

Isaiah Chapter 28

The prophecies of this section (28:1-33:24), each announce a Woe (hoy, “doom”), upon Israel and Judah. They probably date from the reign of Hezekiah and the time of the Assyrian threat. Each “Woe” is a legal condemnation of death. The first one is pronounced against the “crown of pride ... the drunkards of Ephraim.”

The reference is to Samaria, the capital of Ephraim (the northern kingdom), which was situated on a hill that resembled a crown. The prophet denounces them because they have “erred through wine” and “strong drink”. Both “priest” and “prophet” have joined the debauchery of the nation.

The familiar reference to “precept upon precept; line upon line” is to be taken negatively, not positively. The prophet is quoting the people who are weary of his prophecies and are complaining that his repetitious message (“rule upon rule”) is annoying.

Since they will not listen to God’s messenger, He will speak to them with “another tongue,” that of the Assyrians who will take them into captivity.

Isaiah 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!"

“Woe”. The prominent thought in this word is impending disaster. “Crown”: The walls of Samaria were the “crown” of a beautiful hill overlooking a lush valley leading toward the Mediterranean coast. “Ephraim”: The northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians, leaving a lesson for Jerusalem under similar circumstance to learn about foreign alliances. “Overcome with wine.” Licentious living prevailed in Ephraim before her fall.

We do know from other lessons that, Ephraim had received the right hand blessing from God. The right hand symbolizes the spiritual blessing. "Ephraim" means double fruit. Wine and strong drink has been the downfall of many individuals.

This Scripture returns from prophecy about the end time to the conditions in Isaiah's time. Samaria seems to be spoken of as Ephraim in this Scripture. The fact that Ephraim had received the favorite son blessing made him proud. He had not lived up to the blessing he received, and now we see his greatness fading away.

It seems worldly living had brought them down. Drinking and taking of drugs go along with worldly living.

Isaiah 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."

“A destroying storm ... mighty waters”: Isaiah drew on forceful figures of speech to wake his readers from their lethargy in the face of the awfulness of an impending Assyrian invasion.

This is speaking of God bringing a mighty judgment on Samaria. It will be so terrible; it will seem to be hail and a destroying storm. The war that comes will be like a destroying storm. The hand symbolizes the work, or force behind it.

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

They will have nothing to be proud of anymore. It is very easy to overcome a drunkard.

Isaiah 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."

The hasty fruit is referring to the first ripe fruit, fig. Figs ripened before the end of summer harvest were devoured immediately. So the Assyrian conquest of Ephraim would be rapid.

We see that Samaria was a beautiful land. It was desired of the Assyrians. It is compared to the first fruit that comes on the tree. It is very tempting to take and devour. This fat valley just means the farm products are plentiful.

Isaiah 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,"

“Crown of glory”: The true crown will replace the fraudulent “proud crown” (verse 1). “Residue of his people”: Isaiah again sounded the note of a faithful remnant in the Day of the Lord (10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 37:31-32; 46:3).

Samaria was destroyed, because they had wandered away from God. They had become worldly. Not everyone was a drunkard. Again, there is a remnant saved who place God in His rightful place as the Head.

You remember from a previous lesson, that Hezekiah, son of Amoz, is a good king. He tears down the places of idol worship and brings the people back to God. In the spiritual sense, this could be looking forward to Jesus, as well. "Diadem" is a crown circling the head.

Jesus is the true Head of all believers. His crown is glorious. The LORD of hosts is speaking of Jesus. The residue of the people will be crowned with the glory of Jesus.

Isaiah 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."

“Spirit of judgment”: In that day of Messiah’s reign, the empowering Spirit will prevail in bringing justice to the world (11:2).

The One who sits in judgment is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has the spirit of judgment. All Christians are told to resist the devil, and he will flee from you. I believe this is speaking of that on-going battle between the Spirit and the devil.

The strength, spoken of here, is God's. But it is operating through His followers.

Isaiah 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."

“Priest ... prophet ... stumble”: Drunkenness had infected even the religious leadership of the nation, resulting in false spiritual guidance of the people.

It seems no one is immune to the terrible influence of alcohol. In the time of Isaiah, the rule of Hezekiah cleaned up some of the false worship, but it seems it did not clear up the moral uncleanness of the people. Drunkenness was even going on in the priesthood.

