

Building House to House (Isaiah 5:8): Theological Reflection on Land Development and Creation Care

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Land development is the point of theological critique set within the context of Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard." God's good land (the vineyard) was marred by a number of sins, one of them being "building" house to house (land development). Within the horizons of the OT in general and Isaiah in particular, the substance of the critique may be understood theologically within the strictures of OT law regarding land allotment. But pressing toward new horizons in biblical theology, how might the substance of the critique be carried forward? This article will reflect on land development and creation care within the horizons of Isa 5:8 and OT law and then move toward a reflection of the same set within the fields of biblical theology and theological interpretation of Scripture.

Key Words: creation care, Isaiah, Synoptic Gospels, parables, biblical theology, theological interpretation, hermeneutics, application

INTRODUCTION

The title of this article is something of a misnomer. Two verbals are employed in Isa 5:8a, neither of which derive from בנה, "to build." Rather, the terms here used are נגע, "to touch/add," and קרב, "to draw near/conjoin." So why include "building" as part of the title? The rationale behind it lies in the theological criticism outlined in 5:8–10, which carries on from the logic of Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" (Isa 5:1–7). The prophet critiques those who are adding "house to house" and conjoining "field to field" (5:8a) at a grave cost—they construct many large and splendid homes (v. 9) at the

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expense of the land and those who (formerly) live on it. As a result, the land will wither and the finely constructed homes will lie desolate (v. 10). In short, the logic of Isa 5:8–10 may be summarized in terms of construction—wealthy landowners build economic and social security at the expense of both the land (which is a gift from the Lord) and those who depend on it for sustenance (v. 10). In the prophet's woe, this building project is doomed to fail. Set within Isaiah's theology, these wealthy rich are building the wrong kingdom, and the true King will judge them for it (Isa 6:5, 33:22, 43:15, 44:6). This message about wrong kingdom-building is echoed in the Synoptic Gospels as well, which will be demonstrated below. The title of this paper, then, links inappropriate land development with a prophetic critique. This critique denounces the human construction of pride and greed at the expense of the land and those who are meant to dwell on it.

It is important to investigate whether and how this prophetic critique may be applied today, especially if one conceives of the kingdom of God as an "earthly realm" and arena for just human activity in accord with God's rule, as well as an authoritative and redemptive force.¹ God's kingdom is a place where "kingdom fruits" are produced (Matt 21:43) that accord with the way that God rules his kingdom. And it remains vital to recognize these fruits to be "justice" and "righteousness" demonstrated in all spheres of human activity and enacted through the reality of Christ's rule in the created order (John 1:3). If this understanding of the kingdom and its fruits is accurate, then the very nature of Christian action in relation to the land is not secondarily but primarily theological, one particular habit of life that demands just and right action amidst the rich diversity of human action in the world. How the Christian associates with the land comprises one lived arena for obedience to God in Christ.² And the Isaianic critique may hold promise for this habit of life, that is, appropriate land use in God's kingdom.

The aim of this essay is to reflect theologically on the prophetic denunciation of land misuse in Isa 5:8–10 and to do so "paradigmatically," in light of Christ and his kingdom. To show this, I shall explore how Isa 5:8–10 (prophetic woe) fits within the larger theology of land in the OT (derived in

1. For the earthiness of the kingdom, as well as discussion on the kingdom as the arena for just human activity, see Oliver T. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (2nd edition; Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 140–78, esp. pp. 141–42. For a view of the kingdom of God as a "realm" and a "reign," see George B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (ed. L. D. Hurst; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 368–69. See also the balanced discussion of Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), 25–37. For a view of kingdom as primarily a "rule" with little emphasis given to the importance of place (or "realm"), see George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (ed. Donald A. Hagner; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 60–61. For a position that admits "realm" but emphasizes "rule," see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 198–243.

2. Thanks to Craig Bartholomew for sharing with me his thoughts on kingdom and place in his extensive exploration of a Christian theology of place in his forthcoming *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker).

part from the Pentateuch), how it fits within the context of Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:2–7) and the book of Isaiah, and then how the Gospels receive the Song tradition (with particular emphasis on the Synoptic parable of the wicked tenants). The full interaction between these texts helps us, to use Chris Wright's language, move from the "there" of the Isaianic critique to the "here" of its modern appropriation. The notes rung out in Isaiah 5 are echoed and reverberate in the broader canon that receives it, which must be interpreted and heard by the church of God as the Word of God. Hearing both the OT and NT witnesses on this point remains vital to grasp the shape of the larger biblical story, and how Isaiah 5 fits within it. Then it is possible to discover aright one's place within that larger story with specific reference to the prophetic critique of Isaiah 5. Land misuse in Isaiah 5, then, carries forward as a word to the church so that she might respond to the voice of God in worshipful obedience.³ When considered in this way, the Isaianic critique holds promise for the broader question of Christian relationship to the created world, with particular emphasis on the ethical way one lives in the land, or a specific subset of "creation care."⁴

It is in place to note that this is not primarily a historical investigation but an exercise in a certain form of biblical theology and theological interpretation of Scripture.⁵ Other research may speak to how Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the Psalter receive the vineyard metaphor historically, but

3. The notion of a "paradigmatic" association between an OT critique and a Christian appropriation in the light of Christ derives from the work of Christopher J. H. Wright in his *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 441–54. The aim to hear and respond to the voice of God through the Scriptures remains an essential component to what may be termed "theological interpretation." R. W. L. Moberly, "What Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?" *JTI* 3 (2009): 161–78, esp. pp. 162–63.

4. This approach recognizes that Isaiah's critique is indeed "God-breathed" and "profitable" for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16) and therefore is a good and relevant word. Ground has already been broken in establishing a properly theological view of God's people in God's land, so this essay builds on this work with particular attention given to Isa 5:8–10. See Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenges to "Holy Land" Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); R. C. J. Carling and M. A. Carling, eds., *A Christian Approach to the Environment* (Moelfre, UK: John Ray Initiative, 2005); Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, eds., *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity / Leicester: Apollos, 2000); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*; idem, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), esp. pp. 6–28; *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christian and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

5. Traditionally, a focus on the historical development of religion in the Bible is understood as the work of biblical theology. This tradition of doing biblical theology, however, fails to account for the properly theological substance of the text. As such, it negates from the outset the possibility that the Triune God, through the text, addresses the interpreter through the unified witness of the canon. See Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 70–94.

the interests of this essay constrict the focus and necessarily preclude this discussion.⁶ So what is intended by biblical theology here is a focus on a "whole Bible theology" that attends to the distinct voices of the OT and NT. This means that historical, literary, and theological issues are addressed as they arise and as is appropriate.⁷

The Abused Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1–10

Isaiah's denunciation in the whole of 5:1–10 (both Song and woe) only gains currency when rightly set within Israel's basic self-understanding, which derives from their covenant with the deity. Land was at the center of Israel's heritage as the people of God and it provided the place to be God's priests to the surrounding nations (Exod 19:5–6).⁸ Israel understood herself to be in a relationship with God, in his land, as his people.⁹ An outcome of this basic identity is a general land theology that avers: the land was given by the Lord as a fulfillment of the promise to the patriarchs; the Lord owns the land, and his people are its tenants, and divine ownership is to be acknowledged by his people in various legal and cultic ways, including land laws; Israel and its land were related insofar as Israel was related rightly to the Lord.¹⁰

In the OT, then, the divine gift of land demands Israel's intentional care so that they might illustrate God's grace to the nations as well as "thrive in the presence or sight of the God who allows Israel to dwell" in it.¹¹ In the way they lived on the land, insofar as they adhered to God's Torah, Israel preserved its identity as the divine "possession out of all the peoples" and his "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6). The practical means of distributing the land to his people was through its allotment to specific kinship groups (in macrocosm) and family groups (in

6. Other divine vineyard texts are, among others: Isa 27:2–7; Jer 5:10–19, 12:7–13; Ezek 15; Ps 80:9–20; Matt 20:1–16, 21:28–41; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 13:6–9, 20:9–16; John 15:1–17. But H. G. M. Williamson is correct when he states that Isa 5:1–7 is the source from which other texts adapt the vineyard metaphor: *Isaiah 1–27: Volume 1 (Isaiah 1–5)* (ICC; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 329, 343.

