

Harvesting the vineyard: the development of vineyard imagery in the Hebrew Bible

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Vineyards, grapevines and wine have always been part of both the talk about faith and imagery of faith within the Judeo-Christian traditions. In the Christian faith wine has been one of the central symbols in its ritual activity. I would like to explore the imagery of vineyards, grapevines and wine to see how it has been used and developed in the language of faith over time. I dedicate this essay to my esteemed colleague Tony Campbell for at least two reasons. First, the study arises out of work with ministers and lay people trying to maintain the witness of the faith in what seems at times 'a barren land'. A focus of Tony's own work has been on the way scholarly biblical studies intersect with faith as it is lived within the community. Secondly, and somewhat frivolously, maybe Tony, whose preference is for drinking whiskey, can be persuaded to follow a more biblically based lifestyle and become a wine buff.

Brief references

Mention of vineyards, grapevines and wine is prolific in the Bible. Apart from reference in legal, narrative, or historical texts, on many occasions one or more of these are used as an image to speak about the relationship between *Yhwh* and Israel. This happens in two major ways. There are many brief references to the images of vineyard, grapevine and wine by way of proverb, saying, metaphor or simile etc. There is also a small number of texts which develop the imagery at length. My focus will be on the latter, the many different connections between these texts, and the way the imagery develops over time. Before that, however, it will be helpful to glance at the way the imagery is used in shorter texts.

First, the image of the (grape)vine is used to represent the people or nations of Judah and/or Israel, often with negative overtones.¹ This is particularly the case in the prophets. For example, in Jer. 2:21 the people of Jerusalem are described as a choice vine planted by YHWH (cf. Hos 9:10; 10:1), which degenerates into 'wayward (shoots) of a foreign vine'. While the language is different, the passage is reminiscent of Isa. 5:1-7, although there the image is of a vineyard not just a vine. I will consider this passage in greater detail below. It is the growth of the vine that is the focus in Jer. 2:21. In other instances of the use of the vine as an image for the people of Judah it is the fruitfulness of the vine that is central. This is so in Jer. 8:13 where the lack of grapes on the vine represents the wickedness of the people. Hos. 10:1 also focuses on the fruitfulness of the vine but there the fruit is not the works of the people but the blessings on the nation which become a snare for them. The multilayered function of the vine in metaphor is already apparent, although it is only the processes of natural growth which are the focus in these examples. This aspect of the metaphor is apparently quite ancient, being employed in Deut. 32:32-33: 'For their vine comes from the stock of Sodom, and from the vineyards of Gomorrah; their grapes are poisonous, their clusters are bitter; ³³ their wine is the poison of serpents, the strong venom of vipers.'² The full extent of the metaphor is employed in this example, from vine to grapes to wine, although with a possible allusion to the production of sour or bitter fruit, it is mixed with the another metaphor of poisonous drink used to describe a deadly end.³ In this case, the metaphor is associated with sinfulness by reference to Sodom and Gomorrah. That which is the image of something life-giving and sweet, can also be used to allude to something sinful and ultimately deadly.⁴

¹ In shorter references, it is rare to find the vineyard used to represent Israel. Jer. 12:10 is one possible exception.

² On the antiquity of Deuteronomy 32 see e.g. Robertson 1966; Albright 1959.

³ See e.g. Isa. 51:17-22; Jer. 25:15-16; Ezek. 23:31-34 etc.

⁴ For a treatment of the concept of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord in Rabbinic Judaism see Petuchowski (1981).

The image of the vine is not just used for the people or nation as a whole. It is also employed in relation to kings in Israel. Judg. 9:13 speaks by way of a parable of trees and vine of the possibility of establishing kingship in Israel. While there is an anti-monarchical sentiment behind the parable it is the image of the vine as a source of life and joy that is employed. The vine is also mentioned as an important part of the agricultural bounty of the promised land (e.g. Deut. 8:7). As such, vineyards, grapevines and wine come to be used as a major set of images for abundance, peace, and blessing in the land, especially in the expression of sitting under one's own vine (e.g. see Deut. 7:13 and especially 1 Kgs 4:25; Isa. 36:16 = 2 Kgs 18:31; Isa. 25:6; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10; 8:12; 1 Macc. 14:12). This same set of images can also be employed negatively to portray the destruction of the land (e.g. Isa. 7:23). In Jer. 5:17 there is also reference now to the element of human labour in viticulture, where the overtaking of the vineyard by briars and thorns, a familiar image also in Isaiah, is due to the lack of human care.

