

The Cornerstone

Isaiah 28

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Isaiah 28 begins an eight-chapter section (chapters 28-35) mostly directed to the southern kingdom of Judah. Since it is often most effective to address a sin present in a third party, and then apply it directly to the person, Isaiah will first speak of the sin of Israel, then switch the focus to Judah.

Isaiah 28:1-15 – Woe to Ephraim and Jerusalem

*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.*

*⁹ “Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?*

¹⁰ For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,

*Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little.”*

*¹¹ For 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.*

*¹⁴ Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scornful men,
Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,*

*¹⁵ Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with
death,*

And with Sheol we are in agreement.

*When the overflowing scourge passes through,
It will not come to us,*

For we have made lies our refuge,

And under falsehood we have hidden ourselves.”

v1 – To whom was this oracle directed?

To the drunkards of Ephraim: In Ephraim (the northern nation of Israel), drunkenness was a significant enough problem that the LORD directed Isaiah to directly address the drunkards of Ephraim.

- Scripture speaks to drunkards: Proverbs 23:29-35 – the folly of drunkenness. Ephesians 5:18 – filled with the Spirit instead of being drunk. Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:10, 11:21, Galatians 5:21, and 1 Peter 4:3 – commands against drunkenness. Jesus warned against last days drunkenness (Luke 21:34-36).

What is the problem with drunkenness?

Spiritually, alcoholism and drug addiction ruins people. The power of addictions keeps many from coming to Jesus, and they severely stunt the spiritual growth of those who trust Jesus yet have to battle their addictions.

- Looking at alcohol alone, according to the CDC, in 2010 88,000 people died of alcohol related causes in the USA, and cost the USA economy \$249 billion.

- Drunkenness is behind many other crimes. According to some past statistics, 75% of the men and 55% of the women involved in date-rape situations had been drinking or taking drugs just before the attack. At one time the FBI said that 50% of all rapes involve alcohol.

How is drunkenness connected to pride?

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim:

Much of the self-hatred and self-despising drunkards feel is rooted in too much focus upon one's self, which is the essence of pride.

How does drunkenness turn glorious beauty into a fading flower?

Drunkenness makes everything beautiful and good in our lives fade away. Many people have gone from the top of success to homelessness because of drunkenness.

Why is drunkenness described as being overcome with wine?

When alcohol overcomes us, it impairs our senses, our thinking, our judgment, and our reflexes. This is when drinking alcohol becomes sin.

- Whenever we feel compelled to drink, or have difficulty not drinking, it is sin.
- If we have to hide our drinking, or are secretly ashamed of our drinking, it is sin.

Does Scripture prohibit drinking any alcohol?

It does in some situations:

Romans 14:21 – *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles*

But there is no strict prohibition against drinking alcohol:

- Jesus made wine (John 2:1-10)
- Jesus drank wine (Mark 14:22-26).
- Jesus was even unjustly accused of being a drunkard (Matthew 11:19).
- Paul recommended wine to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23).
- The Bible regards drink, moderately used, as a gift from God (Psalm 104:15).

v2-3 – What does the drunkard need to know?

Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one: God is stronger than the drunkard, stronger than the power of alcohol, stronger than anything. If the drunkard is powerless to stop his drinking, God has the power to help him stop — or the power to judge him (*the drunkards of Ephraim will be trampled underfoot*, v3).

v4 – What does the drunkard need to learn?

Like the first fruit before the summer, which an observer sees; he eats it up while it is still in his hand: The drunkard must learn the value of delaying immediate gratification for a future benefit, instead of eating the fruit...while it is still

in his hand. The gratification of drinking may be intense and immediate, but it fades quickly and crashes hard.

Why is it important to learn delayed gratification?

The marshmallow test... A researcher gave this choice to a 4-year-old: "I am leaving for a few minutes to run an errand and you can have this marshmallow while I am gone, but if you wait until I return, you can have two marshmallows." Researchers at Stanford did this test in the 1960s, and a dozen years later they found that the kids who grabbed the single marshmallow tended to be more troubled as adolescents, and the one-marshmallow kids also scored an average of 210 points less on SAT tests.

