2) uncle (Lev 10:4; 20:20; 25:49; Num 36:11; 1 Sam 10:14-16; 14:50; 2 Kgs 24:17; Jer 32:7-9, 12; Amos 6:10; Esther 2:7, 15; 1 Chr 27:32), 3) abstract love in erotic sense (Ezek 16:8; 23:17; Prov 7:18; Song 1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:13).

24 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 35; W. Schottroff, "Das Weinberglied Jesajas (Jes 5:1-7)," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 77.

25 J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC; Texas: Word, 1985), 53.

26 G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja*, Bd. 1 (Stuttgart/ Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1966), 75-76.

27 H. Junker, "Die literarische Art von IS 5:1-7," *Bib* 40 (1959): 264. Clements thinks similarly with Junker; however, he concludes that the mediator is a friend of the bridegroom. His close friend could be expected both to mediate for him in any lover's quarrel and make public representation on his behalf. Clements, *Isaiah*, 56-58.

28 Junker, "Die literarische Art," 264, n.2.

Wildberger interprets *dōd* as Yahweh. As Wildberger tries to explain, this word in the horizon of *Akkadian* divine and personal names, *dōd* seems to be an epithet of Yahweh.[29] Of course, it is notable to call God "My Beloved", because to Isaiah, God is the "Lord of Hosts" or the "Holy One". The beloved, however, cannot be exactly identified with Yahweh, because not only is such a usage unparalleled, but it leaves unresolved the identity of the singer. The singer I take to be Yahweh himself, who is clearly the speaker in the application of the parable to Jerusalem in v.3.[30] Who is then the person sung about, the beloved or loved one? Presumably the beloved might be identified with a king in Jerusalem.

According to Wyatt, the idea of the king as a cultivator is no surprise, because this is precisely the role played by the primal man in Eden, according to Gen 2:15, whom we know to be primarily a paradigm of royalty, drawing on an ancient and widespread motif.[31] Wyatt especially finds a similarity between the cognomen *yedîdyāh* which is to be construed as an oracular affirmation of Solomon's status as the heir (2 Sam 12:24-25) and *dîdî* in Isa 5:1. He argues that *dîdî* is an example of royal cognomens in use in ancient Judah. According to 2 Kgs 22:1, Josiah's mother is named *yedîdāh* (Jedidah) which possibly the feminine counterpart to *dîdî* as a title of the king.[32] In Isa 5:1 *dîdî* is paralleled by the term *dōd*, the two being clearly equivalent not

29 Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 178.

30 T. E. Fretheim, "What Kind of God is Portrayed in Isaiah 5:1-7?" in *New Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Essays in Honor of Hallvard Hagelia*, ed. M. Zehnder (Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts 21; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2014), 53-67.

31 N. Wyatt, "Interpreting the Creation and Fall Story in Genesis 2-3," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 14-15.

32 N. Wyatt, "'Jedidiah' and Cognate Forms as a Title of Royal Legitimation," *Bib* 66 (1985): 115.

only in meaning, but also in their common reference to the king. In fact, the king in Songs of Solomon 1:4 is called *dōdî*, "my beloved," consistently by the bride. The king in Judah is both Yahweh's beloved and the beloved of the Judean. The beloved was presumably not anonymous to Isaiah's contemporary audience. The beloved was probably well known to the audience. He was possibly called by the people the beloved of Yahweh, for he had seemingly been blessed with great material richness and political power from Yahweh. The beloved was his epithet.

2. Vineyard on a Fertile Hill (vv.1b-2)

In Hebrew, *qeren ben-šāmen* which is interpreted as "fertile hill" means originally "horn" and "son of oil."[33] Being a hill, it is on all sides open to the sunlight, a feature that vines particularly love.[34] I presume that *qeren ben-šāmen* reflects the contemporary agricultural location of Judean central hill country. An ongoing survey of the region has in fact found a number of both settlements and agricultural installations around Jerusalem. These include remains of terraces, winepresses, storage facilities, farmsteads and olive presses. According to Premnath, these wine and olive presses may have provided wine for the elite of Jerusalem, for trade purposes, or even for in-kind taxation. Wine and oil were much in demand by the elite and, moreover, were worth more than grain per unit of volume and weight in

33 According to Baly, four basic soil types occur in the Highlands: (1) *terra rossa*, (2) *brown forest*, (3) *rendzina*, and (4) *basaltic*. D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 79. *Terra rossa* soils allegedly are the most productive among them. The soils of *qeren ben-šāmen* might consist of *terra rossa*.