With this picture in mind of the way the (grape)vine is used in brief references, I will now turn to the more detailed portrayals of the fuller set of images: vineyards, grapevines and wine.

Isaiah 5:1-7

The 'Song of the vineyard' in Isa. 5:1-7 is central to any treatment of the biblical imagery of vineyards, grapevines and wine. The tradition of which it is an exemplar, is foundational for many other passages employing the imagery. In some cases the Isaiah text itself is arguably influential in the formulation of other texts. Isa. 5:1-7 is a well crafted, complex passage. There has been a great deal of debate over the genre of the passage. Suggestions have included a song, a love song, a drinking song, a satirical polemic against fertility cults, a lawsuit, a fable, an allegory, and a parable.⁵ The imagery of vineyard and wine production is central to the passage. However, the passage begins (v. 1a) with words of love and song suggesting another context, within which love is celebrated. The joyous celebration at the harvest festival has been put forward as a possible context in which many of these elements are brought together (Matthews 1999: 24). Within two verses of the start of the passage the scene has changed to that of judicial proceedings (vv. 3-6). Consequently, some scholars quite rightly have proposed that more than one genre is involved. Yee (1981) sees the passage as a 'song' in terms of covenantal infidelity combined with a juridical parable.⁶ This shift in context, and the change of singer of the song from singer/prophet (vv. 1-2) to vineyard owner (vv. 3-6) only revealed as *Yhwh* in v. 6, back to prophet (v. 7), all serve to keep the reader/hearer constantly reassessing their interpretation of the passage.⁷ Even in v. 7, where the prophet explains the imagery for the reader/hearer, further meaning can be gleaned by comparing the interpretation with the image itself as we will see below.

Both the natural and the human processes involved in viticulture are employed in the 'song of the vineyard'. The human role of preparing the vineyard, planting it, maintaining and securing it, and preparing for harvest is given in more detail than in any other reference to viticulture (v. 3). This detail is extended in a negative way in vv. 5-6 when judgment is outlined. The detail serves both to emphasise the effort expended by the vineyard owner on his property, a thought reiterated in the question of what more could have been done (v. 4), and to slow the story down implying a lengthy wait by the owner. In the normal course of events it would have been some years before the

⁵ As well as the standard commentaries see particularly Willis (1977) and Korpel (1988).

⁶ Cf. also Clements (1980: 55) who sees the passage as a parable with some allegory.

⁷ See Williams (1985: 463) who argues that the passage is constructed so that the reader constantly has expectations that are proven false and is frustrated in the interpretative process.

vineyard was mature and ready to produce.⁸ This human role is what is related to *Yhwh*'s role with Israel. The portrayal of the vineyard owner (the 'beloved') in the first part of the passage maintains anonymity.⁹ The owner could be any ordinary landowner. This is only broken in v. 6b where the ability of the owner to command the clouds to withhold their rain clearly elevates his identity beyond the human. The delay in the identification of the owner, coupled with the detail given of the efforts the owner puts into his vineyard, serves to generate a deeper understanding in the reader of *Yhwh*'s concern for Israel when the meaning of the story is finally revealed. In contrast to the human role played in the vineyard, which in this case represents divine activity with Israel, the natural processes of growth in the vine and fruit production are given short measure. Whereas the vineyard owner's activities are described in detail, a mere two words in Hebrew (וַיַּעַשׂ בְּאֲשֵׁיִם, 'it produced stinking things') are used to describe the result. They are repeated for emphasis in vv. 2b and 4b. In spite of having fulfilled his part, the owner had no control over the fruit produced by the vineyard. The latter was clearly the cause of the problem.