- Learning to delay gratification is important for human development and maturity.

v5 – What is contrasted with drunkenness?

The LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty: The faded glory that comes from drunkenness is contrasted with God's glory. When we are completely "unglorified" because of the wreckage of sin, we can set our focus on the glory of the LORD.

v6 – What is the blessing in a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment?

When our glory has faded because of our sin, we may lose our judgment and discernment. But then we can receive them from the LORD.

How may we have strength to turn back the battle at the gate?

When our glory has faded because of our sin, we may lose our strength and ability to fight. But then we can receive them from the LORD.

v7 – Who else besides Ephraim had a problem with drunkenness?

They also: Since Isaiah mentions the priest and the prophet, *they also* refers to the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

- The tyranny of drunkenness is something that can touch any person, at any stage of life.

What does it mean, they are out of the way through intoxicating drink?

They are absent from duty. The appeal of drunkenness offers an escape from reality but it is also a denial of reality. Drunkards are of no use in the real world.

v8 – What does drunkenness result in?

For all tables are full of vomit and filth; no place is clean: Drunkenness leads to this kind of degradation and disgrace.

- Alcohol is a depressant; it "loosens" people because it depresses their self-control, their wisdom, their balance and judgment.

How does alcohol as a depressant expose the idea of being “drunk in the Holy Spirit” as an oxymoron?

The Holy Spirit does not depress us; He has the exact opposite effect. The Holy Spirit is a stimulant, and He moves every aspect of our being to better and more perfect performance.

- Of those who act silly or crazy claiming to be “drunk in the Holy Spirit,” the most charitable thing to say is that they are simply acting in their own flesh, because they certainly are not being led by the Holy Spirit of God.

v9 – Who is asking these questions?

Whom will he teach knowledge? These are the words of the drunk, ungodly prophets and priests described in Isaiah 28:7-8. They ask Isaiah, the godly prophet, whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? In their mocking minds, Isaiah’s message is fit only for children (*Those just weaned from milk*).

v10 – How else did the drunkards mock Isaiah?

This is the sarcastic reaction of the Judean leaders to Isaiah’s words of rebuke. They were tired of Isaiah’s strictness and of his recurring application of God’s laws.

- The string of monosyllables in verse 10 may mean that the Judean leaders regarded Isaiah’s message as meaningless or as child’s play.
- The drunkards are claiming they are so smart, spiritually sophisticated and advanced that they’d rather the prophet go on to deeper things.

How did the drunkards of Judea mocking Isaiah’s message actually pay him a great compliment?

It is a beautiful thing for God’s truth to be presented *precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little*.

- When the word of God is properly presented, there is something for both the immature and mature saint to receive, rejoice in and be fed.
- God’s messengers are to present all of God’s word (without skipping a line), and to present it simply and logically.
- This also implies that we can’t receive all aspects of God’s message at once. It is an excellent thing that the gospel is taught us by degrees.

v11 – What does it mean with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people?

If the simple, straightforward message of Isaiah is rejected, God will find another way to communicate to the hard-hearted. He will send unusual messengers to bring the word.

v12 – What would the drunkards not hear?

This is the rest...this is refreshing: The message of rest and deliverance would be rejected by the drunkards.

- But it wasn’t the fault of the word of the LORD — 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.”

v13 – How might the presentation of God’s Word be detrimental to someone?

That they might go and fall backward and be broken and snared and caught: The result of the faithful presentation of the word of the LORD for those who reject isn’t good for them. It will result in their destruction.

So, is the potential for rejecting God’s Word a reason not to present it?

No, because there is also the potential that the hearer will respond and then it will be to their great benefit. We don’t know but should always assume the best because:

Isaiah 55:10-11 – *For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

v14 – How did God describe the rulers of Jerusalem?

