

V. EMANCIPATION NOT FROM EGYPT

CHAPTERS 28 - 35

A. FOUNDATION THAT IS FIRM, CHAPTERS 28-29

1. STUPIDITY

TEXT: 28:1-13

- 1 Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley of them that are overcome with wine!
- 2 Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one; as a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, as a tempest of mighty waters overflowing, will he cast down to the earth with the hand.
- 3 The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under foot:
- 4 and the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be as the first-ripe fig before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.
- 5 In that day will Jehovah of hosts become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people;
- 6 and a spirit of justice to him that sitteth in judgment, and strength to them that turn back the battle at the gate.
- 7 And even these reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink, the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.
- 8 For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.
- 9 Whom will he teach knowledge? and whom will he make to understand the message? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?
- 10 For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little.
- 11 Nay, but by men of strange lips and with another tongue will he speak to this people;

- 12 to whom he said, This is the rest, give ye rest to him that is weary; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.
- 13 Therefore shall the word of Jehovah be unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little; that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

QUERIES

- a. Who is the "mighty and strong one" the Lord has?
- b. Why are priests and prophets drinking strong drink?
- c. How would God speak to that people by "strange lips and other tongues"?

PARAPHRASE

Woe to the crowning glory of Israel, the city of Samaria. It is a city of drunkards. Its glory is about to fade into nothing like the withering flowers. She sits as a crowned head of a lush-green valley but her inhabitants have become slaves to wine. Beware! The Lord has an agent, Assyria, mighty and strong, and His agent comes like a devastating hail storm, a destructive storm, and like a roaring flood. His powerful hand is able to cast everything down to the ground. Yes, Samaria, the glorious fortress in which the drunkards of Israel boast is going to be trampled under the foot of this agent of the Lord. I repeat, This city of Samaria which sits at the head of the rich valley is nothing but a rapidly fading flower. In fact, Samaria shall be to the Assyrian like the fig ripe before its time is to the traveller. He will eagerly pick it and immediately devour it. He will not hold it in his hand. When Samaria has fallen, at last the Lord of the Covenant Himself will be the crowning glory of His remnant. To the remnant, He will be beautiful. To the remnant the spirit of justice He restores to the leadership of the nation will be beautiful. He will restore to the remnant

the strength, courage and faith to stand against their enemies. But, here in Jerusalem, even its leaders reel and stagger in drunkenness. Priests and prophets, the very shepherds of God's people, men who are to declare God's message, are drunkards. They are alcoholics! They are in such a stupor they cannot understand anything nor make a sensible judgment. They are so depraved and debauched they vomit all over the tables and floors and furniture where they carouse and there is hardly a clean place to be found.

Yet these are the people who are saying, Whom does Isaiah think he is teaching; to whom does he think he is explaining God's revelation? Let him search as widely as he wishes, he will not find any who is in need of such teaching. Is it to babies he thinks he is speaking? Isaiah's teaching is childish. It is nothing but repetitious, command upon command and rule upon rule, and there isn't enough of it anywhere to make any sense.

As a matter of fact, God is going to treat the people of Jerusalem like babies and speak a message of chastening to them through a nation whose language they do not understand. God is going to make believers out of these unbelievers by delivering them to the Assyrians. They are too immature and unbelieving to heed Isaiah's teaching, so they will have to be dealt with as immature babies. God repeated over and over His plea to the covenant people to walk in the way of true rest—obeying His commandments—but they would not do so! So, now, they are going to learn through chastening and hardship the will of God is to be obeyed. That revelation of God given through the prophet in command upon command and rule upon rule is going to come to pass and they are going to realize they have stumbled over it when they are broken and trapped and taken captive. That word of God which they mocked is going to mock them!

COMMENTS

v. 1-6 DRUNKARDS: Ephraim, as Isaiah uses it here probably represents the northern kingdom of Israel (cf. Isa. 7:2-17;

Hosea 9:3-16). The "crown of pride," "the fading flower," and "the head of the fat valley," all are descriptive synonyms of Samaria, captial city of Israel, which lasted until the bitter end of Israel's subjugation by the Assyrians. The city of Samaria was situated geographically upon a high rise making it the "head" of a lush-green valley. Omri's intention when he built it was to make it so well fortified it could not be captured. It took the Assyrians three years (723-721 B.C.) to capture it.

This section was probably written in the early years of Hezekiah's reign in Judah when most of Israel had been overrun by the Assyrians and Samaria, the capital, was under siege and would soon fall. There was intense political pressure put upon Hezekiah to make treaties with Assyria and/or with Egypt to keep Judah free from foreign invasion. Isaiah was sent to Hezekiah, and the nation of Judah, with a revelation from God that no alliances should be made with either Assyria or Egypt, but that the nation and its leaders should trust in God for deliverance. This is the thrust of the chapters in this section (28-35). Isaiah begins by showing false foundations and the true foundation.

