

A Study in Isaiah 4:5 – 5:7

The Cloud of Glory — Its Covering — Isaiah Sings of His Well-Beloved — The Vineyard Song

We are reading Isaiah chapters 4 and 5, beginning at verse 5 of chapter 4.

"And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." — Isaiah 4:5–6

"Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved 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." — Isaiah 5:1–2

"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." — Isaiah 5:7

The Glory and the Covering — Two Distinct Things

Verse 5 of chapter 4 says that upon all the glory shall be a defence — or in Darby's translation, a covering; Kelly calls it a canopy. There are two distinct things here: the glory itself, and then something over the glory. The glory is the

Shekinah, the manifested presence of God in the midst of His people — that same cloud which first appeared between the Israelites and the Egyptians as they approached the Red Sea, which filled the tabernacle and then the temple with such density that the priests could not stand to minister, and which Ezekiel saw depart and which, at the end of Ezekiel, he sees return by the same eastern gate through which it had left.

Romans 9:4, in listing what belonged to Israel, names the glory among their privileges — and that reference is to the Shekinah, the particular mark of God's presence in the midst of His people. In Isaiah 11:10, Darby translates his resting place shall be glory — and this is consistent with that same cluster of references. The glory that is spoken of here is not a vague or general concept. It is specific: it is God manifesting His presence in the midst of a people He has claimed for Himself.

But there is something further — a covering over that glory, described as a cloud and smoke by day and a shining flame by night, forming a tabernacle that is a shadow from heat, a refuge, a covert from storm and rain. This covering is for protection. What a covering does is keep off what would spoil the peacefulness, the rest, the purity of what is beneath it. There is a moral application here: to hold and practice from the heart that separation from evil is God's principle of unity — if that is bound down upon a company, it functions like a covering, preventing defilement from floating in. Every vessel that has no covering upon it is defiled; something will come in to alter its character.

The sequence in the chapter is morally ordered. Verse 2 establishes that the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious. Verse 4 establishes that the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. And then, consequent upon that washing, verses 5 and 6 give us the glory and the covering. The one who says he would like to enjoy the glory but prefers not to have any washing is not reading the

chapter morally. The glory and the covering follow the cleansing. They cannot be separated from it.

When they looked back to the wilderness, every Israelite would have recognized these words. The pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night — those marks of God's presence that accompanied Israel throughout forty years in the wilderness — are here promised to every dwelling place of Mount Zion, upon all her assemblies, in the coming day of the Lord's kingdom. Not one assembly, not the central meeting place only, but every dwelling place. God's presence covering the whole.

The parallel with the assembly of God is real. The glory of God is expressed by the presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst of His assembly. That presence places a responsibility upon those who are gathered: to consider what is due to His name. To tolerate evil alongside a profession that He is in the midst — that is the kind of failure Solomon illustrated, building high places for Milcom and Chemosh at the very time the cloud of glory was resting on the temple he had built. The glory of God was not diminished by what Solomon did — it is infinite, eternal — but Solomon bore the full weight of his failure in responsibility.

Isaiah 32:2 and the Person in the Midst

Isaiah 32:2 gives a scripture that has been a comfort to many souls over the years: And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. This is a millennial passage, referring to the Messiah Himself as the refuge of His people. And it connects directly with the last verse of chapter 4: the tabernacle for a shadow, the place of refuge, the covert from storm and from rain. What gives those words their ultimate content is a person — He Himself, the Man who shall be as a hiding place.

That is exactly the transition into chapter 5. After all the structural language of clouds, coverings, tabernacles, and refuges, the prophet breaks into song: Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. It is not a matter of religion, organization, or method. It is a person. The beloved one. Isaiah calls Him my well-beloved. The Song of Solomon, the book that precedes Isaiah in the canon, has the same consuming theme — the heart's attachment to the altogether lovely one. And Isaiah, one failing man in the midst of a nation of failures, had that same heart. He could call the Lord his well-beloved.

The Vineyard — God's Provision and Israel's Failure

Chapter 5 opens with the vineyard song, and its purpose becomes clear in verse 3: And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. The song was sung in order to call forth judgment — to bring the soul to the place where it is willing to agree with God's verdict about what has taken place.

The favors listed are extraordinary: a fruitful hill, fenced, stones gathered out, the choicest vine planted, a tower built in the midst, a winepress made ready. There was nothing lacking in what God had provided. And the question of verse 4 is unanswerable: What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? This is a test case for mankind. The most favored nation on the face of the earth was given everything — the law, the prophets, the oracles of God, the glory in their midst, the covenants — and yet they brought forth wild grapes.

Wild grapes. The grape in Scripture is connected with wine, which speaks of joy — joy in the heart of God and in the heart of man. Wild grapes represent joy that is not under control, not submitted to God, not the fruit of the Spirit. There is a wildness — an abandonment of control, a lack of submission to the will of God. The people sit down to eat and drink and rise up to play; they are idolaters not because they bow to images, but because they live for pleasure and regard not the

work of the Lord. All of that is in the wild grapes.

And the result of the test? Romans 3 pronounces it: there is none righteous, no, not one. One hundred percent failure. The nation that was chosen as a representative sample of mankind — given every possible advantage and every possible reason to succeed — brought forth wild grapes. From that sample, God judges the whole lot. Every human being needs a Redeemer. There were very few in Israel who were redeemed. But there was one who knew how to sing. He called the Lord his well-beloved. His name was Isaiah. And it is his voice we hear in chapter 5 verse 1.

Darby's translation deserves a brief word here. It is the only translation produced by a man who was thoroughly established in the dispensational scope of Scripture — a man who understood the true bearing of what the Spirit of God had written. His remark is instructive: we must know the thing to understand the words. A person who has not been born again will not understand the words born again. One who does not know the government of God, the glory of Christ, the distinction between Israel and the church — will not understand the words that speak of those things. The translation is consequently of great assistance precisely where others, working without that understanding, have obscured or flattened what the Spirit intended.

*Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard —
for he is the covert from storm and rain, the shadow of a great rock in a weary
land.*