

Denunciation upon Israel and Judah

Isaiah 28-29

Isaiah 28:1-8 - *“Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine! ² Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring them down to the earth with His hand. ³ The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, will be trampled underfoot; ⁴ And the glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valley, like the first fruit before the summer, which an observer sees. He eats it up while it is still in his hand. ⁵ In that day the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people, ⁶ for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. ⁷ But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way. The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink. They are swallowed up by wine; they are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. ⁸ For all tables are full of vomit and filth. No place is clean.”*

Background Notes

Chapters 28-35 form a new section of Isaiah that could be entitled “Denunciation of Israel and Judah.” Six woes were pronounced in these chapters. The first woe was pronounced upon the northern kingdom of Israel (or “Ephraim”) in chapter 28.

Israel had gone so far downhill morally and spiritually that it was characterized as a nation of drunkards. Even the religious community was involved in excessive drinking, so their sermons and judgments carried no weight (v7). What a sad description of the nation’s condition: *“For all tables are full of vomit and filth. No place is clean”* (v8).

Because of Israel’s deplorable and decadent condition, God was going to bring the Assyrian army in like sudden hail, a destructive storm, and a mighty flood to wipe out the nation (v2). Israel would be like a first ripe fig - ready and waiting for the Assyrians to pluck and devour (v4). Indeed this took place in 722 BC, when the Assyrian armies overran and defeated the capital city, Samaria, and the northern kingdom of Israel.

There is a note of hope in verse 5. *In that day*, when the Lord returns, the Lord Himself will be a beautiful crown and glorious diadem for the remaining godly Jews.

Doctrinal Points

1. The discipline of the Lord is God's strange and perfect work.

In verses 9-10, the people of Israel complained that Isaiah was insulting them by speaking to them speaking down to them, as if they were little children. Okay, said Isaiah, you don't like to hear me tell you the truth in plain Hebrew? Then you will hear the same message in a foreign tongue - the foreign tongue of the Assyrians who will conquer you and take you captive.

The people will get their basic lessons - but it would be in a foreign tongue: *"¹¹For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, ¹² to whom He said, "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest," and, "This is the refreshing." Yet they would not hear.*

¹³ But the word of the Lord was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little," that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught" (v11-3).

In verses 14-15, Isaiah told the nation of scoffers that their false hopes of an alliance for protection with Egypt or Assyria were essentially alliances with death. In verse 16 Isaiah paused in his denunciation to show that the coming Messiah was the only sure hope and secure foundation: *"Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. Whoever believes will not act hastily."*

In verses 17-18 the Lord's standards of righteousness were contrasted with the false treaties they had made with foreign nations. Those treaties and nations would prove to be useless - without hope or foundation - when the Assyrians swept through the land.

Verse 19 described the steady hammer blows of the Assyrian takeover of the northern kingdom of Israel. The comfort and rest Israel hoped for through her treaties with foreign nations would prove to be like sleeping on a bed that's too short, with a blanket that's too small (v20). Have you ever had that experience? Not much comfort or rest!

In verses 21-22, God's judgment on Israel was called His "strange" or "extraordinary" or "awesome" work. Why is it called that? Because God wants to bless His people, and not have to judge them, as He judged the Philistines or the Canaanites and Gibeonites.

Verses 23-29 state that God's judgment on His people would not only be strange – it would be **perfect**. God's judgment of His people is **discipline**, rather than judgment. Just as a farmer used different threshing implements for different grains, so God knows just the right form of discipline to use for producing the best results.

This was true in Isaiah's day, it will be true during the Tribulation period of the future, and it is true today as well. God knows just the right kind of discipline for each one of us. Maybe it's trial, maybe it's hardship, maybe it's sickness, maybe

it's loss. It's not the same for everyone. God knows what's best. **He disciplines us because He loves us** (Hebrews 12:6). The discipline of the Lord is God's strange and perfect work.