Isaiah intends to remind Judah that Israel's predicament (foreign invasion and destruction) is a consequence of Israel's debauchery. Drunkenness causes ruin—individually and socially. Of course drunkenness is only a symptom of a much more critical problem—self-indulgence or permissiveness. This stems from a fundamental rebellion against the word of God called sin! Drunkenness, or any other form of debauchery and self-indulgence is not sickness—it is sin. God created the grape and the juice of the grape and alcohol. All that God created is good. Wine, alcohol, food, clothing, houses and lands can all be perverted, misused and become objects of idolatry. But if used properly, within the will of God and with temperance and self-control, they are blessings from God.

The trouble with the leaders of Israel in its capital city Samaria was that they allowed themselves to be "overcome" with wine. They were alcoholics—enslaved to wine. They were incapable of making sensible judgments or of leading others to

do so. Drunkenness has the effect of completely incapacitating a person both mentally and physically. Alcohol is highly addictive as a depressant. It affects the ability of a human being to make proper moral judgments. Indulged in excessively it causes deterioration of the liver and other vital organs as well as destroying brain cells. When administered in controlled situations, by physicians as medicine, it may have some healing effect. In some situations, mild, diluted alcoholic beverage such as wine may be more physically safe to drink than the water available. This was certainly not the problem in Samaria. It is not the problem in America and the world in general today. The problem is excess, self-indulgence, sin—drunkenness. There are approximately 9,000,000 alcoholics in the United States today. That is more than the total population of both kingdoms of the Jews put together in Isaiah's day! Of course people can be obsessed with other things and indulge themselves to the point of idolatry and lose the ability to think properly and function as they should—gluttony, pride, greed, hate, sexual promiscuity all lead down the same path to ruin.

The Hebrew word translated *Lord* in verse 2 is *Adonai* and emphasizes *sovereignty*. The sovereign Lord has an instrument of judgment He is going to use against Ephraim (Israel). This instrument is a "mighty and strong" one. We take it to mean Assyria. The Assyrians were devastating in their warfare. They took no thought to preserve anything or anybody. Their method was to conquer, kill, loot, burn, destroy. In order to dispense with the necessity to occupy foreign nations they conquered with garrisoned troops, they simply took the conquered people captive back to their own land and imported their own trusted citizens to occupy conquered land. This is what they did to Israel, and the ancestors of the "imported" Assyrians later became hated "half-breeds" known as Samaritans in Nehemiah's day. The Assyrian army was aptly described as "a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, and a tempest of mighty water overflowing." They stormed upon the land and flooded it with destruction. That great fortress city, Samaria, the crown and pride of the once arrogant and rebellious northern kingdom

Israel would very soon be trodden under foot of thousands of fierce, pagan Assyrian soldiers. Let Hezekiah and Judah take warning! Assyria is going to gobble-up Samaria like a hungry traveler who sees an early-ripened fig, snatches it from the tree and gobbles it up from the palm of his hand without hardly looking at it.

When Samaria falls there will be a *shear*, Hebrew for *remnant*, or *that which is left*, which will reaffirm its faith and trust in Jehovah. Those few remaining faithful to the Lord, when they see Samaria fall, will reenforce and renew their stand for righteousness, justice and faithfulness. They will take new courage and strength from the Lord's actions and reenter the battle for truth and faith.

So the true foundation is the God of Justice, not self-indulgence or permissiveness. Judah had better know this! So the church of God today must know this!

V. 7-13 DEMENTED: Now Isaiah turns his attention to the people of Judah. "Even these" are "swallowed up of wine." It is the theologians who are pointed out—priests and prophets. Priests were to represent man to God and prophets were to represent God to man. The two primary functionaries through which men came into contact with God were, for the most part, drunkards. These religious leaders often times functioned also as advisors to the Hebrew king and his noblemen. Inebriated and intoxicated, completely overcome with drunkenness, they either misrepresented God's will to man or did not represent it at all! Thus the nation was left without religious instruction and leadership at all except for Isaiah and Micah and a few faithful souls known as the remnant! Hebrew religious life was so closely united with its civil structure when religion decayed, civil life became chaotic. Justice and morality dipped to a dangerous low. The drunkards lost their senses and were unable to make sensible, honest judgments. Sin itself is insanity (cf. I Cor. 15:34).