7. The general view taken on the relationship between biblical theology and theological interpretation of Scripture coheres with Treier's "type 3": a creative tension between biblical theology and theological interpretation. See Daniel J. Treier, "Biblical Theology and/or Theological Interpretation of Scripture? Defining the Relationship," *SJT* 61 (2008): 16–31.

8. See the discussion of Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 224–25, 254–57.

9. Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 104–14; Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (2nd ed.; Evangelical Theological Society Studies; Leicester: Apollos / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Hans E. von Waldow, "Israel and Her Land: Some Theological Considerations," in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Meyers* (ed. H. N. Bream, R. D. Heim, and C. A. Moore; Gettysburg Theological Studies 4; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 493–508.

10. Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 9; Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 6–28.

11. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 82. Davis's quotation refers to the highlands of Canaan, but it may rightly refer to the OT perspective of the land as a whole.

microcosm).¹² Even if a family group's heritage was dispossessed for some reason, redemption law (by means of the kinsman-redeemer, compare Ruth 4) and Jubilee law (Leviticus 25) provided an ideal for the restitution of the dispossessed land back to its original tenants. God's land was to be cared for without greed or covetousness by its tenants, recognizing land as an irrevocable divine gift to kinship groups. In this way, the Lord provided nourishment and life for his people.

Set against this theological backdrop, Isa 5:1–10 becomes sensible. The vineyard that the Lord owns and works in the Song of the Vineyard in vv. 1–7 evokes a vision that was familiar to the ancient Israelites hearing it—the land around Jerusalem and Judea was known to be replete with vineyards, and wine was a major resource for family groups and the state in the rise of the monarchy.¹³ The Song imagines God as a farmer working his land, which is described as a “fruitful hill.”¹⁴ He tills the ground, clears it of stones, and then plants it with select vines. Like his audience, God as a farmer knew the soil and how to cultivate it appropriately; he was familiar with the appropriate vines that would produce in the region where his land was located. He knew the times and seasons of tilling and planting. And he knew how to protect the land and vineyard as it produced fruit.¹⁵ The Lord “gets his hands dirty” with the good earth that he knows and to which he belongs, in hopes that it would bring forth good fruit. In v. 2b, God builds a watchtower and a winepress for the vineyard's protection and productivity. He has done all he can do to cultivate and protect the vine, but it produces worthless fruit. The Lord's speech in v. 4 (“What more could have been done for my vineyard that I did not do in it?”) then, anticipates the perspective of the hearers of the Song as well.¹⁶

12. A point remembered in Isa 34:17 but witnessed especially in Joshua 13–21. For discussion, see Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 44–70; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 237–341. See also the fallow and Sabbatical-year laws for responsibility of protection and care of the land (Exod 23:10–11; Lev 25:2–7). For a discussion, see Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 193.

13. Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 1–44, 101–34.

14. Isaiah confirms that the land is owned by God and that his people are related to the divine promise made to Abraham and his descendants (Isa 29:22–4, 41:8–20, 51:2, 63:16). For the promise of the land to Abraham and his descendants, see Gen 12:2–3; 15:4–7, 13–21; 17:1–8. For discussion, see especially John A. Sawyer, *Isaiah* (vol. 1; Daily Study Bible; Edinburgh: St. Andrews, 1984–86), 132–34.

15. It is true that Isaiah is characterized as one of the first urban prophets, but the context of eighth century Israel/Judah was decidedly agrarian. The metaphor employed in the Song (and throughout the book) attests to this reality, although Isaiah does not exploit agrarian imagery as extensively as some of his contemporaries, such as Amos or Hosea. For discussion, see Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 120–38.

16. So Christopher R. Seitz: “We expect the listeners to indict the vineyard when instead God himself speaks the harsh sentence of judgment (5:5)” (*Isaiah 1–39* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 47). Contra Williamson, *Isaiah 1–27: Volume 1*, 329, 343.

Further, the Song embeds the legal requirements given by God for his people through a delicious wordplay that proves bitter to its hearers. Isa 5:7 reads, "I hoped for justice (לְמִשְׁפָּט) but behold, injustice (מִשְׁפָּח)! For righteousness (לְצִדִּיקָה), but behold, an outcry (הֶעֱצָרָה)!" The repetition of the language of hope (קִוָּה) in the Song links the Lord's expectation of "justice and righteousness" mentioned in v. 7 with the "good fruit" of vv. 2 and 4,¹⁷ and the wordplay in the Hebrew of "righteousness and justice" against "injustice and outcry" in v. 7 attest to the failure of the vine in sensuous detail. The series of woe oracles that follow the Song (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22) detail various embodiments of the legal breaches of God's people, which was summarized by the rubric "injustice and inequity" in v. 7. As such, the woes belong with the Song and should be interpreted in light of it. These woes comprise fleshy substance for the metaphor of "wild grapes" in vv. 2 and 4: land development, drunkenness or self-indulgence, pervasive lying and sin, and disregard for God's plans.¹⁸

The metaphor of the divine vineyard, then, lays the foundation for the hearers' reception of God's adverse perspective on their present reality. God owns the vineyard, and his people are to produce fruits of justice and righteousness. But they have failed in this regard (illustrated by the woe oracles in Isa 5:8–22) and therefore threaten their very relationship with God. The viticultural metaphor of God as farmer lulls the Song's hearers into its critique: God has cared for his people as a farmer cares for his land and produce, yet they (the vine) have produced injustice and inequity, despising divine affection. As such, the vineyard will be destroyed (vv. 5–6; compare Isa 1:8).

The first woe oracle (vv. 8–10), which concerns us here, is closely related to the Song that precedes it and must be interpreted in its light. God's land and vineyard (vv. 1–7) are spoiled by the wild grapes of "adding house to house" and "conjoining field to field" (v. 8). What is the substance of this woe? Most scholars locate the critique against a broad canvas of improper land seizure and development grounded on breach in land-allotment law. Whether this woe should be located more particularly stands in question.¹⁹

17. הָיָה (v. 2); קָרָה (v. 4); הֶעֱצָרָה (v. 7).

18. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 50; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 51–55.

19. Many think that the woe here should be understood as a critique against increasing latifundialization during the period of the monarchy (particularly in the eighth century B.C.E.), where wealthy Judahites bought up the land of poorer folk, reducing them to slavery on their former land. On this view, Brueggemann proffers Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* a rich intertext to the kind of thing critiqued in v. 8 (Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, 51–52; Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 107–9; Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 123). Bendor suggests that this view is perhaps too sweeping and argues that the meaning of the verse might be set within the smaller context of inequities in the family unit (בֵּית־אָב) and local village economy: S. Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit 'Ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerusalem Biblical Studies 7; Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 252–53. Others have been more modest in their claims. Williamson marks two in particular: (a) rather than large-scale latifundialization, the critique aims at smaller-scale land acquisition through manipulation of mortgages so that small farmers remained on their land but were forced to pay

Whatever the real situation on the ground, it seems fairly clear the prophet critiques three interwoven injustices.