34 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1968), 110.

terms of exchange value. Because of this, they were key items in trade exchange for strategic military items and other luxury goods.[35]

Vineyard, especially which was located on highland and constructed on the terraces, required large investments of time and labor, both in construction and maintenance. In this regard, the agricultural terminologies such *ʿāzaq*, *sāqal*, and *nāṭaʿ* indicate how difficult it is to construct and maintain the vineyard. The verb *ʿāzaq* is found only here; however, its meaning "dig" leaves little doubt, because the parallel Arabic word *ʿazaqa* means "dig up" and later Hebrew uses the word for "a most through working of a field."[36] This is the first deep breaking of the hard ground that is necessary in order to prepare it to receive the young and tender plants. The next step in rocky hill country was to clear the ground of stones (*sāqal*), which were thrown in the road or piled up to make a wall of terrace. With the ground prepared, the first stage is complete with the planting of the choice vine of the highest quality (*śōrēq*). According to the root meaning of *śōrēq*, it refers to a bright red type of grape.[37] After planting (*nāṭaʿ*) vines, there probably were training of vines to settle down a standing habit supported by wooden props or along the ground supported by a few carefully positioned stones.[38] Pruning, usually carried out before the winter, was an essential operation upon which the yield of grapes in directly dependent, especially given the desiccating effect of the hot sun during the summer when the fruits are developing. After the arrangement of the vineyard, the tower is built in the midst of the

35 Premnath, "Latifundialization," 306.

36 Watts, *Isaiah*, 55.

37 Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 181.

38 D. C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan* (The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series 3; Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 228.

vineyard as a wine-vat is hewn out in it.

As shown above, the vineyard on the terrace of hill country needed large investments of time and labor in construction and maintenance. The most prevalent terrace types of the highlands are the linear sloping and dry field terrace, which entailed the creation of arable land behind a stone wall built laterally. The primary aim of the terrace building is to create leveled surfaces. These leveled surfaces are more accommodating to the operation of the animal traction plow, and, in some locations, they may serve to expand the arable area accessible to irrigation water.[39]

The creation and maintenance of a terrace was not a simple task. The amount of labor invested in these ancient terraces and their maintenance was tremendous. Scholars found that the soil behind the 8th century terraces had been transported to the terraces from another site.[40] In this case, the vineyard of the beloved required tremendous investments of labor and time, for Isaiah reports that, in deed the soil or land was fertile (*ben-šāmen*).

To whom then did this vineyard belong to? Presumably, this private property belongs to a king. For the vineyard which is located in a fertile hill belongs to the beloved. The beloved is presumed to indicate a king in v.1a. There are some indications supporting the location of crown properties and agricultural enterprises in the mid-8th century B.C. Among the kings of Judah, Uzziah is said to have been devoted to agriculture; in his service he had farmers and vinedressers "in the

39 Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 174-175.

40 F. S. Frick, "Ecology, Agriculture and Patterns of Settlement," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 85.

hills and fertile lands."[41]

> He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil. (NRSV, 2 Chr 26:10)

The royal agricultural enterprises concentrated on the cultivation of field crops. There Uzziah had his "farmers." However, the detail that concerns us most here is the "vinedressers, husbandmen." They were located "in the hills and in the fertile lands." Such a unique delineation of the hill country deserves comment. The significant detail in the passage pertains to the location of the vinedressers, which of course means that the royal vineyards must be in the same place. They are in the hill country. It is not surprising that the vinedressers of the king should be in the hill country. That zone was and is famous for its viticulture.[42]

Not only were there crown properties devoted to agricultural production, there was the private sector as well. In addition to the products of his own fields and vineyard, the king also imposed taxes on those of his subjects (1 Sam 8:15, 17). In the 8th century, the king was known to have claimed his share from the first mowing of the fields (Amos 7:1). Exactions for the crown could be very burdensome for the lower classes (Amos 5:11; see also Micah 3:1-4) in particular, with reference to the vineyards of Judah (Isa 3:14).[43]