As scornful men... those who were expressing contempt for God’s Word. Sadly, some of the simple and immature were those who rule this people. They needed to hear the word of the LORD just as everyone did.

- There is no one too high, exalted, or mature to hear the word of the LORD precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little.

v15 – What was the covenant with death the rulers had made?

The rulers of Jerusalem were extreme in their rejection of God and felt they had an “agreement” with death and the grave (Sheol). They proudly believed the overflowing scourge of God’s judgment and correction would surely not come against them.

Why do people generally have no fear of death today?

They are naturalists who believe this physical world is all there is and thus there is no life after death...

1 Corinthians 15:32 – *If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”*

They have rationalized that death is something to consider some other time, but not today.

Why should the ungodly fear death?

Death ends all opportunity for repentance, and their eternal doom is sealed. Satan has a significant interest in making the wicked feel that death is their friend.

How can those who commit suicide become convinced that death is their friend?

They are deceived by the media with their flippant view of death and demons who have a vested interest in harming humans.

- But without Jesus Christ, the moment those unfortunate people pass into eternity, they would give anything to go back to the world where faith and repentance are still possible.

How do people make lies their refuge?

There is a big difference between wishful thinking and hope... wishful thinking is rationalizing based on a limited human perspective, hope is based on revelation of the Creator of everything.

What kind of lies do people embrace to make their refuge?

- That we are good enough or can be good enough.
- That fate or predestination determines everything, so there is nothing for us to do.
- That places confidence in new, false teachings.
- That mere religious profession is enough.
- That one can have a saved soul and an unchanged life.
- That trusts an old experience instead of an ongoing relationship.

Isaiah 28:16-22 – A Cornerstone in Zion

¹⁶ *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.*

¹⁷ *Also I will make justice the measuring line,
And righteousness the plummet;*

*The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
And the waters will overflow the hiding place.*

¹⁸ *Your covenant with death will be annulled,
And your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
When the overflowing scourge passes through,
Then you will be trampled down by it.*

¹⁹ *As often as it goes out it will take you;
For morning by morning it will pass over,
And by day and by night;*

It will be a terror just to understand the report.”

²⁰ *For the bed is too short to stretch out on,
And the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap
himself in it.*

²¹ *For the Lord will rise up as at Mount Perazim,*

He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—

*That He may do His work, His awesome work,
And bring to pass His act, His unusual act.*

²² *Now therefore, do not be mockers,*

Lest your bonds be made strong;

For I have heard from the Lord God of hosts,

A destruction determined even upon the whole earth.

v16 – What does the Lord lay in Zion (Jerusalem)?

a stone for a foundation: God has a solid foundation for those who trust in Him — a stone for a foundation.

What is this foundation?

1 Peter 2:6 quotes this verse applying it directly to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is the foundation for our lives, and only with a secure, stable foundation can anything lasting be built. Anything “added on” to the house, not built upon the foundation, is sure to end up in wreckage.

Who lays this stone?

It is God’s work. We are unable to provide the right kind of foundation for our lives, but God can lay a foundation for us. We are asked to behold God’s foundation, appreciate it, wonder at it, value it, and build our lives upon it.

How is the foundation stone a tried stone?

Our Messiah was tried, was tested, and was proven to be the glorious, obedient Son of God in all things.

How is the foundation stone a precious cornerstone?

Our Messiah is precious, and a cornerstone. The cornerstone provides the pattern for all the rest of the construction. The cornerstone is straight and true, and everything in the entire building lines up in reference to the cornerstone.

How is the foundation stone a sure foundation?

Our Messiah is immutable... unchanging and He has made promises we can trust and build on without fear.

What does it mean that whoever believes will not act hastily (the one who trusts will never be dismayed)?

The one who trusts in God’s provision will be blessed by not suffering in the consequence for rejecting the Savior.

v17 – How is justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet (plumb line)?

In God’s building, it isn’t just as if He established the cornerstone and then allows the building to be built as anyone pleases. Instead, God keeps the building straight with justice and righteousness.

