

Ripe for Judgment – Isaiah 28:1-15

Re-orientation to Isaiah – After the reign of Solomon, around 930BC, the kingdom of Israel was divided in two. Isaiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom (Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem) from approximately 739BC until 680BC during the rule of four kings. Hosea and Amos were his contemporaries, prophets to the northern kingdom (Israel, aka – Ephraim, whose capital was Samaria), and Micah prophesied also during this time. Assyria is the rising threat to both kingdoms. During the reign of Ahaz, Judah witnessed the Assyrian crack down on Israel (2 Kings 15:29) and we are reading here (Isaiah 28) the recorded woes prior to the northern kingdom's imminent fall in 722BC (2 Kings 17:1-6). The whole time period can be reviewed in 2 Kings 15-18 (2 Chron 26-32).

Introduction – We are beginning the third of seven sections of Isaiah. In a series of six woes in chapters 28-35, Isaiah preaches against the temptation for Judah's kings to rely on Egypt rather than the LORD for protection in the face of the growing threat of Assyria. These chapters reveal how Isaiah consistently opposed the foolish counsel to trust in Egypt in the deepening crisis that led to the events of chapters 36-37. He begins with his woe upon Ephraim and then quickly condemns Judah just as strongly. The overall warning is this: God will not be mocked by idolatrous men and nations who treat His revealed Word as though it was unenlightened, irrelevant, adolescent, and useless babble. Such men and nations are ripe for judgment.

Woe to Ephraim and Jerusalem (vv1-4, 7-8) – Ephraim is reproved for her pride and drunkenness, her self-security and sensuality (vv1-4). The “crowns” may refer to wreaths won in drinking contests or in their idol-worship filled with perversions. It also refers to the beautiful city of Samaria and its view. The Lord has a “strong one,” referring to Assyria, which will soon bring this proud and rebellious nation down. Assyria will do the work, but it will be the hand of the Lord (v2). Ephraim will be taken as easily as the plucking of a piece of ripe fruit in early summer (v4). Judah is no better; even the priests and prophets have erred through intoxication (v7). Again, this may refer to literal drunkenness or to a drunken-like stupor that manifests itself as they “*stumble in judgment.*” Their tables are filthy with unclean decisions and leadership (v8). “*What hope is there for a nation when even its spiritual leaders have given themselves over to debauchery?*” – Webb.

What it is to be a Proud Nation of Drunks – Consider what Isaiah is condemning. Men and nations who pride themselves in their secular (forgetting or opposing God) leadership and pursuit of perverted sensuality “*will be trampled underfoot*” (v3). On a side-note: because we are a church body which enjoys wine it is important to remember that God condemns drunkenness, the perverted use of one of His gifts. The alluring lies of such false liberty “*brings them into bondage*” (2 Pet 2:18-19). Wine is a gift to enjoy when the work is finished in the company of feasting and fellowship – and the Lord's Table instructs us in this.

Babbling Mockery (vv9-13) – The drunkards lash out at Isaiah, telling him they are old enough, enlightened enough, and don't need to be told what to do like little children. They mock the law of God as though it was a childish rhyme, a burdensome long list of rules, far below their sophisticated enlightened culture (vv9-10). The Hebrew words are almost not real words (where we read “*precept upon precept*” and “*line upon line*”). Isaiah replies that since they would not listen to God's offer of rest if they would turn to Him, He will bring His law instead upon them with “*stammering lips,*” a foreign language, by whom they will “*be broken and snared and caught*” (vv11-13).

The Gift of Tongues (1 Cor 14:20-22) – Foreign tongues were a sign of judgment, not of blessing, and the impending judgment upon Israel by Assyria then was a foretaste of the final judgment upon old Jerusalem and the Jews in the generation following the resurrection of Jesus. Paul used the passage in Isaiah to correct a misunderstanding and misuse of tongues. They were to mature by remembering that tongues were a sign for unbelievers (unbelieving Israel in particular) and not for believers. They weren't to use tongues for prayer or praise (14:13-17) nor for self-edification (14:26 and all of Chapter 12). While the gift of supernaturally proclaiming the gospel (and the vindication of Jesus) in a foreign tongue existed in the church, its use was being misdirected and was causing divisions and factions in Corinth. The modern movement of “speaking in tongues” disregards the historical and biblical teaching on this matter. Frankly, it misses the point.

The Covenant of Death (vv14-15) – Understanding Isaiah in light of the New Testament, we learn this is not just a theology lesson or a history lesson. This is a declaration of how the world is; this is the declaration of the New Jerusalem. Those who scoffed at God's Word and later at His Son made a covenant of death. Ephraim was ripe for judgment. First century Israel was ripe for judgment. And any who “*have made lies our refuge*” are in the same position.

The Crown of Glory (vv5-6) – But none of this thwarts God's purposes. “*In that day...*” - We have seen over and over this phrase pointing us to the Day of Judgment upon old Israel and the establishment of the new Israel, the worldwide church/kingdom of God under the reign of Jesus. He is the crown of glory for the remnant and for every sub-remnant as this story continues. He is “*for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.*” A Stone has been laid in Zion (v16), but we will have to pick that part of the story up later...