1. By exploiting the land, resultant from breaches in land-allotment law, wealthy landowners exploit the poor.²⁰
2. As a result of the exploitation, only this few are left *alone* in the land—with their wealth and power secure (v. 8). This leaves others not simply landless but rather vulnerable in the society.²¹ Following on this, God specifically condemns the great (רָבִים), large (גְּדֹלִים), and splendid (טוֹבִים) estates (בָּתִּים) in v. 9. These luxurious estates are built on land that is—in the final analysis—not their own and established by profits of injustice.²³ Wealthy land development in this case is unjust because the rich get rich at the expense of the poor, and the land that was employed for sustenance for all God's people is now reserved as a place of lavish estates (v. 10).
3. The critique against the kind of land development here is designed to condemn this activity as profoundly unjust and unrighteous before God and abusive to his neighbor. The critique holds even if the use of land was not technically illegal per se.²⁴ Isa 5:8–10 then reveals that the wealthy few cannot develop the

high taxes (via their produce) to the new landowner (possibly the king); and (b) transfer of ownership was not at issue, but rather wealthy landowners held land as a lean against a loan and in the interim enjoyed the produce of the pledged land (again, possibly this was a result of royal policy). See Williamson, *Isaiah 1–27: Volume 1*, 351–53. Williamson favors a blend of perhaps the latter two options. Davis suggests that royal appropriation of land for a state-wide rather than regional economy becomes common royal policy in the eighth century, critiqued by Amos and Hosea, and would fit the critique of Isa 5:8–10 as well. See Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, 120–35.

20. This may be a case of wide-scale exploitation (latifundialization view), village-scale exploitation (בית-אב view), or a more modest version of the same (as identified by Williamson). Nonetheless, a few benefit by the way they co-opt or buy out the land allotments of the poor and then use it for their own ends.

21. A key to understanding this is found in the term לְבַדָּם, “you alone.” The term בַּד and its derivatives often indicate separation from other things, whether garments (Exod 26:9, 36:16) or towns (Deut 3:5), or even people (Zech 12:12–14). This concept of separation may connote singularity (in regards to the Lord: Ps 51:6, 71:16, 83:19, 86:10), or loneliness and solitude (Lam 1:1, 3:28), but also may imply solitary security (Ps 4:9). Within the context of Isa 5:8, the intention is separation and singularity, which comes at the expense of others, so that there is “no room” (עַד אֶפְסֵי מָקוֹם) in the land. The rich crowd out the rest, which leaves only these privileged few secure “in the midst of the land” (בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ) (Isa 5:8b).

22. See the discussion on the expansive notion of בֵּית as “estate” rather than merely a physical habitation in D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 100–101.

23. This judgment comports with Amos 3:15: “I will demolish the winter house and the summer house; the houses of ivory will be destroyed, and the great houses (בָּתִּים רַבִּים) will come to an end.”

24. Williamson, *Isaiah 1–27: Volume 1*, 351–53; Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 121–25; esp. p. 139. The wealthy landowners may be legally within their rights to buy up land that is in forfeiture, but nonetheless they remain in rebellion against God's demands with how they use this land and treat its former tenants.

land to their own ends or to build their own "kingdom." God's requirement for justice and righteousness through land-allotment law indicates an ideal that, in this case, is not met.²⁵

In summary then, Isa 5:1–10 and vv. 8–10 in particular exposes and critiques the way the wealthy few abuse triadic relationship between God, his land, and his people. The wealthy few cannot buy up and develop the land as they wish. Its value as God's gift to his people requires just and righteous development. The land must be received as a gift from God and used in a way that pleases him and benefits all who live on it. Those who add "house to house" and conjoin "field to field" are open for God's judgment because they exploit the land for their own benefit which leaves the vulnerable without a place to live and thrive in God's inheritance. They build their own mini-kingdoms at the expense of God's kingdom, for which they will be judged.

At this point, it may be tempting to adduce certain applications of the prophetic critique. One may simply note it as an illustration of the failure of God's people to obey God's voice. Then application proceeds by setting the church analogously in Israel's place and encouraging her not to disobey God's voice today. The problem with that move lies in its lack of specificity. In a more targeted approach, the critique from the prophet's world is transitioned into a critique that may function in our world by means of a "principle-izing" arc. The principle "avoid greed that abuses land or neighbor" stands as a truth that may be applied today.²⁶ Brueggemann goes this way when he sees in Isaiah's woe in vv. 8–10 a condemnation against modern agribusiness.²⁷ And Premnath states that the growth of large estates in the eighth century B.C.E. and the prophetic critique against this activity fundamentally broached a question that should be asked today: in regards to the land, who holds and has access to the economic base in society? This query prompts a subset of questions that drive modern interpreters to diagnose the problems of society, at both individual and collective levels.²⁸

On the one hand, Brueggemann and Premnath rightly alert the Christian to the fact that, for the OT and NT, theology remains earthy. Their concern to flag the ethics of business in relation to the land is salutary. How one lives on the land is as theological as what one believes about God. Their rationale for this derives from Israel's land-theology highlighted above. "Justice" and "righteousness" in Isaiah's Song are related to real, embodied

25. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 89–99.

26. On a popular level, this is the approach of J. S. Duvall and J. D. Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 203–13. Hays and Duvall build on the widely used distinction between meaning and significance advocated by E. D. Hirsch and relate meaning to a theological principle that can be carried across ancient context via a principle-izing bridge. For his distinction between meaning and significance, see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 8–23, 140–44.

27. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, 51–52.

28. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, 181–88.

ways of inhabiting God's land. And for the Christian, "justice" and "righteousness" should not be understood as abstract theological principles but rather as fleshy human enactments in God's created order that accord with his rule in creation, as indicated in the introduction above.

On the other hand, their applications tend to rely on an abstract principle that detracts from the force of Isaiah's critique, evacuating it of its originating meaning. One may rightly wonder whether Brueggemann's analogue between Isaiah's critique and the practices of modern agribusiness is, in fact, coherent. Is modern agribusiness in covenant with God as was Israel? The relationship between source and target via the mediating use of a principle in his analysis remains tenuous at best. Brown notes that principle-driven interpretation tends to relinquish the originating text of its true meaning—and this is especially the case with Brueggemann's appropriation.²⁹ An outcome of this move is that it prevents the Scriptures from having their full say on land theology, especially related to Isa 5:8–10. This move short circuits the freight of theological vision, within both Isaiah the book and the canon as a whole.

One way to apply of the critique of Isa 5:8–10, which gains its currency from OT land law, may be accomplished through theological interpretation instead of the more traditional principle-izing arc. For modern appropriation, one must remember that in the full sweep of Scripture, land theology in the OT is headed somewhere—toward redemption in Christ. Christ came to redeem all things, the entire created order, land included (John 3:16; Col 1:15–20). Tom Wright correctly avers that Jesus, with his emphasis on the kingdom of God, "had not come to rehabilitate the symbol of the holy land, but to subsume it within a different fulfillment of the kingdom, which would embrace the whole creation."³⁰ It is deficient theologically to apply the Isaianic critique against land development without the larger narrative of Scripture informing the appropriation.

Theological interpretation orients the interpreter to the full testimony of the Bible so as to apply Isaiah's critique in light of that testimony. Isaiah's full presentation of the vineyard metaphor needs to be heard in order to understand its theology and potential application. Further, the witness of the NT may be brought to bear in interpretation and application, as this evidence reorients the vineyard metaphor from Isaiah 5 and plays on the notion of fruits of "injustice" and "unrighteousness" from that passage. It is not argued here that the NT responds to the land critique of Isa 5:8–10 rigidly. Rather, the NT receives and adapts the Song in a particular way. The NT appropriation of the vineyard metaphor highlights Christology and kingdom fruitfulness. However, that does not mean that the Isaianic Song or succeeding woes are cast aside as irrelevant. By virtue of theologi-

29. See the helpful and careful discussion of Jeannine K. Brown on the prospects and pitfalls of principle-izing approaches to modern appropriation of biblical texts: *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 261–67.

30. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 446. Contra Davies, who believes that Jesus paid little attention to the relationship between God and the land (*The Gospel and the Land*, 365).

cal interpretation, the reception of Isaiah's Song in Isaiah 27 as well as in the NT exposes a hermeneutical trajectory that enables one to reread Isa 5:8–10 theologically in light of these texts. Taking account of this trajectory, the interpreter then can begin to relate Isaiah's critique to the modern world. It is in place, then, to explore this interpretive trajectory with attention to Isaiah 27, the Synoptics' parable of the wicked tenants, and then possible application of the Isaianic critique.

The Renewed Vineyard in Isaiah 27:2–6

Isa 27:2–6 responds to Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard and provides a vision of renewal after judgment. In the Song's depiction of the vineyard, God's judgment reigned supreme; in this latter vision, God's restoration is set in beautiful color. God's care for his vineyard in Isa 5:2–6 is matched by his continued care in Isa 27:2–6: the Lord keeps watch over his vineyard and waters it continually (v. 3) so that no harm may come to it; the vineyard (Jacob/Israel) will sprout and blossom, covering the world with fruit (v. 6). In short, the vineyard that was withered through judgment leaving it desolate and torn down (Isa 5:6, 10) has now become the "vineyard of delight (פֶּרֶם חֶמֶד)" (Isa 27:2).

The renewed vineyard displays expanded borders. Although its production of wild fruit perhaps was isolated within the confines of the land of Israel in Isaiah 5, this new vineyard in Isa 27:6 now sprouts good fruit over the face of the whole world (פְּנֵי-חֶבֶל). Thus, the vineyard has grown paradigmatically, and its produce (תְּנוּכָה) contrasts with the "wild grapes" of Isa 5:2, 4 (and vv. 8–10) and instead may be understood as the fruit of justice and righteousness expected by God in Isa 5:1–7. Thus, the vision for the "vineyard of delight" is global in scope and productivity and fruitfulness blossom among the nations, bringing good fruit to the entire earth. The greedy land development schemes that marked those who conjoin "house to house" and "field to field" (Isa 5:8), which God judged (5:9–10), are now obliterated in the new vision. God's judgment in Isaiah 5 is not final but rather disciplinary and directed toward the abolishment of sin in the land so that the people might produce fruits of justice and righteousness not just in Israel but throughout the earth (Isa 27:6).

When would this restoration arrive and how so? Within the context of Isaiah the book, restoration will be decidedly a work of God, who imbues the suffering servant with his spirit to accomplish this divine task (Isa 48:16–19; 49:1–13, esp. vv. 6, 8; 61:1–11). This work of God will be accomplished "in that day," an eschatological time that, ringing with apocalyptic overtones, is consequent with the Lord's defeat of leviathan and the dragon of the sea (Isa 27:1). In this sense, the picture of salvation cannot be localized to a specific historical return from exile but rather expands its scope cosmically and eschatologically.³¹ The remainder of Isaiah returns to

31. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 195–97; Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1980), 218–20.

this vision over and again (although without returning particularly to the vineyard metaphor) and culminates in a complete restoration of creation, even a “new heaven and a new earth” (Isa 65:17–25). Yet there is a degree of expectation that remains inherent to this renewal in Isaiah that makes its deferral apparent. The time of restoration will come, to be sure, but it has not yet arrived. Nonetheless, it is clear that the failure of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 is transformed by the renewing act of God in Isaiah 27.

The association between the vineyard metaphor in Isaiah 5 and 27 prevents a fast and easy application of the prophetic critique of land development in Isa 5:8–10. In the context of Isaiah, both judgment and restoration must be assessed in order to offer a fully developed application. But as intimated above, Isaiah’s vineyard metaphor is taken up in the NT as well, so one must press into the broader corpus of the canon to flag NT usage of the metaphor to see if the critique lodged in Isa 5:8–10 is further directed, and it is in the Synoptics’ parable of the wicked tenants.

Jesus and the Vineyard in the Gospels

The Synoptics receive the divine vineyard metaphor of Isaiah 5 and adapt it in the parable of the wicked tenants in Matt 21:33–46, with parallels in Mark 12:1–12 and Luke 20:9–19. Weren has convincingly demonstrated these are not merely adaptations of a stock vineyard metaphor but, in the cases of Matthew and Mark, explicitly interact with Isaiah’s Song.³² This is true for Luke as well, although the Lukan reception remains streamlined and abbreviated when compared to that of Matthew and Mark.³³ The tables below highlight the Matthean and Markan versions, though the Lukan account will be referenced. The Synoptics reiterate a constellation of terms from Isaiah’s Song in the LXX, linking them together intertextually. Note particularly the similarities illustrated in tables 1 and 2.³⁴ Luke evinces similar parallels. Note the correspondence between the opening lines in the Lukan parable and the Song: ἐφύτευσεν, ἀμπελῶνα (Luke 20:9) // ἐφύτευσα, ἄμπελον (Isa 5:2 LXX). The transitions to judgment speech in the parable and Song also correspond to one another: τί οὖν ποιήσει αὐτοῖς ὁ κύριος τοῦ

32. W. J. C. Weren, “The Use of Isaiah 5,1–7 in the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12,1–12; Matthew 21,33–46),” *Bib* 79 (1998): 1–26.

33. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 216–17; C. A. Kimball, “Jesus’ Exposition of Scripture in Luke 20:9–19: An Inquiry in Light of Jewish Hermeneutics,” *BBR* 3 (1993): 77–92; Klyne R. Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants* (WUNT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 106–10. It is not my intention to become embroiled in the Synoptic problem at this point but only to say that with majority scholars I hold Markan priority for the parable, which both Luke and Matthew read in concert with both the LXX and Hebrew versions of the Song and then adapt in their own particular ways for their own theological reasons. Complex interaction may account for some differences in the parallel pericopes. I agree with Snodgrass and Evans that the original literary form of the parable stems from Markan tradition rather than that of the *Gospel of Thomas*. See Klyne R. Snodgrass, “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: Is the *Gospel of Thomas* Version the Original?” *NTS* 21 (1975): 142–44; Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 216–19.

34. Weren, “The Use,” 6–26.

ἀμπελῶνος (Luke 20:15) // τί ποιήσω ἔτι τῷ ἀμπελῶνι μου (Isa 5:4 LXX). Matthew, likely following Mark, replicates (though reverses) the four activities mentioned in Isa 5:2 LXX, while the Lukan tradition does not include all of these actions. The use of the interrogative in Mark 12:9, Matt 21:40, and Luke 20:15 follows the use of the interrogative in Isa 5:4 LXX. In each, respectively, it functions to transition from the parable itself to judgment speech.

These linkages make it likely that the Synoptics receive the Song tradition in the Greek and then adapt it for their own purposes within their deployment of the parable. Similarities and differences between the Song and the Synoptic parables will be explored a bit further below. Different from the Song, the Synoptic parables particularly direct their critique against the Jewish leaders. Further, the delicious wordplay of Isa 5:7 in the Hebrew is not imitated in the LXX in Luke or Mark. But there is evidence of this sort of counterpart in Matt 21:41 (κακοὺς κακῶς). It is striking that this wordplay on the Hebrew of Isa 5:7 connects thematically to the focus of Matt 21:41. The wordplay in Isa 5:7 has to do with the reality of corrupt fruit, and the wordplay in Matt 21:41 highlights miserable tenancy and the vineyard given to others who can give fruit back to the landowner in its due season. This point, however, should not be overplayed. More readily apparent are the allusions to Isaiah's Song at both the opening and at the transition to judgment in the parables.