Isaiah paints a vile and repulsive picture of drunkards, but it is a true picture. Distillers of liquor in America often picture users of their product as "men of distinction," etc. The truth

of the matter may be known by anyone who wants to spend a little time around places where their product is excessively and indulgently consumed. It is a picture of behavior worse than the vilest animal. Vomit, cursing, lewdness, violence, incoherence and delirium is the environment created by drunkenness.

The drunken priests, prophets and other citizens of Judah and Jerusalem manifest their utter depravity by mocking Isaiah's attempts to instruct them in the revelation of God. They say in effect, "Who does Isaiah think he is to talk to us like one would talk to children. Are we babies?" The Hebrew word translated *teach* is *yarah* and means, *instruct, inform*. The Hebrew word translated *message* is *shemoah* which means, *something heard or report*. This verse (9) emphasizes the fact that Isaiah's major ministry was in teaching, instructing the nation concerning the report he had heard (revelation) from God. He evidently spent a great deal of time at teaching. While the nation resented being taught as one would children, that is how they were behaving.

The phrasing of verse 10 in the Hebrew is interesting: *tsav latsav, tsav latsav, qav laqav, qav laqav*. Leupold thinks, "it is sarcastic talk, done in monosyllables to make the simplicity of the prophet's message ridiculous." Thus Isaiah is represented as playing the part of the pedantic teacher treating them like stupid children. He doles out his lessons in a repetitious, sing-song, rote method. The drunkards are making great sport of Isaiah's sincere attempts to penetrate their wine-addled brains.

The prophet's reply in verse 11 is: As a matter of fact, God is going to treat the people of Jerusalem like babies and speak a message of chastening to them through a nation whose language they do not understand. God is going to make believers out of some of these drunken unbelievers by delivering them to the Assyrians. They are too immature and unbelieving to heed Isaiah's instruction, so they will have to be dealt with as immature babies. They will have to be *shown!* Their minds are too addled. They cannot reason—they can only understand harsh, punitive action. The Lord himself will speak unwelcome words to them which may also in a way be likened to

“stammering lips” and a “foreign tongue.” He is going to speak to them in a way they were not accustomed to be spoken to, and probably, in reference to the Assyrians, through a people whose language was foreign to them. The apostle Paul paraphrases Isaiah 28:11 in I Corinthians 14:21. Paul uses it, we are convinced, in the same way Isaiah meant it here. The church at Corinth, in its mania for the “charisma” or gift of tongues (speaking an understandable foreign language unknown to the speaker but miraculously empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit) was acting like a child. The Christians there clamored for this spectacular and showy gift more than they did for prophecy which instructed. Foreign tongues, miraculously uttered, was simply a *sign* for unbelievers who had to have a demonstration of the supernatural in order to make believers of them. Foreign tongues were not to edify, instruct or reveal anything to believers. The problem of “tongues” would be to a great extent solved if Bible students would make the connection Paul makes in Corinthians with Isaiah’s warning here to Judah. The connection is that the showy, spectacular, manifestation of the supernatural is for the immature and unbelieving. While teaching, instruction, prophecy is for the mature and spiritual.

God had reiterated His invitation again and again through the prophets. Time after time He sent prophets and teachers to guide them to Him wherein they might find rest for their souls (cf. Jer. 6:16-21), but they *deliberately* refused to walk in His restful and refreshing way. The way of rest is in believing and keeping His commandments (cf. Mt. 11:28-30; Jn. 15:1-11, etc.). But to those who are self-indulgent when the way of God is preached, it is to them like babbling (cf. Acts 17:18).

They mocked and scoffed at Isaiah’s sincere, untiring, repetitious and simple instruction of God’s revelation of Himself. They refused to comprehend that God was about to judge them. But within two generations the revelation given through Isaiah in command upon command is going to come to pass, and they are going to realize they have stumbled at the truth and are trapped by it and taken captive. That which they

mocked is going to mock them. God is not mocked—whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap!

QUIZ

1. What is the "crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim"?
2. Why is drunkenness so destructive?
3. What era of the history of Judah is portrayed here?
4. What is the attitude of the people of Judah toward Isaiah's teaching?
5. What is the connection between Isa. 28:11 and I Cor. 14:21 and "tongues"?
6. What is Isaiah's answer to the mockery of the people of Judah?