The interpretation of the passage in v. 7, with the shift to justice and righteousness etc., might seem to have little direct connection to the imagery of the vineyard, but that is not the case. The repetition of the verb קָוָה 'to wait, hope' in vv. 2, 4, and 7 ties the interpretation into the earlier description of the vineyard owner's activity. *Yhwh*'s waiting for justice is comparable to the owner's waiting for the vineyard to produce grapes. But further, we noted above that in some instances the lack of fruitfulness of the vine represents Israel's wickedness (Deut. 32:32; Hos. 10:1; Jer. 8:13). Here the 'stinking things' produced are defined clearly as injustice and unrighteousness. Israel has acted contrary to the expectations and intentions of *Yhwh*. The woe oracles collected later in Isaiah 5 include further references to wine (vv. 11-13, 22) but in the context of drunken revelry. These woe oracles have the effect of interpreting and defining the nature of the sin in v. 7. Just as the covenant with *Yhwh* has been broken and undone, so the imagery of wine with its joyous associations at the start of Isaiah 5 is also 'undone' with descriptions of the destructive side of wine in the community and its association with injustice. *Yhwh* now responds with punishment in terms of undoing all the careful work undertaken earlier (vv. 5-6).¹⁰ The final act, withholding of rain in v. 6b, echoes covenant curses (Deut. 28:24; Lev. 26:19-20; cf. 1 Kgs 8:35). Viticulture in Israel and Judah, like other agricultural activities, was dependent on rain rather than irrigation (cf. Deut. 11:10-12), and hence on the gift of the *Yhwh*. The people had proved unfaithful, negating the faithful and hopeful acts of *Yhwh*. The long process of preparation of the vineyard and expectation of its fruitfulness by the owner/beloved underlines and justifies both faith in and a faithful response to *Yhwh*.¹¹ The owner not only prepares the ground for the vineyard, but has throughout the long period of waiting, guarded the vineyard from being overrun by thieves and wild animals (cf. Isa. 7:23-25), kept weeds from destroying it from within, and given it every opportunity to become fruitful.

Developments within Isaiah

Isaiah 27:2-6

⁸ Matthews (1999: 24) suggests four to five years referring to Lev 19:24-25, although it should be noted that this text is related to when Israel first enters the land.

⁹ Although Blenkinsopp (2000: 207) argues that the words 'beloved' in v. 1 (יְדִידִי and יְדִידָי) both occur in theophoric elements in biblical names and could suggest to an ancient audience that *Yhwh* is to be understood as the 'beloved' in that verse.

¹⁰ Note the interpretation of Carroll (1999). Also cf. Matthews (1999: 25).

¹¹ This is the wider theme of Isaiah 5-12 in relation to the Assyrian crisis (cf. Isa. 7:9b).

It has long been recognised that Isa. 27:2-6 constitutes a post-exilic development of the song in Isa. 5:1-7. In concert with other material in the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 24-27) Isa. 27:2-6 reinterprets earlier prophecy, even that in the Isaiah tradition, and in the process reverses what the earlier text said. (cf. Sweeney 1987: 51-52 and Clements 1980: 219) Blenkinsopp concludes that ‘In any case, 27:2-5, read as a radical revision or eschatological abrogation of 5:1-7, presents a theologically interesting case within the Isaian tradition.’ (Blenkinsopp 2000: 374-75)

There are a number of problems associated with this passage. The first is textual. There are several differences between the MT and the LXX, especially in vv. 3b-4.¹² The second problem is contextual relating to the coherence of the units in Isaiah 27.¹³ The connection between v. 6 and vv. 2-5 has also been questioned, especially by Wildberger (1997:583)¹⁴, although with many others I believe that v. 6 functions as a conclusion to the preceding verses. In spite of the textual and contextual difficulties associated with Isa. 27:2-6, a number aspects of Isa. 5:1-7 are echoed in the later text: the reference to singing and love-song in 5:1 and the command to sing in 27:2; the fertile location of the vineyard in 5:1 and the pleasantness of it in 27:2; and the suggestion of protection in the watchtower in 5:2 and *Yhwh*'s guarding the vineyard in 27:3.¹⁵ However, none of these involve exact verbal correspondence. The only terminology shared by the two passages is in reference to ‘thorns and briars’ (5:6 and 27:4), a phrase exclusive to Isaiah (cf. 7:23-25; 9:17; 10:17). In addition, it is important to note that other passages earlier in Isaiah have also been suggested as influential on 27:2-6, namely Isaiah 1; 17; and 24.¹⁶

