

Is. 28:1 Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower, which *are* on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!

Again God uses Isaiah to declare a woe against pride. We discussed the issue of pride in chapter 14 regarding the fall of Lucifer and in chapters 16 and 25 regarding Moab. Now Isaiah is directing his message to Ephraim (as representative of the northern kingdom of Israel). Most commentaries reference Samaria as the crown of pride of Ephraim. According to the NIV Commentary, Samaria is situated on a hill at the head of a very fertile valley. Although beautiful and important, Isaiah describes it as a fading flower already in the process of decay. The “drunkards of Ephraim” seem to be referencing the leaders and nobility of the northern kingdom. They have become prideful and have developed an attitude of priority on personal gratification as evidenced by the phrase “overcome with wine.”

Is. 28:2 Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, *which* as a tempest of hail *and* a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand.

Is. 28:3 The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet:

Is. 28:4 And the glorious beauty, which *is* on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, *and* as the hasty fruit before the summer; which *when* he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.

History tells us that Assyria was the instrument God used in judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel. It was a powerful and strong nation that conquered Israel with the force of a powerful, destructive storm (a whirlwind—like a tornado or a hurricane) accompanied by hail. This reminds me of the verse referencing God’s storehouse of hail set aside specifically for judgment:

Job 38:22-23 Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?

The Assyrians are also compared to a “flood of mighty waters.” This seems to add to a picture of quick and complete destruction. Ephraim’s destruction is also compared to that of the first-fruits of the year that are eagerly picked and consumed.

Is. 28:5 In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people,

Is. 28:6 And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate.

“the residue of his people” = the people of the southern kingdom, Judah

“in that day” = the time when Ephraim is destroyed

It would seem that in contrast to the events in Ephraim, Judah (the southern kingdom) is pictured as a people who are boasting in the Lord, and not in themselves. As the crown of Ephraim is “fading,” the crown of glory of the believing remnant in Judah, the LORD of hosts, is vibrant and beautiful. The Lord is pictured as the source of wisdom and discernment in justice and of strength and valor for those appointed as soldiers to defend the kingdom.

Is. 28:7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

Is. 28:8 For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.

“they also” = still referencing Judah

The spiritual leaders of the people, the priests and prophets, are following the path of sin that led to God’s judgment on the northern kingdom.

“they err in vision” - This seems to be a direct reference to the prophets. God often spoke to them in visions, and they are misrepresenting God’s message to the people.

“they stumble in judgment” – This seems to be a reference to the priests who were charged to represent God in matters of judgment.

Deuteronomy 17:8-13 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

Verse 8 seems to be emphasizing the drunken sinful lifestyles of the spiritual leaders. This seems to be a contradiction to the words in verse 6. Evidently, there is still a difference between the spiritual leaders of the two kingdoms. At least in the southern kingdom the Lord is still acknowledged as the source of wisdom and power, though the spiritual leaders are falling further and further into their sin and not putting themselves into position to be able to hear God correctly and consistently.

I was working on a study in Corinthians last night and reflected on the idea of being in possession of something (e.g., a knowledge of God as the source of wisdom and power) and not reaping the benefits available to you through possession of that knowledge. That thought seems to apply here.

Is. 28:9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.*

Boy do the commentators differ on this verse. My first thoughts are that Isaiah is referencing God as the teacher, the source of knowledge and understanding. I think the last phrase is a picture of those who have a teachable spirit. Children are so eager to learn; and after weaning, they are ready for meat—food that needs chewing and is harder to digest. That describes the type of person God can teach—one who is ready to hear and understand and make application to his life.

Is. 28:10 For precept *must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:*

“precept” = Any commandment, instruction, or order intended as an authoritative rule of action; esp., a command respecting moral conduct; an injunction; a rule.

“line” = a cord (as connecting), especially for measuring; to bind together.

The teachable person is willing to humble himself as a little child. The best way to learn spiritual truth is one commandment at a time. As you mature you are able to make connections and applications to daily living with the commands of God. God doesn't expect us to know everything at once.

Is. 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

“stammering” and “another tongue” = unintelligibly

“this people” = the drunken priests and prophets

In other words, these rebellious, sinful, drunken spiritual leaders can't understand God's message because they don't have the right heart attitude to receive it.

Another tongue is a reference to a language other than Hebrew, not Jewish. This could be a reference to the Gentile church. The gospel would eventually be preached and made known throughout the world by the followers of Jesus, but the Jewish people as a whole would refuse to hear it.

Is. 28:12 To whom he said, *This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.*

“rest” = peace, comfort, consolation

God had a message of comfort and encouragement to give the people through the priests and prophets, but they chose not to proclaim it. (The Hebrew for *hear* indicates to hear with intent to obey, to publish, proclaim or witness.) They were too caught up in the pleasures of sin for a season.

Is. 28:13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

This verse makes me think of the verses in Isaiah 6:

Isaiah 6:9-10 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

God is sending forth His message clearly and simply. Their response to His message is to stumble and fall. It's like they are learning by rote repetition, but they are not able to make spiritual application to their lives. Again, it makes me think of my study in Corinthians. We have to have spiritual ears to hear spiritual truth; otherwise, the wisdom of God is foolishness to men.