2. STABILITY

TEXT: 28:14-29

- 14 Wherefore hear the word of Jehovah, ye scoffers, that rule this people that is in Jerusalem:
- 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are 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:
- 16 therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation; he that believeth shall not be in haste.
- 17 And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.
- 18 And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol shall not stand; when the overflowing

- scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.
- 19 As often as it passeth through, it shall take you; for morning by morning shall it pass through, by day and by night: and it shall be naught but terror to understand the message.
- 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.
- 21 For Jehovah will rise up as in mount Perazim, he will 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.
- 22 Now therefore be ye not scoffers, lest your bonds be made strong; for a decree of destruction have I heard from the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, upon the whole earth.
- 23 Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech.
24. Doth he that ploweth to sow plow continually? doth he continually open and harrow his ground?
- 25 When he hath levelled the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and put in the wheat in rows, and the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in the border thereof?
- 26 For his God doth instruct him aright, and doth teach him.
- 27 For the fitches are not threshed with a sharp 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.
- 28 Bread grain is ground; for he will not be always threshing it: and though the wheel of his cart and his horses scatter it, he doth not grind it.
- 29 This also cometh forth from Jehovah of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.

QUERIES

- a. What is a "covenant with death"?

- b. What is the "foundation stone" to be laid in Zion?
- c. Why use the figure of a "short bed" and "narrow covers"?

PARAPHRASE

Listen, you rulers of Judah that sit in Jerusalem and scoff—listen to the word of Jehovah! You scoff at the predictions of God's judgment and say, We have insured ourselves against death—death cannot harm us, neither can Sheol—and the flood of Assyrian invasion that is upon Israel shall not come to Judah, for we have protected ourselves with deceptive diplomacy and international sophistry. Because your foundation of deceit and intrigue will crumble, the Lord says, I am laying in the midst of My faithful remnant, the foundation of Zion. This foundation will be a rock, the tested and precious rock, the promise of the Messiah, which will be a solid and sure foundation for every one who believes. Whoever believes this will not panic when my judgment comes. Not only will there be a secure foundation but the standards of measuring men will be according to God's standards—justice and righteousness. Your refuge of deceitful diplomacy will be swept away as by a fierce hail-storm or raging flood. All the covenants and agreements you have made to insure against disaster will be cancelled out by the overwhelming might of the Assyrian invasion when it tramples down your land. The Assyrians will conquer your land swiftly and advance toward Jerusalem daily. You will hear news of their advance every day and night and every message will strike terror into your hearts. Your "bed is too short" and your "covers too narrow." Your preparations for security are inadequate. Just as Jehovah rose up against the Philistines in David's day at mount Perazim and Gibeon, he is going to rise against Judah, strange as it may seem, and bring to pass His word spoken by the prophets. So do not scoff at the warnings of God's word, but give heed to them and repent or your destruction by the Assyrians will intensify because I have heard a revelation from God of the powerfulness

and universality of their conquests.

Now listen very closely to my words! Is the plowman so stupid that he plows his land over and over again without sowing his seed? No! When he had prepared the ground doesn't he broadcast the dill, scatter the cummin and plant the wheat and barley in rows? Yes, he does, for God has made him to use common sense to see and understand what needs to be done. The farmer never threshes all grains the same. A sledge is never used on dill—it is beaten with a stick. A cart-wheel is never rolled on cummin—it is beaten softly with a flail. Bread grain grinds easily so he does not pulverize it into dust. Once the cart-wheel has driven over it and ground it the farmer stores it. This is not only good common sense but it is true wisdom and comes from the Lord of Hosts who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

COMMENTS

v. 14-22 FOUNDATIONS: The rulers of Judah, sitting in their fortress city Jerusalem, scoffed at Isaiah's prophecies of Judah's judgment. They had made agreements and covenants with Egypt to insure their protection from Assyria—they thought! This is probably the meaning of "covenant with death," and "agreement with Sheol." It is very doubtful that there is anything here associated with mysticism or black magic, etc. The context is an entire section devoted to Isaiah's denunciation of alliances with Egypt. The government of Judah had been dealing in political subterfuge and deceitful diplomacy, trying to manipulate Egypt against Assyria and Assyria against Egypt. Judah was trying to deal under the table—to play both ends against the middle. And they were trusting in their skill at such sophistry. Little did they know they were dealing with world powers much more deceitful than they—and more skilled at it! Political chicanery and international double-dealing is disastrous. No nation can build its security and prosperity on deceit.