The reflection of Isa. 5:1-7 in 27:2-6 has one other aspect to it. We noted how the ‘song of the vineyard’ in Isaiah 5 changed speakers as it progressed, from a singer (vv. 1-2), to *Yhwh* (vv. 3-6), back to the prophet in the interpretation of the parable (v. 7). A similar shift occurs in 27:2-6. It begins with a statement by the prophet or other individual calling a group of males to sing about a vineyard, referred to somewhat unusually by feminine singular pronouns (לָהּ). In vv. 3-5, *Yhwh* speaks in the first person about his relationship with the vineyard, still referred to in the feminine singular. In v. 6, it is not clear if *Yhwh* is still speaking or the prophet has returned. In any case, the text now speaks about Jacob/Israel in the third person as the writer applies the previous account to Israel. If Isa. 5:1-7 can be classified in genre as a parable, albeit with other elements, then the writer of 27:2-6 is treating the earlier passage allegorically, employing the old text to speak to their new post-exilic situation (also Childs 2001: 197). In the development of the imagery, the general intent of 5:1-7 is reversed. No longer is the image of the vineyard used to speak of judgment, but it is now used to suggest a possible state of peace with *Yhwh*, if the people are willing to embrace that.¹⁷ Not only is the meaning reversed but many of the familiar elements are reversed. Now *Yhwh* constantly waters the vineyard (27:3) and has no anger against it (v. 4). If thorns and briars are produced, it is no longer *Yhwh* who allows them to come from outside (cf. 5:6) but they are generated within the vineyard (27:4). While the watchtower was provided for the vineyard in 5:2, now *Yhwh* is its constant guardian. Nothing will harm the vineyard now from outside, potential danger now only lies within. The call for making peace with *Yhwh* fits in here. In 5:7 *Yhwh* expected justice and righteousness from Israel/Judah. From the rest of Isaiah 5, these values were defined in social

¹² See the standard commentaries for suggested emendations and translations.

¹³ Sweeney (1987) argues fairly convincingly for reading the chapter as a whole, while Leene (2000) argues that vv. 7-9 act as a transition in the chapter between material on the vineyard and that with the city as the subject.

¹⁴ A break in the text is also suggested by a space left by the scribe after v. 5 in 1QIsa^a (Blenkinsopp 2000: 375).

¹⁵ See also Wildberger (1997: 583) for other points of comparability.

¹⁶ Sweeney (1987: 55-56) and Leene (2000: 216-217).

¹⁷ This eschatological hope is not without an element of judgment. Apart from the reference to *Yhwh* burning any thorns and briars produced (v. 4), the rest of the chapter introduces a note of judgment if it is taken as a whole (Sweeney 1987).

terms, justice for the disadvantaged etc. In Isa. 27:5 the call is for peace with *Yhwh*. While this could be understood in terms of social justice and righteousness, the fact that the ‘thorns and briars’ come from within suggests that the peace referred to is essentially an inner peace with *Yhwh*. Finally, whereas the vineyard produced only ‘stinking things’ in 5:2, and 4, now the whole world is full of the fruit of *Yhwh*’s vineyard.

The image of the vineyard from Isaiah 5 has been maintained in 27:2-6. A different vocabulary is used for the most part but there are enough similarities to know that the later passage is a development of the older word associated with Isaiah of Jerusalem. In the process of reappropriation the imagery has been reversed and the interpretation no longer deals with the issue of injustice in the nation. Faith is now a matter of internal piety and obedience in the faithful community of post-exilic Jerusalem. (Sweeney 1987: 58)

Isaiah 63:1-6

An important issue in the interpretation of a number of passages in so-called Third Isaiah is attention to references or allusions to other texts, especially those in Isaiah. (Childs 2001: 515) In the case of 63:1-6, there is a connection with Isa. 59:15b-20, and possibly 51:9-11 and 10:6. The image of the divine warrior in 63:3-6 has received most attention. By way of contrast, the imagery of the winepress and the treading of grapes has all but been passed over.¹⁸ In my opinion, a possible connection to Isa. 5:1-7 should not be overlooked. The reference to the winepress is not just a passing metaphor, lost as the activities of the divine warrior come into sharper focus.