1Corinthians 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Stephen Armstrong gave an interesting teaching on this section of scripture beginning with verse 9. My summary of that teaching follows: Verse 9 is a response of the leaders to Isaiah's message. They basically mocked him for thinking that he has more understanding and wisdom than they—Were we born yesterday? In verse 10 the Hebrew reads as two single syllable words repeated four times in reference to precept and line. In other words, in the Hebrew it reads as though Isaiah sounds like he is stuttering like the village idiot. In verse 11 Isaiah begins to defend himself. Implied—You might mock me; but if you don't listen to me, you will listen to foreign conquerors. I spoke to you clearly and you refused to listen. Since you rejected God's words as gibberish, your judgment is certain. Obviously, this is another time I wish I knew Hebrew.

Is. 28:14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.

Isaiah is trying to get the attention of the “scornful men,” the spiritual leaders of the people of Judah as represented by its capital, Jerusalem. He wants them to listen with understanding to what God has to say.

Is. 28:15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

Isaiah is pointing out that they are living under a false sense of security. They have taken refuge in a message falsely presented as being from God. That is very much akin to the pride of Ephraim. They knew they were misleading the people, but trusted their own reasoning more than God's message.

At the time of this prophecy, Israel had made a covenant of mutual defense with Egypt that Isaiah had warned against. This covenant seems to be a type of the covenant they will make with Antichrist.

Is. 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

I can't help but think of the references to Jesus as this stone.

Psalm 118:22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

Matthew 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

Acts 4:10-11 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Romans 9:33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

1Peter 2:6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

I think what Isaiah is referencing here is faith in God that will allow the one who believes to be at rest in the spirit. In working on chapter 10 of Romans I had cause to reference this verse.

The Hebrew for *haste* references "hurry, to be eager with excitement or enjoyment, ready." When I looked back at my journal for Isaiah, I had really just glossed over this part of the verse. The key seems to be in reference to the precious corner stone, Jesus, that allows us to cease from our efforts, our *busyness*, to work out our own salvation. In Him we can find rest and peace because

He has done the work necessary by laying down His life for our sin. All we have to do is accept what He has done.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.
[end excerpt]

His message was applicable to the people of Judah at that time. I think it is also proper to recognize that it is foretelling the time when Judah and Israel as a whole will experience rest because of their faith in Jesus, the Son of God, Whom the scripture makes clear is the foundation stone upon which our faith is built.

The foundation stone of the Old Testament times, God the Father, was a tried and proven *Stone*, just as Jesus, His Son, would prove to be in the future for the church. God had miraculously provided for His people over and over again according to His word with undeniable consistency. His value and reputation (from the Hebrew for *precious*) was proven to be without comparison to any false god they had followed at those times when they rebelled against God.

Is. 28:17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

I liked the wording of the NLT on this verse: "I will take the measuring line of justice and the plumb line of righteousness to check the foundation wall you have built. Your refuge looks strong; but since it is made of lies, a hailstorm will knock it down. Since it is made of deception, the enemy will come like a flood to sweep it away."

Is. 28:18 And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.

Is. 28:19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report.

Isaiah is telling the people that even though you are believing in the lies told you by your priests and prophets and you think you are safe, God's truth will come to pass; you will be judged. Once that judgment begins to fall, you are going to tremble with fear since the events are not matching the false message that was delivered to you.

Is. 28:20 For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.

The NIV Commentary had this quote: "God's people had made their bed; now they must lie on it, and they would discover its inadequacy to provide true rest."

Is. 28:21 For the LORD shall rise up as *in* mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as *in* the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.

Both Perazim (2Samuel 5) and Gibeon (Joshua 10) represent places where God had intervened on behalf of His people in judgment against their enemies. The fact that He is going to judge in wrath His own people is considered a strange work for God. God is longsuffering but righteous, and He cannot let sin go unpunished.

Is. 28:22 Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.

“bands” = chastisement

Isaiah is warning the people not to take God’s message lightly, or they will end up with an even harsher judgment. Isaiah is emphasizing that the message he is giving is true, it is from the Lord GOD of hosts. The word *consumption* indicates a complete destruction. The word *earth* can also be translated land and appears to be referencing the whole of Judah. In the time of Antichrist, this will be applicable to the whole earth.

Is. 28:23 Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech.

Again, Isaiah pleads with the people to listen to his message with their hearts and not just with their ears.

Is. 28:24 Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground?

Is. 28:25 When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place?

Is. 28:26 For his God doth instruct him to discretion, *and* doth teach him.

Is. 28:27 For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod.

Is. 28:28 Bread *corn* is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break *it with* the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it *with* his horsemen.

Isaiah is trying to paint a word picture. Judah was an agricultural society. They understood the principles of sowing and reaping. He is basically saying, “Doesn’t a farmer break up the ground in order to be able to plant?”

God has given the people understanding regarding how to make plants grow. Both fitches and cummin appear to be condiments, and bread corn references turning it into meal from which you can make bread. Each plant has to be beaten in some way to transform it into a usable product. Each product is a result of the whole process—plowing, planting, reaping, and beating.

Is. 28:29 This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, *which* is wonderful in counsel, *and* excellent in working.

All of this wonderful knowledge and understanding has come from God. The words *counsel* and *working* refer to God's purposes and actions respectively. This connects me back to His "strange work" in verse 21. Just as God's wisdom in implementing the harvest cycle is wonderful and excellent, so is His judgment of the sin of His people. He is doing everything He possibly can to bring them to the point of repentance and restoration in faith and fellowship with Him.