What does the interaction with Isaiah's Song accomplish in the parables? In two separate articles, Hester and Horne argue that the Synoptics' parable of the wicked tenants engage Isaiah's Song to advance not (just) a theological meaning but a practical one as well. Namely, it challenges its readers with a question, "Who owns God's land and what are the appropriate ways to develop it?"³⁵ In this, the land-misuse critique of Isa 5:8–10 is prophetic of similar activity in the first century A.D. Hester unhelpfully tends to emphasize the "practical" meaning inherent to the parable, but Horne rightly integrates both practical and theological. The useful insight, however, of both scholars is that in the Synoptics, at root, the land belongs to God, and religious leaders are likely misappropriating the land at the expense of peasants, and this act consequently functions to condemn them.³⁶ On this, one finds a corollary to the interpretation of Isaiah's woe oracle in 5:8–10. Thus, the religious leaders in Jesus' day produce "wild grapes" of land misuse (particularly appropriating massive quantities of land at the expense of tenant farmers) that correlates with the wealthy elite's actions in Isaiah's day.³⁷

What Hester and Horne miss, however, is the Christological focus that the parable reinforces in each of the Synoptics. Jesus provides an entrée to understand Mosaic teaching (and thereby land law) in its fullness. Jesus

35. J. D. Hester, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism and the Parable of the Tenants," *JSNT* 45 (1992): 27–57; E. H. Horne, "The Parable of the Tenants as Indictment," *JSNT* 71 (1998): 111–16.

36. Hester, "Socio-Rhetorical," 43–44; Horne, "The Parable," 113–16.

37. Hester, "Socio-Rhetorical," 34–40; Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 105–9.

Table 1. *Opening Lines of Song and Parable*

<i>Isa 5:2 LXX</i>	<i>Mark 12:1</i>	<i>Matt 21:33</i>
1. ἄμπελον	1. ἄμπελῶνα	1. ἄμπελῶνα
2. ἐφύτευσα	2. ἐφύτευσεν	2. ἐφύτευσεν
3. φραγμὸν	3. φραγμὸν	3. φραγμὸν
4. καὶ πολήνιον ὠρυξά ἐν αὐτῷ	4. καὶ ὠρυξεν ὑπολήνιον	4. καὶ ὠρυξεν ἐν αὐτῷ ληνὸν
5. καὶ ὀκοδόμησα πύργον	5. καὶ ὀκοδόμησεν πύργον	5. καὶ ὀκοδόμησεν πύργον

Table 2. *Transition to Judgment Speech
Using the Interrogative in Song and Parable*

<i>Isa 5:4 LXX</i>	<i>Mark 12:9</i>	<i>Matt 21:40</i>
τί ποιήσω ἔτι τῷ ἄμπελῶνι μου	τί [οὖν] ποιήσει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἄμπελῶνος	ὅταν οὖν ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἄμπελῶνος, τί ποιήσει

also provides an entrée to understand fruits of justice and righteousness (or the “fruits of the kingdom” in Matt 21:43) that come as a result of the death of the beloved son. Reading Jesus’ parable simply as a social critique (Hester) that comports too closely with Isaianic indictment (Horne) empties the parable of its Christological emphasis within the Synoptic gospels.³⁸ Although wrongful land development may indeed have been prevalent in the social world of the first century A.D., and this may be evidence of fruit of “unrighteousness,” Jesus’ parable targets land-misuse not by blithely applying an OT metaphor but by relating that metaphor in and through the gospel of the kingdom, which Jesus brings forth.³⁹

In this way, two major theological emphases emerge in the reception of Isaiah’s Song in the NT: Christology and kingdom fruitfulness. These twin themes open a significant trajectory through which modern application of the woe of Isa 5:8–10 may begin. Appropriate or inappropriate land development by the Christian, then, must be understood in light of and measured by the twin emphases of Christ and the fruit of his kingdom.

The Synoptics adapt Isaiah’s Song to emphasize the tenants’ (lack of) care for the owner’s vineyard in general and in particular their (mis)treatment of the landowner’s son. The idea of a son is nowhere in view in Isaiah’s Song and marks a significant deviation from it. In all three Synoptics, the rhetoric of the parable effects a condemnation of the religious leaders, and by implication, all those who reject Jesus in a similar manner.⁴⁰ Whereas

38. Snodgrass, *The Parable*, 80–112.

39. For discussion on the kingdom of God and Jesus’ emphases in his kingdom teaching, see Darrell Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 565–93; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 198–243.

40. Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke–Acts* (Library of New Testament Studies 367; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 114–15. On Jesus and the kingdom, see Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 703; and Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge:

in Isaiah's Song the fruits of injustice and unrighteousness are evidence of a rejection of God, in the Markan and Lukan versions, the tenants' treatment of the landowner's son helps to expose the Christological emphasis. Those who reject *the son*, in effect, reject God. The son and the landowner/God are conjoined in the parable. In the Song, Israel's rejection of God is concomitant with fruits of injustice and unrighteousness expressed in the succeeding woes, as discussed above. So while linked through intertextuality, the Synoptic parables retain a particular emphasis by adapting the Song with a Christological focus.

This Christological focus may be heightened with the language of the "beloved son." Mark and Luke use the adjective "beloved" with "son" in Mark 12:6 (υἷὸν ἀγαπητόν) and Luke 20:13 (τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν). There may be intertextual connection between the language of "beloved" in Mark 12:6 and Luke 20:13 and the language of "beloved" in the introduction to the Song proper in Isa 5:1, "I will now sing for the beloved (τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ) a song of the loved one (τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ) concerning my vineyard: The beloved (τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ) had a vineyard on a hill, on a fertile place" (Isa 5:1 LXX). It may be that, because the referent in Isaiah is God, Mark and Luke are explicitly and theologically connecting God and the beloved son. This terminology comports with the description of Jesus in the Christological formula of Matt 3:17, 17:5 (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός) that explicitly links Jesus to God as the divine son. Although theologically evocative, this point should not be overemphasized. But with the other intertextual connections highlighted above, it is plausible that the "beloved" language in Mark and Luke reinforces the divine sonship of Jesus, his rejection, and the rejection of God by the Jewish leaders.

So those who reject the beloved son ultimately reject the landowner. Seen from a theological perspective, those who reject the son reject the Lord's program for a harvest of justice and righteousness, forgiveness, and salvation through him (Luke 1:68–79). The son's death (and his resurrection) becomes the foundation for a nation/kingdom of justice and righteousness (Matt 21:41, 43b; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16). This interpretation elucidates the logic of Jesus' quotation of Ps 118:22–3 in all three Synoptic accounts (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:17–18; Luke 20:10–11).⁴¹ The Markan use of the quotation gives further specificity to the identity of the beloved son: he is the "son of David, the messiah, who, though rejected and killed, is the beginning of God's new creation."⁴² In Mark and Luke, then, Isaiah's

Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46–76. I do not agree with Bryan that what is in view is a particularly "nationalistic" flavor of condemnation; else by virtue of Jesus' use of the metaphor, he would be implicitly condemning both himself and all the faithful Jews who adhere to Jesus' teaching through faith. The issue is not primarily ethnicity or nationality per se but rather the proper faith in God's work that produces fruits of the kingdom, which (many of) Israel's leaders do not produce due to their lack of faith in Jesus.

41. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 800–801, 814–15; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 547–48; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1993), 954–55.

42. Collins, *Mark*, 548.

Song has been received and filtered through a Christological lens that emphasizes the death of the beloved son and his rejection by Jewish leaders.

The Matthean version of the parable does something similar but it also highlights kingdom fruit in a way that goes a step further than Mark or Luke (Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16). For Matthew, rejection of Jesus amounts to an inability to produce fruits of the kingdom of God.⁴³ This concept of fruits of the kingdom (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ . . . τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς, Matt 21:43) is particularly Matthean (3:8, 10; 7:17–19; 12:33; 21:43). These fruits are the fitting produce of positive response to the Lord, in contrast to Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus (Matt 21:42). More to the point, the formulaic language of producing fruit in Matt 21:43 (ποιεῶ + καρποὺς) and elsewhere⁴⁴ is a description of righteous behavior in all spheres of life, much akin to righteous behavior expected (but not enacted) in Isaiah's Song. The "fruits" identified in Matt 21:43 may be understood paradigmatically as the expected "good grapes" of Isaiah's Song. In Isaiah's Song, Israel failed to produce "good grapes," and in the Matthean transformation of the Song the Jewish leaders fail to produce fruit of the kingdom.