The vocabulary of viticulture permeates the passage and there are several commonalities with Isaiah 5. First, there reference to the winepress itself (פַּרֵה) in 63:3. The term is used only here and in Hag. 2:16. קֵב is found in Isa. 5:2 and is often translated as ‘wine vat’. However, קֵב can also mean winepress (Job 24:11; Isa. 16:10; Jer. 48:33) and the same verb (דָּרַךְ) is used with both nouns for the act of ‘treading’ the grapes. The mention of Edom in Isa. 63.1 sets up an alliteration with the word ‘red’ (אָדָם) in v. 2, which is associated with the red juice stain from the press. Similarly mention of Bozrah recalls the verb בָּצַר meaning ‘to cut off’ but also used of grape gathering (e.g. Lev. 25:5; Deut. 24:21). In Isa. 63:1, the one coming speaks ‘in righteousness’ (צִדְקָה, often translated ‘vindication’), which is one of the qualities sought by the *Yhwh* in 5:7. The use of רָמַס ‘to trample’ in 63:3 (used in parallel in that verse to דָּרַךְ mentioned above) recalls its use in 5:5 where wild animals and passers by are allowed to trample the unproductive vineyard, while the verb שָׁכַר ‘to become drunk’ used in 63:6 recalls שָׁכַר ‘strong drink’ in 5:11 and 22 (both times parallel to יַיִן ‘wine’).

The allusions are strong enough to think that a reading of Isa. 63:1-6 would raise thoughts of Isaiah 5. In the earlier chapter the vineyard owner never had the pleasure of the joyful harvest and treading of the grapes anticipated. Rather, in his response he let others trample his vineyard to ruins. In 63:1-6 *Yhwh* takes revenge on the enemies of his people. This later passage could be read as the resolution of the vineyard imagery in Isaiah. The vineyard owner does complete his work, although the grapes he now treads are not those he initially intended to tread. In a further twist of the interpretation of the earlier song, *Yhwh* now treads those who have been allowed at various times to trample his own people. In similar fashion to the resolution of the problem created when *Yhwh* used the Assyrians to punish his own people (Isa. 5:26-30 and 10:5-27a), now *Yhwh* brings to

¹⁸ A few commentators have mentioned it in passing and referred briefly to Isaiah 5 etc. These include Miscall (1993: 141) and Conrad (1991: 106).

account those who carried out his judgment on his own people. It is not without notice that the verb רָמַס 'to trample' was also used in relation to *Yhwh*'s punishment of the Assyrians (10:6).

Further biblical developments

Several other passages are worth brief consideration. The first is Psalm 80. This community lament is divided into three uneven sections by a repeated refrain in vv. 4, 8, 20 (Heb.; Eng. vv. 3, 7, 19).¹⁹ The last section, vv. 9-19 (Heb.; Eng. vv. 8-18) tells the story of Israel's past experience with *Yhwh* in terms of a parable of a vine. The provenance of this psalm and the historical event behind it have long been debated. Some have suggested it comes from the old northern kingdom, others that it belongs to Judah and Jerusalem at the time of Josiah and Jeremiah, and others that it is a composite psalm with pre- and post-exilic elements.²⁰ A more convincing tradition history approach has been argued by Nasuti (1988: 97-102). He recognises a number of references within the psalm and linguistic elements which connect it to other Asaphite psalms and what he calls an Ephraimite tradition. These include the reference to Joseph (Heb. v. 2; Eng. v. 1), the tribal names Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh (Heb. v. 3; Eng. v. 2) and also aspects of the vine image with its connections to Hosea and Jeremiah. However, he also notes two aspects of the Psalm which link it with a southern tradition, namely the reference to Benjamin in v. 3 (Heb.; Eng. v. 2) and the shift in the image of the vine in v. 13 (Heb.; Eng. v. 12). There is a shift from the vine to the vineyard and its walls. The language used to describe the destruction of the vineyard is similar to that used in Isa. 5:5.²¹ Tate strengthens some aspects of Nasuti's argument especially with further connections between Psalm 80 and the Jeremiah traditions, but concludes that the connection of Psalm 80 to the Ephraimite tradition does not help a lot in the end as this tradition, even in Nasuti's argument, 'was at home geographically both in the North and South and historically both in pre-exilic and post-exilic Israel.' (Tate 1990: 311)