41 H. P. Müller, *"kerem," TDOT* 4: 319-325.

42 A. F. Rainey, "Wine from the Royal Vineyards," *BASOR* 245 (1982): 58-59.

43 Rainey, "Wine from the Royal Vineyards," 61.

Against the avarice of the landed elite to gain maximum economic advantage through the cultivation of cash crops, Yahweh will respond with a total failure of the harvest much to the farmers chagrin. All the labor of preparation proved to be in vain, because instead of the large, sweet and juicy ones which had been expected the vines yielded only small, hard and sour grapes.[44]

Unexpected fruits show us that the investments of capital and labor do not always bring the expected capitalistic success. There is not any reference or concern on the subject of labor and the worker in the story of the vineyard. This failure seems to be a natural result. In fact, the subject of production is alienated in this story, while the objects of production are numerated and emphasized. The text strangely keeps silent about the activities of laborers. It speaks of only the investments in labor and material. This can possibly mean that the workers were excluded in the process of production totally.

The workers presumably were wage laborers who "produce others' wealth"[45] and therefore enjoined involuntary to productivity. In premonarchic Israel, family members had access to a plot of land which had been inherited from their progeny. The land had been understood as a gift from God. However, with the shift to monarchy, the ancient Israelite land tenure was interrupted by the landholdings in the hands of the kingship and its functionaries.[46] The lands once freely held by

44 See Y. Avrahami, "Foul Grapes: Figurative Smells and the Message of the Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1-7)," *VT* 67 (2017): 341-356; M. L. Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addresses of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 105-122.

45 K. Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R. C. Tucker (New York/ London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 134.

46 O. Loretz, "Die prophetische Kritik des Rentenkapitalismus: Grundlagen-Probleme der Prophetenforschung," *UF* 7 (1975): 271.

peasants began to fall into the hands of the small upper class even in the highlands, and peasants became landless laborers.

In the system of patrimonial land tenure, labor was considered as a social duty. With the change in the system of land tenure, however, labor became a commodity. The sellable labor forced workers to join in the process of production involuntarily. While men's nature, according to Marx, is to be a free conscious producer,[47] the workers in the vineyard were not able to express themselves freely in productive activity, for they were driven to produce by need and greed of the landlord. In addition, the production of the workers did not correlate towards their personal consumption. Their production was geared to the market for an unknown consumer. The primary producers were in no way benefited by the fruits of their own labor. Their production was deprived by the landlord. They were only an element of investments by the landlord. They were estranged from their productive activities, for they could not benefit from the labor. It is no wonder that the estranged labor reduces the productivity. The involuntary labor did not induce a high degree of productivity.

3. Accusation to Inhabitants of Jerusalem (vv.3-4)

The particle *we'attāh* "and now" (v.3), begins a disjunctive clause, the sort of clause that marks a break in the poem, namely, the beginning of the song itself.[48] The song now takes a new turn. In this part, inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah are the target of Yahweh's judgment. The pre-location of Jerusalem before Judah could be explained

47 R. C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition (New York/ London: W. W. Norton & Company: 1978), xxv.

48 Petersen, *Interpreting*, 84.

as that of the capital city was directly ruled by the kingship or the main working place of the prophet. This pre-location, however, is noteworthy, for the accusation was primarily and mainly directed to the inhabitants (*yôšēb*) of Jerusalem.

The semantic field of *yôšēb* includes the ownership of the land.[49] Especially where *yôšēb* is a collective singular, it designates members of a single class of leadership. A. Alt recognizes the upper-class political nuance of the term *Bewohner* in his discussion of Judg 5:23, where *yôšēb* indicates "*die Besitzer und Herren des aristokratisch verfaßten kanaanäischen Gemeinwesens*" (the proprietors or lords of the aristocratic Canaanite political structure).[50] More recently, Gottwald had concluded that *yôšēb* are the "leaders in the imperial feudal statist system." *yôšēb*, primarily, refers to king but embraces other functionaries in the statist system. Therefore, *yôšēb*, on occasion, referred to persons of power in the upper socio-economic strata irrespective of their holding political office.[51] It is probably not by accident that Isa 3:14 uses the expression "devour the vineyard," to describe the conduct of the Jerusalem aristocracy (See also Jer 12:10).

Under the monarchy an administrative/judicial system was developed whereby judges were appointed by the crown in regions throughout the realm. For Judah this system is attributed to Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 19:4-11). The judges may have been military commanders and responsible for regional security. They would be entitled to royal land grants, exemption from certain services along with au-

49 Premnath, "Latifundialization," 307.

50 A. Alt, "Meros," in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 1, ed. A. Alt (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968), 276.

