

Review

Having finished the section commonly called "Isaiah's Apocalypse," we move on now to another section. Chapters 28 through 35 basically describe judgment for the Jews and Assyrians, even while making promises for Israel's future. Tonight, we will be looking solely at chapter 28.

28:1-4 Drunkards Of Ephraim Will Be Judged

Ephraim was a tribe of Israel whose inheritance in the promised land was in the north. God often used this name to describe all of the northern kingdom (Isa. 7:9), whose capitol was Samaria.

The sin of the northern kingdom was rampant and continually unrepentant. Their lack of the fear of God led to blatant pride. Right up the line to their king, they were disobedient to and presumptuous against the Lord.

In the first of six woes in this eight-chapter section of Isaiah, the prophet describes them in picturesque language. You may recall that when Jesus was outside of the city of Sychar, He looked up at the crowds which were streaming out of the city to come see Him. He said to His disciples,

John 4:35 "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."

Jesus described the crowds hungry for salvation as being a field ready for harvest. But the Lord described the drunkards of Ephraim as a fertile valley ready to be picked clean and trodden under foot.

28:5-6 The Remnant

Judgment would come upon the proud drunkards of Ephraim, but throughout the ages, God has always preserved a remnant - a faithful people in the midst of the wicked. Isaiah promises that God has not forgotten them.

Of course many would probably assume that this remnant is made up of those religious people that are often respected: the priests and the

prophets. But God has more information on the subject...

28:7-8 Drunken Priests And Prophets

Counted among the drunkards in Ephraim were priests and prophets. Lacking any fear of God, they drank liquor even while doing the work of the ministry. The prophets would reel with drunkenness even while having their visions. The priests would be tottering with drunken instability while making decisions and sacrificing animals. They were often so drunk that they were vomiting right on the sanctified tables. They had made the entire place unclean.

28:9-10 Who Will Learn The Word?

With nearly every adult in the northern kingdom too sinful to repent and too drunk to stand, Isaiah asks the question: To whom is God going to teach His Word? And who will be able to teach others His Word?

At this point, the only choices He has left are the babies. Of course, having just been weaned, they are not old enough to comprehend systematic theology, or even basic Bible teachings.

God's Word requires some basic intelligence to understand. It is beyond the grasp of babies drinking milk, and beyond the ability of confused drunkards to read and understand.

But it's not rocket science. God has made His Word accessible to anyone who desires to learn it. He says that He has given it to us in an orderly fashion. If we simply read it line by line, we will quickly pick up the basics.

This is why I'm so sold out to the line-by-line teaching method. Teaching the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book, cover to cover is the best way I know to quickly acquaint people with God's Word. Because no matter where we are in Scripture, you will learn about God's nature and God's plan. You'll hear that God hates sin but loves sinners. He has established this form of communication to us line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. It's the perfect way to learn!

28:11-13 Rejecting The Word

But not everyone wants to receive the Word of God. Some people continue to listen, even while hardening their hearts against what the Word says. For those people, the Word is unintelligible.

There are some people who are so stubborn, that the simplest truth is beyond their comprehension. Isaiah uses the example of the simple message of God saying, "This is where to find rest from your weariness." But even that simple message cannot be understood by someone who has chosen to harden their heart against God's Word.

This is why Jesus began to teach in parables:

Matt. 13:10-16 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear."

Many people read this and think that Jesus was disguising the truth with difficult parables. In fact, what He is saying is that parables make the truth so obvious, so simple, that they demonstrate who is truly not able to receive God's Word at all. It is like what Paul said to the Cor-

inthians:

1Cor. 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1Cor. 2:14 ... a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

And so we see that to those who are drunken, prideful, having no fear of God, even the simplest verse-by-verse Bible teaching will not result in repentance. They will continue to stumble and fall into the end result of their sin.

28:14-15 A Covenant With Death

How had the Jews made a "covenant with death"? It was a bargain they had made that would lead to their death.

It is probably that Isaiah is not quoting them directly. It is more likely that they had been boasting about their new alliance.

You see, instead of relying on God's direction when He said, "I am the One you need to turn to for rest and safety against this coming judgment," they had turned to Egypt for assistance. The Jews were now touting their alliance with Egypt. This was their new safety, how they thought they would be delivered.

But the covenant they had made had sealed their fate. It was truly a covenant with death. Egypt would be no help to them when the Babylonians came. Jeremiah tells us that when the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem, Egypt came marching up to rescue them. But when the Babylonians left Jerusalem to go face the Egyptian army, Pharaoh had them turn around and go home (Jer. 37:7). Seeing this, the Babylonians returned and finished the job on Jerusalem. The Jews should have made their covenant with God, not with Egypt.

28:16-17a The Cornerstone Will Be The Standard

God promised that in the future, once the Jews returned from the

Babylonian Captivity to Jerusalem, He would send the Cornerstone.

The Bible makes it clear that this Cornerstone to which God is referring is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, in talking about God's household, spoke of it as...

Eph. 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone

Peter also made reference to Him as the Chief Cornerstone (Acts 4:10-11), as did Jesus Himself (Matt. 21:42-44).

Why would Jesus be called a cornerstone? In ancient times, the cornerstone was the starting point for all building above the foundation. It was a stone which had been made almost perfect. It was placed completely level and was precisely aligned. Throughout the rest of the building project, the cornerstone became the determining point for every measurement. It was the basis for uniformity, and the standard for any alignment.

Jesus is righteous and just. His life would serve as the basis for determining righteousness and justice.

Unfortunately, this cornerstone would be rejected by the builders. Peter explained the miraculous healing of a lame man by preaching to the rulers, elders, scribes, and many high-ranking priests,

Acts 4:10-11 "let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead - by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone."

Jesus was rejected. He had known this would happen and said,

Matt. 23:37-38 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!"

Once the Cornerstone established the standard, the Jews of Jeru-

saalem were liable. But when they rejected the Cornerstone, crucifying Him, they brought the judgment of God down on themselves and their city.

28:17b-21 Zion Will Be Continually Overwhelmed

Jerusalem would become a continual trampling place, where the overwhelming scourge would continually pass through. And throughout the ages, we have seen this proven true time and again:

Once the Cornerstone had been rejected, the Romans took over Jerusalem. And then it was the Arab Muslims. After that, the Seljuk Turks, then the Egyptian Fatimids, and then the Crusaders. Later, it was the Ottoman Empire.

Zion has, throughout the centuries, been continually overwhelmed. Invading forces have passed through day and night.

28:22-29 The Threshing Will End

Isaiah hopes that all of these warnings will make the Jews open to listening to his pleas for repentance. He reminds them that God is going to judge the entire earth as well as Zion.

They cannot expect God to continually bless without judging any more than you would expect a farmer to continually plant seeds without breaking up the fallow ground by plowing and leveling the field.

Fortunately, God will only use the severity that is necessary. He will not thresh dill with a threshing sledge. And even the grain for bread that's crushed has a limit to what it can endure. God will not utterly destroy them. He merely desires repentance.