The significance of this failure, recorded following after Jesus' citation of Ps 118:22–23, reveals theological import of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 21. The fruits of the kingdom are not produced by the Jewish leaders precisely because they cannot understand or embrace Jesus as the cornerstone of the Lord's program for mediating divine righteousness, justice, and forgiveness. Those who acknowledge the divine program in Jesus, however, comprise what is, in effect, a "reconstitution of Israel . . . with new and unexpected members drawn in to replace those by their lack of faith, but with a recognizable continuity with the OT people of God."⁴⁵ Those who believe in him will produce fruits of the kingdom and give the fruit of the vineyard to the Lord in their season (οἵτινες ἀποδώσουσιν αὐτῷ τοὺς καρποὺς ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτῶν; Matt 21:41). Those who do not believe in him will be destroyed (Matt 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16). In this way, Matthew's reception of Isaiah's Song follows the other Synoptics to highlight Christology but goes a step further to outline the possibilities for kingdom fruitfulness as well.

A word more needs to be said at this point. It may be supposed that the meaning of "fruits of the kingdom" is a metaphor for "faith in Jesus."⁴⁶ This would seem to cohere with the thrust of the parable on its Christological emphasis, as identified above, and to teach that one must have faith in the beloved son. And yet this view would neglect that the parable not only identifies the nation who would be given the fruit of the vineyard (the reconstitution of Israel), but the actuality of the fruits this nation would produce—that is, the crop. The language of Matt 21:41 avers that the produce

43. Weren, "The Use," 20–21.

44. Matt 7:17–19; 12:33; 13:23.

45. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 800.

46. I am indebted to the helpful formal response of Kenneth Cuffey at the IBR Creation Care Section for helping me clarify my thoughts on the meaning of "fruit" here.

will be given back to the Lord. This implies a harvest of righteous activity that is borne out of faith in Christ and ultimately laid before the Lord, as a harvester would bring produce back to the landowner (Matt 21:34). This extends the focus of the parable beyond Christology and faith in the son to that of kingdom fruitfulness. Kingdom fecundity is grounded in faith in the beloved son (Christology) but nonetheless the language of Matthew suggests that there is actual "produce" in the kingdom that extends from this faith.

Matthew has a larger interest in depicting right fruit as right actions within a whole range of human activity. One of the closest intertexts to our passage here is the parable of the sower in Matt 13:1–23. The word of the kingdom (13:19) is cast like seed. The one who hears and understands the word "bears fruit and yields some 100, some 60, some 30 times what was sown" (13:23). The point here is that the word of the kingdom produced for the hearer fecundity in that hearer. If belief only were in view there, then it would not follow to focus on productivity that springs out of belief. Because it does, productivity that springs out of belief is a significant point. Similar emphases on productivity that arise out of belief appear in Matt 7:17–19 and 12:33. In this light, the "fruits of the kingdom" in Matt 21:43 should be understood as not only belief in Jesus but also right actions extending from said belief.⁴⁷ In light of the connections already established between Isaiah's Song and the parable, the "fruits of the kingdom" in Matt 21:43 serve as an analogue to the expected fruits of "justice" and "righteousness" in Isaiah's Song—righteous behavior enacted in all spheres of life and grounded in appropriate faith. These fruits in Isaiah's Song were the earthy deployments of justice and righteousness in the whole of life lived in faith before God, including how Israel lived on the land. And so should the fruits of the kingdom be understood, as well, with the difference being filtered through the Christological lens of the parable. It is in and through faith in the beloved son that kingdom "fruit" appears. This will prove to be a significant point for application of Isa 5:8.

Reception of Isaiah's Song in the Synoptics reveals a trajectory that on the one hand emphasizes the centrality of Jesus as the broken-yet-resurrected son whose life and death announce the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the Synoptics (particularly Matthew) emphasize the fruits of the kingdom that grow out of those who have faith in this son. Those who embrace Jesus are precisely those who may yield the fruit of the kingdom (Matt 21:43).

The prophetic critique of land development in Isa 5:8–10 can be understood in light of this interpretive trajectory. While the parable of the wicked tenants in the Synoptics certainly does not address the woe of Isa 5:8–10 precisely on the same level as it does interact with the Song of the

47. Frederick D. Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 15–24. One notes too the way that belief in Jesus as well as appropriate action are intertwined in Matt 21–23. See Weren, "The Use," 21–26.

Vineyard, the parable does open a way to assess Isa 5:8–10 in light of Christology and kingdom fruit. Through this trajectory, the NT helps us, to use Chris Wright's language, appropriately move from the "there" of the world of the OT to the "here" of modern (post-NT) ethical appropriation of the OT.⁴⁸ How might a modern appropriation of Isa 5:8–10 take form, noting the NT emphasis on Christ and fruit? It is to this we now turn.

*Producing Fruits of the Kingdom: Theological
Appropriation of Isaiah 5:8–10*

In the first place, Jesus stands at the hermeneutical crux for modern appropriation of Isa 5:8–10. As one believes in Jesus, his death and resurrection as the beloved son, the forgiveness he offers, and the kingdom of God he inaugurates, one is able then to produce "fruits of the kingdom." Matthew's emphasis on fruitfulness that extends to a whole range of human activity (Matt 21:43) comes out of faith in Jesus.⁴⁹ Right human action in the world is borne out of faith in the son. As O'Donovan states, "Activity is responsive [to what God has done in Christ]. As the church participates in Christ's resurrection it is authorized to live joyfully in the order God has made, and to recover it from oppressive and exploitative corruptions."⁵⁰ This point chastens the drive to sequester Isa 5:8–10 today without taking route through the Christological trajectory established in Matthew's reception of Isaiah's Song. When done, the critique in Isa 5:8–10 is reenvisioned in light of the presentness of the kingdom of God in Jesus, as indicated by the Gospels. Imprecise analogues between acts of land seizure in Isaiah's day and Jesus' day and their application to the present day that do not reflect on the crux of Jesus are exposed to be deficient. To establish an analogue productively and theologically, one must assess the reality of the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom.

The second point draws on the first. Application of Isa 5:8–10 is possible only after theologically reconsidering the concepts of "God's people" and "God's land" in light of what Christ has done to the identity of both.⁵¹ This reevaluation stands as a vital part of the interpretive process, else what is thought to be a principled application of an ancient critique may evacuate the originating meaning on the one hand or sleight the reality of Christ and the effects of his resurrection and ascension on the other. It is important to read theologically here because Isaiah's concerns in 5:8–10 center on land (mis)development within the borders of Israel by the people of God. But for application of this text postresurrection, these very borders of the land and the identity of this people must be reassessed in light of

48. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 441.

49. Oliver T. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120–57, 182–92.

50. *Ibid.*, 183.

51. To my mind, Christopher Wright has done the most creative and effective work on the Christian relationship to the land, and the following discussion is indebted to him. See his *God's People in God's Land; Old Testament Ethics*, 76–211; *idem*, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*, 181–212.

what Christ has done to reconfigure the margins of the "promised land" and to recast the identity of God's people, Israel.

The Synoptic parable of the wicked tenants does not address the point of the borders of the land in light of Christ but it does address the identity of God's people. Matt 21:41–46, Mark 12:9, and Luke 20:16 each highlight God's irruption of a new thing by giving his vineyard to others. As explored above, God's people are not (only) his elect Israel, as Isaiah affirms, but on the Synoptics' rendering in the parable, God's people are those who will have faith in the son and who will produce kingdom fruits and give them back to the landowner/God.⁵² So those who can produce the good fruit of proper land use are those who are properly Israel in Christ.