51 N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 532.

thority in judicial affairs.[52] Presumably, the men of Judah indicate the judges who were appointed by the king. Judges are frequently involved in the accusations of property abuse (Isa 1:21-26; 3:2). As Isaiah recognizes the status of audience, he addresses the doom-oracle in the form of juridical accusation. Probably the selection of juridical terminology of *mišpāṭ* in v.7 has to do with accusation on this group.

If the assumption that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are functionaries or upper-class and the men of Judah, judges, is correct, it is curious that Isaiah does not mention about the other class of people. However, the whole of society, as Marx says, consists of two classes: the property-owners and the property-less workers–the proletariat. According to Marx, the proletariat and wealth are opposites. As such they form a whole. They are both products of the world of private property. Marx supports that the private property conditions proletariat as proletariat. Isaiah does not explicitly refer to the class of proletariat, he implies it when he mentions property-owners.

4. Proclamation of Judgment (vv.5-7)

Introduced once again by *we'attāh* (v.5) begins the proclamation of judgment. Isaiah declares, like a judge, what to do against this fruitless vineyard. The farmer does not care for the vineyard any longer, because it produced worthless stinking grapes despite careful weeding and hoeing. The hedge will be removed, and wall will be destroyed. Thus, cattle and wild beasts will be no longer be hindered from coming in to depasture and trample. It is obvious that since the farmer will stop caring for the abandoned vineyard, it will now be overrun and stifled by wild thorns and thistles. These two plants well

52 J. A. Dearman, "Prophecy, Property and Politics," *SBL 1984 Seminar Papers*, 391-392.

depict the uncultivated state of the wasted vineyard. They will replace the once lush and valuable vines (v.2). The once carefully hoed hill country will be neglected; no concern will be given to weeding out the briers and thorns that spring up. The formerly cultivated fields will be good only for the grazing of livestock.[53]

It is noteworthy to point out that the first action of Yahweh will be the removal of hedge surrounding the vineyard. The hedge purports to prevent the transgression of cattle and beasts. Connecting the hedge with the tower (v.2) which is centrally located to enable the watchman to guard against theft at the time when the grapes ripen, we can reach to another interpretation. That is, the hedge surrounding the vineyard not only prevents the entry of wild animals, but also the uninvited grazers/poachers. This hedge identifies the limits of private property. The hedge is a tool of alienation with which the proprietor of vineyard separates himself from other people. Marx argues that the property-owned class and the proletarian class represent one and the same human self-alienation. But the former feels satisfied and affirmed in this self-alienation, experiences the alienation as a sign of its own power, and possesses in it the appearance of a human existence. The latter, however, feels destroyed in this alienation, seeing in its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence.[54] There-

53 The parallel of this material can be found in the prophet's later speech on the vineyard in 7:23-25. In 5:5, Yahweh states that his vineyard will become a "trampling ground"; in 7:25b, the prophet predicts the Judean farmland will become a place where cattle are let loose and a "trampling ground" for sheep. In 5:6, Yahweh declares that the vineyard shall no longer be pruned or "hoed" and, consequently, "briers and thorns" will be allowed to grow up. In 7:23-25, Isaiah proclaims that the Judean hills, which used to be hoed, will no longer be tendered; there will be no worrying over briers and thorns. Indeed, the briers and thorns will overgrow the former vineyards (v. 23).

54 Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes," 133.

fore, the removal of the hedges necessitate equity.

Private property represents the conservative side, the proletariat, and the destructive. From the former, according to Marx, comes action aimed at preserving the antagonism; from the latter, action aimed at its destruction. Both the proletariat itself and its conditioning effect vis-a-vis–private property–disappear with the victory of the proletariat. But proletariat cannot liberate itself without destroying its own living conditions. It cannot do so without destroying the very fabric of its inhuman living conditions of contemporary society which are the by-products of its own existence. At this moment, Yahweh intervenes on the stage of conflict as a destructor of inhuman situation. Yahweh is on the side of the proletariat. Yahweh declares that the hedge and the wall surrounding the vineyard will be destroyed. There will be no one to possess the land. There will also be no landlords: the rich landowners will be bereft of their large landholdings.