While this discussion may not help in the end with questions of the provenance and dating of Psalm 80, it is suggestive with regard to the vine and vineyard imagery. It would seem that in Psalm 80 two different images, which are nonetheless related by virtue of their subject matter, are brought together. Moreover, two facts support the suggestion that Ps. 80:13 (Heb.; Eng. v. 12) and Isa. 5:1-7 reflect a common tradition. First, the psalm and Isa. 5:5 use similar language to describe the breaking down of the walls of the vineyard.²² Secondly, in the section on the vine in the psalm, *Yhwh* is addressed in the second person as the one who brought the vine out of Egypt (Heb. vv. 9-10; Eng. vv. 8-9), and as the one who can deliver (Heb. vv. 15-16, 18-19; Eng. vv. 14-15, 17-18), while the trouble faced by the people is caused by a third party (Heb. vv. 14, 17; Eng. vv. 13, 16). However, in v. 13 (Heb.; Eng. v. 12) it is *Yhwh* who has acted against his people. This matches the earlier statements of the psalm (Heb. vv. 5-7; Eng. vv. 4-6) where *Yhwh* was angry with his people and put them at the mercy of their enemies. In both these matters, Ps. 80:13 (Heb.; Eng. v. 12) and Isa. 5:1-7 are in agreement. The Isaiah connection would suggest that this common vineyard imagery, as opposed to the vine imagery, is a southern tradition.

The way that the two traditions have been brought together makes no provision for confession on the part of the vine/people. No mention is made of any faithlessness on their part in the past as is the case in Isaiah 5. On the other hand, there is no implication that *Yhwh*'s action is unjust, and the

¹⁹ Although it should be noted that the title for God changes each time the refrain is repeated.

²⁰ For summaries of the various proposals see Tate (1990:309-312), Kraus (1989:139-141) etc.

²¹ W. Beyerlin argues that the vine metaphor was the latest stratum of the psalm. Cited in Tate (1990: 311).

²² Both verses use a form of the expression *pāras gādēr* 'to beak down a wall'. Here I propose a slightly stronger connection than Nasuti (1988: 99).

pledge of faithfulness in the future (Heb. v. 19; Eng. v. 18) together with the possible allusion to a fuller vineyard tradition (and even Isaiah 5?) in v. 13 (Heb.; Eng. v. 12) could suggest that the people have been faithless.²³ In any case, the emphasis in the psalm is on *Yhwh* as the only one whose ‘turning’ or ‘repentance’ will save the people (Heb. v. 15; Eng. v. 14). A similar point is made to that in Isa. 27:2-6. Finally, if Isa. 5:5 lies behind Ps. 80:13 (Heb.; Eng. v. 12), then the parable told in Isaiah is interpreted allegorically in the psalm, assuming that some destruction of Jerusalem, such as occurred in 587 BCE, is referred to.

Two other passages require brief comment. They are Ezek. 15:2-8 and 19:10-14. Both develop the image of the vine in a new way. In the former, a parable is told about a vine. It expounds the worthless nature of the wood of the vine, except as fuel for a fire (v. 4). This is the vine’s uniqueness among the trees. Consistent with the tradition of the vine imagery noted in the brief references above, the focus here is solely on the vine. What is unique about the parable is that it speaks not about the vine’s lack of fruitfulness or grandeur, which brings condemnation, but its inherent worthlessness.²⁴ The application of the parable in vv. 6-8 is allegorical in nature and focuses only on the destruction of the vine signifying the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezek 19:10-14 presents another hybrid use of the vine imagery. In the latter half of a lament over the ‘princes of Israel’ (the kings of Judah in the context of Ezekiel), the image of the vine is applied to the ‘mother’ of the princes (v. 10), that is, Jerusalem or Judah. Notions of a favourable planting are combined with a notion of pride or even hybris associated elsewhere with the parable of the great tree (cf. Ezek. 17:3-10; 31:2-9).

Beyond the Hebrew Bible

The influence of the Isaiah 5 version of the vineyard tradition on New Testament passages has been a matter of comment and debate. Its influence has been especially noted in the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-46//Mark 12:1-12//Luke 20:9-19) and in John 15:1-11. In the case of the parable in the Synoptic Gospels, it is the account of the parable in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew that is of most concern. Each of the three accounts begins with the statement that a man (householder) planted a vineyard. Before reference to his letting it out to tenants, Matthew and Mark both give detail on his preparation of the vineyard, namely that he set a hedge around it, dug a wine press, and built a tower (Matt. 21:33//Mark 12:1). The detail of the preparation clearly reminds the reader of Isa. 5:1-7. The question that has been debated is whether the Gospel account, especially Mark, has been influenced by the MT or the LXX version of Isaiah 5.