But the issue of the land must be reevaluated as well. It will not do simply to assume that the land critique of Isa 5:8–10 can be applied in the same way after the Advent. In the first place, one must assess whether and how the NT evacuates or changes the general land theology present in the OT as delineated above. Does the NT no longer view the land as "owned" by God as the OT avers or claim that God's people are its tenants? Is OT land law operative for the NT Christian? As may be intimated above, the answer is not as simple as it may seem. It is appropriate neither to jettison the OT theology of land on the one hand nor simply to embrace it on the other. The key to a biblical theology of land is found in the person and work of Christ. In this light, there will be continuity and discontinuity between OT and NT visions of land, but nonetheless an overall unity in that God owns the land (not just the borders of Israel but the whole earth) and God's people have a responsibility to tend the land well for his glory and pleasure (as Israel was to tend the land well and could be judged for land misuse).

Wright theologically reconsiders God's land and its fruit in light of Christ. He argues that, just as God gave to Israel the gift of the land, which she generally failed to inhabit properly, God gave Israel and the world Christ, who expanded the borders of the "promised land" to include the whole earth. Those who are "in Christ" now inhabit his good realm under his rule in the kingdom of God. The expanded vision of land is hinted at in the postcrucifixion and postresurrection command of Jesus: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Now go and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt 28:18b–19a).⁵³ The language of "heaven" and "earth" is a merism that encapsulates the entire created order, into which Jesus commissions his follower to go. Thus, authority is given to Christ and so to Christ's followers (whether Jew or Gentile) as they go throughout the earth proclaiming Christ and making disciples.

Further, Wright draws on Paul to exemplify his approach for theologically rereading God's people and land from the OT. He notes how the apostle instructs (predominantly) Gentile believers in the letter to the

52. See pp. 202–203 above.

53. Note as well the NT teaching regarding the twelve apostles, symbolically associated with the twelve tribes of Israel who were given the land in order to illustrate the Lord's grace and thrive in the land they were given. See O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 105.

Ephesians: "Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:19). Paul's language of "strangers/foreigners" and "fellow citizens" evokes Israel's land tenancy and habitation in accordance with OT law. Paul states that those who were formerly excluded from land-ownership ("strangers"/"foreigners"; compare Num 33:50–56) are now those who have ownership and inheritance through faith in Christ: "you are now fellow-citizens and members of the household of God."⁵⁴ The focus on the land and its original inheritors (Israel) is not displaced as irrelevant but channeled in a particular direction. Those who have faith in Christ (whether Jew or Gentile) have become heirs to the promises of God, and their responsibility to the "promised land" extends outward to the entire created order. Expectations for proper habitation in God's land are no longer confined, as it were, to the borders of Canaan in light of God's kingdom inaugurated in Jesus. Responsibilities that belonged to Israel to care for the land (as they were its inheritors) now belong to those who have faith in Christ (whether Jew or Gentile), who are now "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

This point remains theologically instructive as one begins to appropriate Isa 5:8–10. Paul treats the identity of Israel and its land responsibilities as a theological paradigm for the NT church. What makes this paradigmatic extension possible is the very death and resurrection of Christ. That is not to say that Paul advocates a rigid application of OT land law in Ephesus. Rather, the identity of God's people in Ephesus is paradigmatically related to the identity of God's people in Israel. There is no indication that the Ephesian Christians or modern Christians are to follow OT land law rigidly in the same manner as did Israel. But the general theological teaching of land law—that God owns the land, it is a gift from God to humans, that it is there for the thriving and nourishment of all—still remains valid for Christian appropriation. The key for this appropriation, however, lies in understanding the recasting of Israel's identity and the land in the light of Christ.

The Synoptics' treatment of the parable of the wicked tenants suggests this as well, with its redeployment of Isaiah's Song with an emphasis on the death of the son and kingdom fruitfulness, as discussed above. Whereas Isaiah's grapes of "(in)justice" and "(un)righteousness" were

54. See the discussion of Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 192–98. Wright concludes: "Thus, by incorporation into the Messiah, people from all nations are enabled to enter into the privileges and responsibilities of God's people, privileges and responsibilities that, in the Old Testament, had been focused on life in the land. Now Christ himself takes over the significance and the function of that old land-kinship qualification. To be *in Christ*, just as to be *in the land*, denotes first, a status and a relationship that have been *given* by God; second, a position of inclusion and security in God's family; and third, a commitment to live worthily by fulfilling the practical responsibilities towards those who share the same relationship with you" (*Old Testament Ethics*, 192).

produced within Israel's own borders as God's people used its land, the church will produce this sort of fruit in the whole earth rather than the isolated confines of ancient Palestine.⁵⁵ The responsibilities given by God to Israel to inhabit her land properly serve as a paradigm for proper habitation in the world today, but understood particularly in terms of "kingdom fruit" rather than notions of "justice" and "righteousness" that comport too tightly with OT law.

If this is true, then, third, the way the church lives on and develops the land may be figured as a purposeful and paradigmatic "sign" for the kingdom of God in the created world just as the land ethics are a purposeful "sign" that signified the grace of God in the land of Israel. For modern appropriation of Isaiah's critique, it will not do to conceive of living in the world (ethically or otherwise) as something worthless waiting for something else, as though God's kingdom belonged somewhere other than this world. Rather, the kingdom of God now is the central realm of Christ's rule in the world, in which Christ-followers live and operate, awaiting its future consummation.⁵⁶ The manner in which Christians live on this land—now—may be understood as "kingdom land ethics," which are designed to produce fruits of righteousness and justice, or "fruits of the kingdom" (Matt 21:43)—signs that God reigns in Christ and that he is reconciling the world to himself. If the church fails to live justly on the land, then no doubt do they produce "wild grapes" of injustice that displease God, they are counterproductive to living in his land, and they fail to signify Christ and his reign. From this insight, I offer five motivating points for ethical action that represent a positive application of Isa 5:8–10.

1. *Just as Israel was to receive her land as a gift from God, which the wealthy of Isaiah 5 did not do in adding house to house, the church must receive the earth as a gift from God, being reconciled to God through Christ (Col 1:15–20).* God does not destroy the earth but, in Jesus, purifies it of sin so that its true goodness might be found (2 Pet 3:18).⁵⁷ Any view of the land that believes it will be burned up or done away with is profoundly unbiblical. The church must relearn the divine gift of the earth if it is to proclaim Christ and his redemptive kingdom adequately. In Isaiah's Song, the land was a gift meant to produce good fruit; in the Synoptic reception of the Song, those who embrace Christ are those who might produce kingdom fruit throughout the earth. It is a gift of God, given as a responsibility for the church to develop for the glory of God and as a "sign" for his kingdom. This recognition agrees with New Agrarians that the land has value beyond price. It is a gift of God being redeemed by God and not primarily

55. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 103–45, 182–211. Thus, the approach taken here differs from that of Gary M. Burge, who in an otherwise stimulating work tends to underplay the need for proper and just action toward the land in Christian praxis in his *Jesus and the Land*.

56. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 142–44.

57. Lucas, "The New Testament Teaching on the Environment," 92.

a commodity to be used up, bought, and sold.⁵⁸ This motivation contrasts against the greed of the wealthy in Isa 5:8–10, who used the land to build their “mini-kingdom” and rejected God’s land as gift.

2. *If the land is a gift of God and the living place where God’s justice and righteousness are set out on display for the nations, then the church must recognize that the entirety of the world is the theater in which God’s justice and righteousness are to be performed.* The church’s responsible development of land is as much an act of obedience and service to Christ as any other act in life before God. In this sense, Kuyper is correct when he says that “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human life of which Christ, Who is Sovereign of all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”⁵⁹ In light of the cosmic theater of God’s redemption, human action toward the land will be pleasing to the Lord, as Lucas rightly notes, so long as these actions are done to bring honor to God and his gospel.⁶⁰ This point takes account of the paradigmatic extension of the land of Israel in light of Christ. Concrete embodiments of just land development are expected throughout the earth in light of Christ and the fruits of his kingdom that he enables, just as in former times Israel was expected to produce good fruit but is critiqued for its failure, especially in Isa 5:8–10.