The owner of the vineyard is none other than the almighty Yahweh Sebaoth himself (v.7), not the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah. The people of Israel and the men of Judah are only stewards of the land of Yahweh. Wildberger argues that the house of Israel and the men of Judah must be understood in parallel to each other, and not in contrast. In this case the title "Israel" would have to be understood in a religious-historical sense and be a title adopted by Judah. Clements, however, argues that the two titles can be best interpreted as complementary so that Isaiah was here affirming that both the house of Israel and Judah had proved a failure in Yahweh's purpose.[55]

God expected from Israel *mišpāṭ* (justice) and *ṣedāqāh* (righteousness); however, they produced only bitter fruit that is described in

55 Clements, *Isaiah*, 59-60.

wordplay as *miśpāḥ* (bloodshed) and *ṣe'āqāh* (cry). The words contain an elegant pun, for those which have nearly the same sound have an opposite meaning. The attempts to replicate the wordplay in English are numerous, e.g.:

> He looked for the light of justice and found the night of bloodshed,
> for compassion and found oppression.[56]
> Looking for measures he found massacres, and for right he found riot.[57]

The meaning of the *hapax legomena miśpāḥ* is not known for sure. Some have connected it with the root which has been connected with the Arabic *safaḥa* (pour out, spill [blood]).[58] While *LXX* interprets *miśpāḥ* as ἀνομία (lawlessness) and *Vulgate* as *iniquitas* (iniquity), *BDB* translates it as "bloodshed." Actually, bloodshed results from lawlessness and iniquity. This word presents the socio-political situation of Israel in Isaiah's activity. The word *miśpāḥ* could also have the meaning "annexation" and here refers to the annexation of the property of the poor to the property of the rich, as one can learn from the use of the verb *śpḥ* in 1 Samuel 2:36 and Isaiah 14:1.[59] *ṣe'āqāh* is the distress cry and complaint of those who suffer from political or social violence (Gen 27:34; Exod 3:7,9; 11:6; 22:25, 1 Kgs 8:5).[60]

56 Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 48.

57 Leupold, *Exposition*, 112.

58 Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 185.

59 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 218-219.

60 Watts, 56. See also M. Weinfeld, "Justice and Righteousness: The Expression and Its Meaning," in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, eds. H. G. Reventlow,

IV. Dissonance to Consonance

The Song of Vineyard in Isa 5:1-7 well reflects the socio-economic situation of 8th century of Judah. In the 8th century, the crucial new elements were the exceptional influx of wealth into the economically parasitic city of Jerusalem and the uneven distribution of that wealth among the population. The effect should have been mutually benevolent, but in practice it was only the few who benefited. The beneficiaries of this growth and prosperity were a small percentage of the total population-the upper class. They lived off of the labor and surplus of the majority-the peasants. Much was spent by the rich on consumption and the purchase of durable goods. Great buildings were erected at public expense (1 Kgs 9:15-20) and luxury goods were imported from abroad (1 Kgs 5:10; 9:26-28; 10:15-28). Such spending, however, did not exhaust the wealth available. Here they encountered a problem: the Judaean economy lacked sufficient enterprises from which a suitable return on invested capital could be assured, and the option for entrepreneurs of creating new businesses base other than the traditional reliance on agriculture. Wealth was invested in either land or loans.[61]

Therefore, it is presumable that the economic surplus caused a change in land tenure system. There was probably a shift from the peasant-held small plot type of domain to the mercantile domain.

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et al. (JSOTSup 137; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 239.

61 See M. Goodman, "The First Jewish Revolt: Social Conflict and the Problem of Debt," *JJS* 33 (1982): 416-427. Goodman argues that the unequal distribution caused to a revolt in the post-exilic Israel. He, however, emphasizes that the socio-economic situation in post-exilic period which is especially reflected in Ezra-Nehemiah does not differ from that of Isaianic period.

Here land was viewed as private property of the landowner, an entity to be bought and sold and used to obtain profit for its owner.[62] A shift towards mercantile domain involved a change in the direction of large landholdings. It is notable that the rebuke in the parable of the vineyard is addressed to the rich upper class, as one can learn from the passage juxtaposed with it, which speaks of those who "add house to house and join field to field" (Isa 5:8). In this process, peasants are at the losing end with maximum risk and minimum security of tenure. The consequence of latifundialization is the steady deprivation and impoverishment of the peasantry.[63]

The upper class of Jerusalem and Judah monopolized the economic goods and even deprived the property of the powerless. They, however, were supposed to play the central role of the national government in distributing goods and services in a pre-industrial society. For the economy under kingship depended heavily on the role of the upper classes, which are usually a very small percentage of the total population in such society. The rapacious landlords swallowed up the holdings of small farmers (Isa 5:8-10), the rich skinned the backs of the poor (Isa 10:1-2), and fragrant social injustices were smoothed over with a veneer of religious piety (Isa 1:10-17). The ruling elite are not only do not produce, but plainly disdain physical labor.