How will God reveal those who have not built on His foundation?

The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place: The ungodly leaders of Jerusalem made lies their refuge and found a hiding place under falsehood (Isaiah 28:15).

- But the storms of life and God's judgment would sweep away their refuge of lies and their hiding place. They had built on the wrong foundation and would therefore be destroyed.

Jesus spoke of this in the parable of building on the rock: Matthew 7:26-27 – *everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*

v18 – What is the covenant with death the ungodly leaders of Jerusalem made that would be annulled?

They thought they made a “deal with death,” but would find that God would cancel their covenant with death.

- When God's scourge of judgment comes, they will surely be trampled down by it.

Why is the report of God's judgment so terrible?

It is awful to learn that you are on the wrong side of God and have made Him angry. Repent and turn to Him while you still can.

v20 – What kind of bed had the ungodly rulers of Jerusalem made for themselves?

The bed is too short...the covering so narrow: They had to realize that their present place was dangerous, and they could find no refuge where they were at right then.

- Their rejection of God gave them no peace, no rest, and no warmth.

v21– What does it mean the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim?

- At Perazim, the LORD accomplished a great victory for Israel in the days of David (2 Samuel 5:20).
- At Gibeon, the LORD accomplished a great victory for Israel in the days of Joshua (Joshua 10:11).

In those cases, the LORD fought for Israel, but if her leaders did not repent, they would soon find the LORD fighting against Israel. This use of God's strength against His people is surely His awesome work.

Why is God's work characterized here as an unusual or foreign act?

Isaiah 55:8-9 – *My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

God has the big picture and we don't. Consequently, He will often act in way that we do not expect based on our limited perspective.

v22 – Why shouldn't we be mockers?

Because God's judgment is coming and mocking bonds you to that which makes you an enemy of God.

Proverbs 29:1 – *He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

Isaiah 28:23-29 – Listen to the Teaching of God

²³ *Give ear and hear my voice,*

Listen and hear my speech.

²⁴ *Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow?*

Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods?

²⁵ *When he has leveled its surface,*

Does he not sow the black cummin

And scatter the cummin,

Plant the wheat in rows,

The barley in the appointed place,

And the spelt in its place?

²⁶ *For He instructs him in right judgment,*

His God teaches him.

²⁷ *For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge,*

Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin;

But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick,

And the cummin with a rod.

²⁸ *Bread flour must be ground;*

Therefore he does not thresh it forever,

Break it with his cartwheel,

Or crush it with his horsemen.

²⁹ *This also comes from the Lord of hosts,*

Who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance.

v23 – What were the rulers of Jerusalem urged to do?

Give ear and hear my voice: The rulers of Jerusalem had to listen to God's word and pay attention to His voice.

v24-25 – What is the point of the question, *does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow?*

The end of Isaiah 28 is a poem relating the work of God to the work of a farmer. A farmer knows when to stop plowing and when to disc the ground, when to plant, and what to plant where. A farmer uses different tools at different times to produce crops.

- Likewise, God knows what instruments to use in our lives. We don't have to doubt or despair at what God is doing in our lives, because He is an expert farmer, working on us with all His wisdom.

v26 – What does the faithful farmer do?

Allows God to teach him about what to do. This is accomplished through His Word and, when God's Word is silent, discovering God's ways through observation.

v27-28 – What is the point of pointing out different processing for different grain?

God molds us by putting different people through different experiences based on what we need to become more like Him.

v29 – How is God *wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance?*

The phrase *wonderful in counsel* is the same used to describe the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6 (*Wonderful Counselor*). It reminds us of the perfect timing and wisdom of God's work in our lives.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Drunkenness is sin and should not characterize the follower of Christ.
- God's Word is powerful, logical, consistent, builds on itself, and a little bit goes a long way.
- A healthy fear of death should lead a person to God's provision for death.
- Lies are never the refuge they initially appear to be.
- Jesus Christ is the cornerstone on which we should build our lives.