3. *To receive this gift of land well, the church must learn to “return to the land,” in a way similar to the way Israel was intimately bound to the divine gift of land for sustenance and provision.* For the Isaianic (and indeed for the Synoptic) audience, this point likely would be redundant. They were agrarians, and their dependence on the land was self-evident. But their reality is not a modern one. The church must learn to recalibrate its understanding of humanity’s proximity to land, its status as a gift given by God for the *thriving* of its inhabitants. This does not mean a recalibration to a preindustrial way of life (necessarily), but it does recognize that God’s means of food production in his world is the earth, and the church must acknowledge this reality and live into the divine rhythms given by God to the earth rather than at odds with them.⁶¹ This means becoming reacquainted with the fundamental value of the gift of land as the source for food and water. Land development—from the largest industrial development to the smallest garden plot—ought to reflect the proximity and dependency on the divine gift of land itself of all the inhabitants of the earth. The church ought to develop land in such a way that it provides for the thriving of all who live on it. Land use may carry with it an evangelistic tenor so that this kind of human action glorifies the Christ in whom all things hold together (Col 1:17, Heb

58. Wendell Berry, “The Agrarian Standard,” in *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land* (ed. Norman Wirzba; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 23–33.

59. Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty” (Public address delivered at the inauguration of the Free University, 20 October, 1880); this essay follows J. D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–90, esp. p. 488.

60. Lucas, “The New Testament Teaching on the Environment,” 92.

61. Wendell Berry, “The Gift of Good Land,” in *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (ed. Norman Wirzba; Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002), 297–304.

1:3).⁶² As the church returns to the land in a way that glorifies God and loves its neighbor, it will signify Christ's expressed rule in his kingdom.⁶³

4. *Land must be understood as a divine gift for the good of all, not just a few.*⁶⁴ Here one finds a particular place to apply the critique of Isa 5:8–10, targeted at the wealthy who exploited the land and the poor of the land, so that they alone dwelt securely, leaving others vulnerable. The church must reflect on her land use to make sure that she does not leave others vulnerable and without either (1) place for habitation or (2) a source of food. Both of these issues are pertinent to the critique of the wealthy in Isa 5:8–10. This may mean that the church reflects on the very conception of who owns land and for what purpose it exists. The church ought not simply to gobble up and develop land as did the wealthy few of Isa 5:8–10. Can the church justify the way it develops the ground, not in pragmatic terms but rather in terms of its being a resource for thriving and place for the good of all? Land understood on these terms is conceived of not as a piece of property but rather as a place of blessing, given by God for the thriving and benefit of all peoples. This may mean the church begins to advocate a modest materialism that emphasizes divine land ownership, sustainability, and blessing rather than mere profitability for the few and cognizance of local environment and land economy.⁶⁵ In short, the greedy activity of the wealthy in Isa 5:8–10 must be countered by the beneficent activity of the church, signifying Christ and his kingdom.

5. *Reception of the land as gift must be done at a local level.* It is difficult to live out the ethics of points 3 and 4 above if one does not know where one lives. Although Christ's kingdom expands the borders of Israel to encompass the whole world, receiving the land as a gift begins at a local level. The church must live out just land practices concretely, and somewhere; the best place to start is where God has placed one. Understanding what actions in regards to the land are, in fact, beneficial for all is impossible if the church remains ignorant of local place. The church, then, will develop God's land in ways that accord with the rhythms of whatever particular place—whether coastal, mountain, plain, swamp, or the like. This means that the church must be aware of, and live into, the environment where it finds itself proclaiming Christ and his kingdom.⁶⁶ So practical skill in regard to developing the land must be fostered.⁶⁷ The same divine care

62. Lucas, "The New Testament Teaching on the Environment," 93–94; Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 105–10.

63. For further explication, see Lucas, "The New Testament Teaching on the Environment," 91–93.

64. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 193–97; Wendell Berry, "Two Economies," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (ed. Norman Wirzba; Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002), 219–35; "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *ibid.*, 305–20.

65. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 36–39; Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 20–38.

66. *Ibid.*

67. On developing skill, see Berry, "The Gift of the Good Land."

that God expresses to the earthy ground that he knows and works in the Song of the Vineyard should be a model of the same care that the church expresses to the land. The message of God reconciling the world through Christ goes into the whole world, but it receives this message and develops God's land at a localized level, cognizant of the rhythms of that particular place.

Finally, it is in place to situate these "kingdom land ethics" within the full scope of this discussion. Embodying this ethical way of living in the land should not be understood as a progressive ushering in of God's kingdom. Isaiah's Song and woes are taken up in the eschatological cosmic renewal of Isa 27:2–6, which is a beautiful vision of Christ's kingdom. God himself establishes his reign. And the kingdom is already present because Christ has been raised, even if it has not been fully consummated. In the final analysis, God will consummate his rule on the earth, and there will be, in a sense, no further need of "signs" of the kingdom—God's reign will be apparent to all. Inaugurated and consummated by Christ, it is he who makes "all things new" (Rev 21:5). The woe of adding house to house and conjoining field to field (Isa 5:8–10) will be, according to Isa 27:2–6, abolished in the work of the Lord. His vineyard will be reestablished and thrive in divine salvation, which (in Isaiah) is accomplished through the Servant of the Lord. The NT confirms that this Servant is Jesus, who bears sin and enacts God's renewal process. As Childs argues on the place of Isa 27:2–6 in the scope of a full biblical theology,

In sum, the Old Testament has also extended its vision of the vineyard beyond the destruction of the wicked tenants [in the Synoptics' parable] to the restored and reconciled people of God's original intent. From the perspective of the two testaments a further typological analogy is formed which further confirms the unity of the one plan of God.⁶⁸

God's "one plan" is the salvation of the entire created order. God's work in the vineyard is global in scope according to Isaiah 27—fruit springs up among the nations, signifying the expanse of God's restoration, and the Synoptics give clarity as to the agent of the restoration—Jesus himself. Where the kingdom of God is manifest in this world now, it awaits the consummation of the kingdom in the new heavens and new earth pictured in Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21. Ultimately, kingdom land ethics are only "signs amidst the rubble"⁶⁹ that await God's promise of restoration. Now, the created order "groans" (Romans 8) but awaits its final restoration.

68. Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 345.

69. The language here is that of Lesslie Newbigin, who argues that the work of the church is only a sign that points to Christ and the Kingdom of God that is inaugurated but awaits consummation: *Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History* (ed. G. Wainwright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 95–109.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show that Isaiah's woe on "building" house to house remains fecund for Christian appropriation, but only insofar as the church attends to the trajectory of Isaiah's Song (to which the woe belongs) in both Isaiah and the Synoptic reception. The woe of Isa 5:8–10 critiques wrongful "kingdom" building that exalts the wealthy few by developing the land in a way that exploits the poor. This kingdom building is deemed by the divine King as profoundly unjust. Modern appropriation begins by following the hermeneutical trajectory opened in the Synoptics' reception of the Song in the parable of the wicked tenants. This reception reveals an emphasis on Christology and fruits of the kingdom of God. Fruits of the kingdom are only produced when one recognizes Jesus as the beloved Son. Those who embrace Christ and his kingdom will produce fruits of the kingdom, or fruits of "justice" and "righteousness" in the Isaianic analogue. As adding "house to house" and conjoining "field to field" (Isa 5:8–10) comprises fruits of injustice in the land, one may see the converse as well: appropriate land development may be understood as fruits of justice or fruits of the kingdom in the hermeneutical trajectory established by the Synoptics.

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