At this point we should note that the translators of the LXX made several changes to MT Isaiah 5 in their work. Of the changes made, those relevant for our study are the following. First, while the speaker in the MT version changes several times throughout the text, the LXX translators have framed the entire parable as a first-person speech. Secondly, in v. 2 the LXX omits the words *וַיַּעֲקֹרוּ וַיִּסְקְלוּהָ* (‘he dug it and cleared the stones’) but adds *καὶ φραγμον περιεθηκα καὶ εχαρακωσα* (‘and I surrounded it with a hedge and staked it’). This could imply that the vineyard owner does not have to start work from scratch, but that land already prepared to a degree is involved.²⁵ In addition, the Hebrew word *בַּקֵּי* (‘winepress/wine vat’) in v. 2 is translated by *προληνιον* (‘vat’). The usual translation is by *ληνος* (‘winepress’).

²³ Cf. Mays (1994: 263-264)

²⁴ Cf. Greenberg (1983: 269) who notes what the writer could have developed at this point in the context of the Book of Ezekiel.

²⁵ Kloppenborg Verbin (2002: 143-153) details most of the changes and argues that in these there is a shift from the individual vine to the vineyard as a whole, which I do not think is a strong point, and that the change in preparation of

In Matt. 21:33//Mark 12:1, where the detail of preparation of the vineyard is given, it is clear that LXX Isa. 5:2 is influential. The Gospels omit reference to digging the land and clearing it of stones, which we find in MT Isa. 5:2, but include the statements *καὶ φραγμον αὐτῷ περιεθηκεν* (Matt. 21:33) and *καὶ περιεθηκεν φραγμον* (Mark 12:1), which are similar to the additional clause in LXX. On the other hand, the Gospels use the third person rather than the first person as in the LXX, and Matthew renders the LXX *υπολημιον*, preserved in Mark, by *ληνον*. It seems likely that while the LXX of Isaiah 5 has influenced the versions of the parable in Matthew and Mark, it is not necessarily an exclusive relationship.²⁶ This influence may not have been the only one on Matt. 21:33-46//Mark 12:1-12//Luke 20:9-19. Evans argues that the Targumic traditions of Isa. 5:1-7 connect the passage with the temple's destruction. This could well be influential in the placement of the parable in Mark between chapters dealing with the temple, and in the inclusion of the quotation from Ps 118:22-23 in Matt. 21:42//Mark 12:10//Luke 20:17. (Evans 1984)

While the translators of the LXX of Isa. 5:1-7 have made several changes to the MT in their work, I do not believe they have made major changes to the vineyard imagery in the process, nor, if the above argument is accepted, have their changes greatly influenced the development of the imagery in the Synoptic parable. The majority of developments in the parable do not come via the LXX. As we have already noted the Synoptic parable is similar to Isaiah 5 (LXX version) at the start with the details of the vineyard owner's activity. The vineyard and the owner are the same (i.e. Israel and *Yhwh* respectively) as in Isaiah 5. While the owner does not do quite the same in the preparation of the vineyard as in MT Isa. 5:2, he nevertheless does all that is required. The difference in the Synoptic parable is in the leasing of the vineyard to tenants. The parable turns into a history of Israel with its prophets and messengers from God, and in this sense echoes Isa. 5:1-7. In the preparation by the owner, and in the freedom of both the vineyard itself and the tenants in their management and care, the parts played by God and Israel in that history are summarised. The parable then takes a turn, for unlike Isaiah 5 the Synoptic parable is not about the vineyard itself, which we can presume is fruitful. In Mark and Luke it is about the tenants, i.e. the leaders of Israel, although in Matt. 21:43 the writer redresses this somewhat by including an application of the parable to the Kingdom of God, which is understood there really as a matter of election. The writer of Matthew maintains to some degree the spirit of the Isaian parable, wherein the people have not produced suitable fruit.