You remember the 2 sons of Aaron who brought strange fire into the temple, and were killed by God for it. Most people believe they were drunk on alcohol. Strong drink impairs the thinking and the judgment.

This can apply to our day, as well. Ministers of the gospel must keep themselves from strong drink. It impairs your ability to minister the truth. It also impairs your judgment. It weakens your will.

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

When leaders wallowed in filth, what hope did the nation have?

Vomit does go along with drunkenness. I am not sure that is to be taken literally, however. This just means that a person, whose will is weakened, will go on to other sins. Filthiness will prevail.

Isaiah 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."

“Weaned from the milk”: The drunken leaders resented it when Isaiah and other true prophets treated them as toddlers by reminding them of elementary truths of right and wrong.

This is speaking of people who have grown in the Lord, and are able to handle the meat of the Word. They are no longer fed on milk and honey, but have learned to know the Word of God. The easiest person to teach the Word of God is someone eager to know the Word in its fullness.

These erring priests and prophets might have thought they knew, but they did not, if they had gotten into error by worldliness. Those who are just weaned from the breast are really just above babes in Christ.

Isaiah 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 upon precept ... there a little”: This is the drunkard’s sarcastically mocking response to corrective advice from the prophet. These imitations of a young child’s babbling ridicule Isaiah’s preaching.

"Precept" means commandment. We know the commandments are sure, and not to be changed. The fact it was mentioned twice establishes it as fact. Isaiah was not giving them a new or different way.

He is just saying, over and over things they know are in God's commandments. He gives them a little of it here and a little of it there.

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

“Another tongue”: Since the drunkards would not listen to God’s prophet, he responded to them by predicting their sub-servience to Assyrian taskmasters, who would give them instructions in a foreign language. The New Testament divulges an additional meaning of this verse that anticipates God’s use of the miraculous gift of tongues as a credential of his New Testament messengers.

It would not matter what tongue he spoke to them, they would not listen. Hearing is involved in receiving a message. They have ears to hear, but they do not hear. Whether this is in Hebrew, or in the Assyrian language, they would not receive it.

The stammering comes when a person is speaking in a tongue unfamiliar to them.

Isaiah 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 ... refreshing ... not hear”: In simple language they could understand, God offered them relief from their oppressors, but they would not listen.

The rest, spoken of here, is in Jesus. They turned Him down, and would not accept Him as their Messiah. The refreshing is a spiritual blessing, as is the rest. Even in the days of old, God had promised to bless them, if they kept His commandments. If they did not keep His commandments, judgment came.

Jesus, the King of Peace, brought a refreshing and rest to all who would accept Him as their Savior. They would not accept Him, and they would not hear, or accept Him.

Isaiah 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."

“Precept upon precept ... there a little”: In light of their rejection, the Lord imitated the mockery of the drunkards in jabber they could not understand.

The LORD had given them the commandments. There had been no wavering in the message. They needed to repent. They needed to be broken of God. They needed to belong to God, and they would not.

In the time of Isaiah, they would be conquered by the Assyrians. If they would not hear the prophet, then the judgment was war. They would be moved backward, broken, snared, and taken in war, since they would not heed the prophet.

Isaiah Chapter 28 Questions

1. Whose glorious beauty is a fading flower?
2. _____ had received the right hand blessing.
3. What does the right hand symbolize?
4. What does the word "Ephraim" mean?
5. What was their downfall?
6. What had made Ephraim proud?
7. God brings a mighty judgment on _____.
8. Who desired to conquer Samaria?
9. What can we assume from the "fat valley"?
10. What kind of king is Hezekiah?
11. What is a "diadem"?
12. _____ is the true head of all believers.
13. "The Lord of hosts" is speaking of _____.
14. The One who sits in judgment is the _____ _____ _____.
15. What is the strength in verse 6?

16. The _____ and the _____ have erred through strong drink.
17. What uncleanness did Hezekiah not get rid of?
18. Who (like these priests), had brought strange fire into the temple?
19. What did God do to them?
20. Why must ministers keep themselves from strong drink?
21. All tables are full of _____.
22. Whom shall He teach knowledge?
23. Who is the easiest person to teach?
24. What does "precept" mean?
25. Why was it mentioned twice?
26. What is involved in receiving a message?
27. Explain the stammering tongue?
28. What would God do, if they kept His commandments?
29. What would happen, if they did not keep God's commandments?