Because of their sin and depravity, the rulers of Judah were trying to perpetuate the kingdom of God by deceit and falsehood. Such schemes destroyed the very purpose for which God had called them to be a kingdom—the redemption of men and women. So, because man could not make a proper foundation upon which to build redemption, God lays a true, tested, solid foundation. The Hebrew word *yisad* (lay) is past tense. God had already started the foundation. It was the Messianic promise. It was started at least as early as David (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12ff). The completion of the foundation would be found in the Messiah Himself (cf. Mt. 21:42, 44; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:20; I Pet. 2:4-6). But God was laying in “Zion” (the faithful remnant) even then the beginnings of that Messianic hope through the prophets. The foundation stone then is the Messianic hope. The faith of a faithful few in Isaiah’s day in these promises (and others to come after them) resulted in the coming of the Messiah and the building of a holy kingdom and habitation of God in the Spirit—the church. Christ, the Person, the Incarnate God, was the chief cornerstone. That God was going to come in *A Person* to the earth to establish His kingdom was rejected by sinful men of the prophet’s day. They wanted “the vineyard” for themselves, and so they killed the messengers of God who came seeking God’s fruit. Then when they saw the Son coming, they killed Him because He was the heir (cf. Mt. 21:33ff). The foundation being laid by God, the Messianic hope, had already been tested and tried and men did believe in it. Their belief in it made them fit for God’s kingdom because it redeemed them. The standards of citizenship for God’s Messianic kingdom are belief, justice and righteousness. That small band of believers paying attention to Isaiah’s preaching would cling to the Messianic hope and their lives would be characterized by justice and righteousness. Upon that foundation and measured by those standards they would overcome the despair, confusion and spiritual destruction that the impending storm of Assyrian invasion would bring to the scoffers.

Isaiah promises the scoffers all their cherished plans and

schemes for protection from Egypt (built upon deceit) would be cancelled, wiped out. Whenever the Assyrians passed through the land the people of Palestine would be conquered—Judah as well as Israel. The Assyrians marched relentlessly, morning by morning, night after night, toward Jerusalem. Nothing hindered them (until of course, Hezekiah repented and prayed and Jerusalem was spared, cf. Isa. ch. 35-36). Every new day brought news of the Assyrian approach and terror began to grip them.

The prophet now turns to a proverb or parable probably very familiar to the people of his day. A bed too short for a man to stretch himself full length on and covers too narrow to wrap himself in on a chilly night are, to say the least, inadequate. As a matter of fact, they are a vexation! Judah's political intrigues with Egypt were like too short beds and too narrow covers. They were inadequate and would later vex their souls when God's judgment fell.

Jehovah will break through all the foolish and fallible schemes of Judah and her alliances with Egypt and execute His wrath on sinful Judah just as He did against the Philistines in David's day (cf. II Sam. 5:19ff). *Perazim* in Hebrew means "break through." David named the place where he brought the Lord's justice on the Philistines Baal-Perazim, "Lord of breaking-through." The Lord judging His people will be a "strange" work. Most of the Jews in Isaiah's day refused to believe the Lord would judge them (cf. Isa. 5:12, etc.). The work of the Lord is to purify for Himself a holy people (cf. Mal. 3:1-5, etc.). It may seem strange to men, but to God it is a part of His plan.

Isaiah now inserts a strong warning. The attitude of the rulers at Jerusalem seems to have been one of scoffing at the Word of the Lord as proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah. So Isaiah warns them what he has preached is a revelation from the Lord—not his own prediction. The more they resist it, the more inevitable and severe will be their doom at the hands of the Assyrians.

v. 23-29 FACTS: Not only were the rulers of Jerusalem

building on a false foundation, they were not even using good common sense and logic in their thinking. They did not have their facts straight. They must not only build on a stable foundation, they must think sensibly. It is tragic to watch sin throttle a man's ability to think logically and properly. Isaiah begins by calling for close attention to his words. Then he attempts to penetrate the calloused and crooked thinking of the rulers by illustrations from everyday experience. This is the way things work, says Isaiah; men do not continually plow a field. Once the field is plowed and prepared a man sows seed and later reaps a crop. God is going to "plow His field" to prepare it. But He will not continually plow it. The plowing is preparatory. Then He will sow and reap. But the plowing must be done. Verse 26 indicates preparing the soil; sowing and reaping is a systematic way things are done by men because such a systematic order of things comes from God. It certainly is a fact of experience that a man does not first go out and sow seed on fallow ground and then break up the sod and harrow it.

The same common sense and discretion is used in threshing. A man threshes the crop only as much as it needs to be threshed to extract the grain. He does not go on threshing it after the grain is separated and grind the grain into dust. God certainly will use the same reasonableness and discretion in dealing with His people. He will plow and thresh—this is needful—but He will not do so forever. He will reap also.

QUIZ

1. Why do we think the "covenant with death" has no reference to black magic?
2. What does the "agreement with Sheol" mean in its context?
3. When did God lay the "foundation stone" in Zion?
4. What is the meaning of the "short bed" parable in verse 20?
5. Why would Isaiah refer to plowing and threshing to illustrate his message?
6. How does it apply to God's dealing with Judah?