2. The discipline of the Lord is God's redeeming and restoring work.

Isaiah 29:1-4 - *"Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! Add year to year; let feasts come around. ² Yet I will distress Ariel; there shall be heaviness and sorrow, and it shall be to Me as Ariel. ³ I will encamp against you all around; I will lay siege against you with a mound, and I will raise siege works against you. ⁴ You shall be brought down; you shall speak out of the ground; your speech shall be low, out of the dust; your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground; your speech shall whisper out of the dust."*

In verse 1 Jerusalem was called *Ariel*, which means "altar hearth." God would have to judge Jerusalem. The city itself would become an altar of death as enemy armies surrounded Jerusalem (v2-4).

In verses 5-8, again there is a message of hope. Although God would use enemy powers to judge and discipline His people, the enemy powers themselves would be blown away in judgment. These verses literally came true when King Sennacherib of Assyria besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC, but Sennacherib never conquered the city. In just one night God miraculously struck down 185,000 Assyrian troops. Sennacherib thought he had the victory - but for him it would turn out to be like a hungry and thirsty man who dreams he is eating and drinking, but when he awakes he finds no food or water.

The miraculous rescue of Jerusalem is certainly prophetic of the rescue of Jerusalem in the future. During the Tribulation period, the nations of the world will besiege Jerusalem - only to be completely defeated when the Lord will intervene for His people.

In verses 9-14 the reason is given for God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem once again. They were spiritually blind and lacked understanding because they willfully refused to see and understand. The Lord quoted verse 13 in reference to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 15:8-9: *"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

The moral principles in Isaiah 29:15-16 are still true today. If you will not see what God is saying to you, you cannot see: *"Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord, and their works are in the dark. They say, "Who sees us?" and, "Who knows us?" ¹⁶ Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; for shall the thing made say of him who made it, "He did not make me"? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?" (v15-16)*

These verses sure have an application for today! Do you try to hide your thoughts and actions from the Lord and think that He doesn't see or know? Don't kid yourself! Do you try to reverse roles with your Creator, and think you're the potter and He's the clay?

Isaiah 29:17-24 - *“Is it not yet a very little while till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest? ¹⁸ In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. ¹⁹ The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. ²⁰ For the terrible one is brought to nothing.*

The scornful one is consumed, and all who watch for iniquity are cut off— ²¹ who make a man an offender by a word, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and turn aside the just by empty words.

²² Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: “Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now grow pale. ²³ But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will hallow My name, and hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel. ²⁴ These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine.”

Once again we have good news in verses 17-24. God’s judgment will work out His discipline and result in the redemption and restoration of His people. A great future is predicted for Israel! Discouraging and deplorable physical and spiritual conditions will be reversed in the Land, including Lebanon (v17-18). There will be spiritual restoration. Evildoers will be judged, and unrighteousness will no longer prevail (v19-21). The descendants of Abraham will return to the Lord and submit to God’s Word (v22-24).

When will this take place? From God’s perspective, it will happen in *“a very little while”* (v17). But from our perspective, the fulfillment is yet in the future - when the Lord returns to establish His earthly kingdom. Some people incorrectly teach that this prophecy is being fulfilled in the Church today, as a so-called *“spiritual seed of Jacob.”* No. The correct view is that in the future, as a result of God’s discipline of His people, a redeemed and restored remnant of godly Jewish people (the *literal* seed of Abraham) will be prepared, and will become an essential part of the wonderful earthly kingdom of Christ. The discipline of the Lord is God’s redeeming and restoring work.

Practical Application

Don’t let your godly ancestors be ashamed!

Verse 22 says that Jacob will no longer be ashamed of Abraham’s descendants, because *in that day* a godly remnant will be redeemed and restored to the Lord. Throughout the past centuries and to this present day, Jacob would have to be ashamed of Israel. They rejected their Messiah, and they continue to do so. But there’s coming a time when Jacob will no longer be ashamed of his descendants. *“These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine”* (v24).

What about us? Many of you have godly ancestors. Would they be ashamed of the way you’re living? Do you need to make some changes in your life’s paths? Do you need to come back to the Lord? Don’t let your godly ancestors be ashamed!