

I am sure that we are all familiar with the passages concerning the vine and the branches in John chapter 15. This is a very beautiful passage dealing with the idea of our continual fellowship with Christ, that we live in him and are nourished in him, and he in turn lives in us. It also talks about the responsibility that we have as Christians to bear fruit as a result of this relationship.

But I think that we are not so aware of the background of this thought. In Is. 5:1ff we can see one of the three primary passages which deal with the Lord's vineyard in the Old Testament. Let us read it...

*I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.*

*Isaiah 5:1-7*

I can just see this figure of God, with tender loving care, planting this vineyard. He does everything he can possibly do to start it on its way, the scripture says, and if there was anything to do than he did, he just doesn't know what it is. Of course this vineyard is really the nation of Israel. But God says that when He went down to look at the fruit that it bore, it was useless, good for nothing. And so he trampled it under his feet.

It is not a story without hope, however. We find that God, with the same tender care and love has planted another vineyard, of which all Christians are a part. But we also have the responsibility of bearing useful fruit. Now this is not something that we can accumulate like points, but is a response to God's love and care; living a godly life as God wants us to do. If again we do not bear the right kind of fruit, will not God be just as furious with us as he was with the Israelites? In Romans 11 we find that the trimming of unfruitful branches goes on. We must endeavor to live in the steps of Christ, bearing his fruit as he lives in us.