Finally, a brief word about John 15:1-11. The development in this passage is more dramatic. The vine and vineyard imagery come together as the writer develops a theology of the relationship between Jesus, the Father, and Jesus' disciples. Jesus is now the 'true vine' (v. 1). God, the Father, is still the vinegrower. In contrast to the Synoptic parable discussed above, the 'son' is now the vine, and not just one of the messengers, albeit the most important one. The Father is pictured as the carer of the vine, pruning, removing useless wood etc. (v. 2). There is a strong emphasis on Jesus as the source of life for the people who are represented by the branches of the vine. In this sense the John passage picks up on Ps. 80:8-19 (Heb.; Eng. vv. 7-18). The branches depend on the vine, and when they abide in him they are fruitful. They can do nothing apart from him (v. 5).

the vineyard together with some terminology changes suggests the influence of agricultural practices from Hellenistic Egypt

²⁶ Contra Kloppenborg Verbin (2002: 154). He argues (2002: 156-157) against Aus (1996: 4-6, n. 4) who questions that Mark depends on the LXX, but while not all Aus's arguments are convincing, neither are Kloppenborg Verbin's rebuttals, especially that to do with the third person in Mark 12:1 and the use of *υπολημιον*. In the former, Kloppenborg Verbin cannot use the changes in person in MT Isa. 5:1-7 compared to the uniformity of Mark 12:1-9 to argue for LXX influence. In the latter, he cannot simply argue that Aus does not show dependence on the MT as support for LXX dependency, which is what in effect he does.

Verse 6 reminds the reader of Ezekiel 15 and the uselessness of the vine wood (cf. also Jer 5:10). A strong tie is developed between the Father (the vineyard owner), Jesus (who as the vine gives life to the branches) and the people (the branches themselves). The source of life now moves in that direction. In contrast to Isaiah 5 the owner does not just expect the vineyard to yield fruit, but life and fruitfulness flow from the Father through to the branches via Jesus. But, while Jesus replaces the vineyard as Israel (as in Isa. 5:7), in the Gospel of John Jesus is also a symbol of the new Israel (cf. 1:47).²⁷

While there are some connections to the Old Testament imagery here, there are new developments in John 15. The vinegrower is no longer the main actor. The fruitfulness of the vineyard is directly dependent on Jesus, the vine. Moreover, the imagery of bearing fruit is changed. No longer directly referred to as justice etc., bearing fruit is understood as giving glory to God in the course of discipleship of Jesus (v. 8).

Conclusion

It is little wonder that vineyards, grapevines, and wine, figure strongly in the imagery of the Hebrew Bible. These things were both commonplace in ancient Israelite life, as well as items valued for both their sustenance of life and the wonderful delights they brought to community and family life.²⁸ They were part of the God-given cycle of agricultural life in the land at the same time as being the product of human toil and care. In these many aspects, and in the interplay between them, vineyards, grapevines and wine were employed in literary images for the health and well-being of the people, or the lack thereof. In briefer references the vine and its fruitfulness proved useful to represent the people or monarch. In more lengthy texts the intricate relationships and processes in the domain of the vineyard, both human and natural, could be explored.

From this discussion of the parables and other texts concerned with vineyards and vines, some further points may be gleaned. First, there is a consistent image of God as the vinegrower/vineyard owner in most of these texts. As such, God is involved in the care of the vineyard/vine and has plans and hopes for it. At the same time God is also subject to the vicissitudes of the vineyard/vine, finding his hopes thwarted (e.g. Isaiah 5). Secondly, there appear to be two streams of tradition in the imagery associated with viticulture in the Hebrew Bible, one focusing on the vine with possible connections to the briefer references noted at the beginning, the other concerned with the vineyard. The latter could be a southern tradition. It is exemplified by Isaiah 5 or some tradition very close to it and developed within the Isaiah traditions. This development allows for a radical reversal of the parable and its various elements if need be (Isaiah 27) or possible completion of the parable in a new direction (Isaiah 63). The former tradition of the vine possibly belongs to a northern or Ephraimite tradition, finding expression in Psalm 80, combined already with an aspect of the vineyard tradition, or in other southern exilic or post-exilic texts (Ezekiel 15 and 19) developed in new ways. Within the broader Jewish context further developments took place as evidenced in the LXX and Targum of Isaiah. Finally, in early Christian circles both traditions are taken in new directions. The Isaian parable of the vineyard influences the Synoptic parable of the wicked tenants via the LXX, while the 'I am' statement by Jesus on the vine (John 15) combines elements of both traditions, but with the vine developed in a still newer direction. In all this there is constant interplay between tradition and context, and a constant sense of new harvests to be made.

²⁷ See further Brown (1966: 669-672).

²⁸ See Matthews (1999) for a general discussion of viticulture in the ancient Near East and Israel.