On the contrary, the living conditions of contemporary peasants reached the nadir of inhumanity. In poverty they lost their identity as well as dignity. They could not escape from such disaster, though were filled with indignation. For they were unable to liberate themselves without first destroying their own living conditions. It was all

62 E. R. Wolf, *Peasants* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 53.

63 Premnath, *Latifundializaton*, 302-305.

but impossible to change their status quo on their own. They were entirely powerless at the mercy of their landlords.

In this regard, it is Yahweh, in the Song of Vineyard, who works on behalf of the oppressed. Yahweh intervenes to defend the weak and the defenseless and to restore the order and familial solidarity of the covenant community. Yahweh breaks through the walls and hedges surrounding the vineyard that alienated the peasants from the landlord. Yahweh abolishes the private property, for "private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to preserve its own existence and thereby the existence of its opposite, the proletariat."[64] Yahweh executes the sentence that proletariat-producing private property passes upon itself. Yahweh executes the sentence that wage labor passes upon itself by producing others' wealth and its own poverty. With the intervention of Yahweh, both the powerless itself and its conditioning opposite-private property-disappear.

V. Conclusion

The Song of Vineyard is not apparently intended for cultic use, and its purpose is socio-political rather than devotional. In front of the congregation, Isaiah recites a song about the vineyard of his beloved, and after this he asks who is responsible for the desolation of vineyard. Isaiah accuses the house of Israel and the men of Judah. Isaiah claims that God expected justice and righteousness, but saw a bloodshed and heard a cry. There were bloodshed and cries of pain which come from greed, excessive drinking, perversion of justice and morality. Isaiah saw plenty of evidence that rapacious landlords were swal-

64 Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes," 133.

lowing up the holdings of small farmers (Isa 5:8-10), that the rich were skinning the backs of the poor (Isa 10:1-2), and that flagrant social injustices are smoothed over with a veneer of religious piety (Isa 1:10-17). Isaiah announces that those in position of political power are responsible for this socio-economic disorder. They monopolized the economic goods and deprived the property of the powerless. The latter was socially and politically marginalized. They were victims of powerful political and economic institutions and their leaders.

It has been argued that the leaders are in debt to the society that they belong to. However, the social expectation for leaders are not fulfilled due to their negligence on social responsibility. Recently, strange words such as "Gapjil" and "Slave Contract" have been widespread in Korean society. "'Gapjil', roughly translated as 'high-handed' or 'heavy-handed' conduct of abusing one's prominent position and power, derives from the contract term 'gap' (party A, who leads) and 'eul' (party B, who is led)."[65] This is also commonly found in labor contracts between an employer and an employee here. Such an imbalance in relations and one-sided contract practices have existed for a long time. Still, it has recently become an issue because the main culprit behind this controversy is the social leadership.

Every society expects its leaders to fulfill their responsibilities corresponding with their social status. So, if they fail to live up to these expectations, society is severely reprimanded. Isaiah points out that this responsibility should be attributed to the powerful and rich. That is to say, leaders such as elders and princes should take the responsibility for the devastation of vineyard. The stinking grapes represent

65 Park Jae-Hyuk, "Will 'gapjil' Culture Vanish in Korea?" *The Korean Times*, August 2, 2017, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/tech/2017/08/694_233958.html.

the cries of pain and bloodshed which were brought by oppression and exploitation from the power. Leaders of Israel and Judah should console and support the oppressed, but instead they took advantage of their weakness and treated them with cruelty.

Social injustice is an immense and world-wide problem. If Christians are to be true to their own tradition and ethically responsible, they must take part in the struggle against it. Christians are responsible for removing social absurdities and economic inequity. God has acted in Christ to set us free; to that action, he expects a reaction. We sometimes speak of "Christian social action." More accurately, we should describe such efforts as "Christian social reaction", the People of God reacting by trying to help the hurts of the world, loving "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

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