

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 63

May 3, 2020



Jacob blessing the Children of Joseph, nu Rembrandt Cir 1656

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah
Message Sixty-Three
THE JUDGMENT UPON EPHRAIM
May 3, 2020
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Isaiah 28:1–13

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! ²Behold, 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. ³The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under foot: ⁴and 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. ⁵In that day will Jehovah of hosts become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people; ⁶and a spirit of justice to him that sitteth in judgment, and strength to them that turn back the battle at the gate.

⁷And 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. ⁸For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.

⁹Whom 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? ¹⁰For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little.

¹¹Nay, but by men of strange lips and with another tongue will he speak to this people; ¹²to 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. ¹³Therefore 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 (ASV, 1901).

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

King David committed adultery, murder and tried to cover-up the crimes. He was guilty of deliberate, premeditated murder. Therefore the Lord said to him through Nathan the prophet:

II Samuel 12:10–12

¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. ¹¹Thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house; and I will take thy wives before

thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. ¹²For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. ¹³And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah. And Nathan said unto David, Jehovah also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. ¹⁴Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. ¹⁵And Nathan departed unto his house (ASV, 1901).

To his credit, David doesn't try and explain his way out of the sin. David's conscience has been seared by his sin and cover-up. But his heart is still hungry for the Lord he has spurned. David was forgiven (12:13). He should have died for his sins, but he was allowed to live and remain king. He was forgiven due to his genuine repentance but would live with the consequences. But there were going to be painful consequences for his sin. The consequences for David's sins were spelled out and fulfilled precisely. Because David used the sword to strike down Uriah the Hittite, *Now, therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house (dynasty)*. The sword was often employed in David's dynasty. His son, Absalom, would kill another son, Amnon. Absalom would seek to overthrow David, and thus David would have to fight against Absalom and his forces to defend his kingdom. General Joab would kill Absalom. Adonijah would seek to establish himself as king in David's place, and Solomon would eventually have him executed (1 Kings 1 and 2). David's son, Solomon, was the last of the kings of the United Kingdom. His sin was also the reason for the division of the United Kingdom. It was not until after David's son Adonijah sought to seize the throne for himself that David publicly designated Solomon as his successor. Solomon married many foreign wives, and eventually his heart was turned to worship their pagan gods (I Kings 11:1–8).

As a result of Solomon's folly, God announced that he would lose his kingdom. Because of his father David, God would delay this judgment until after Solomon's death: (I Kings 11:9–13). The worse aspect about Solomon's failure is that he never gave evidence of repentance.

After King Solomon died his son Rehoboam could not keep the entire kingdom together, and it split into two sections. Rehoboam kept the Southern region with the property divided between only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam took the Northern region, which had been divided among ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jeroboam was evil and turned the Jews living in the North away from God. He set up false worship centers in Bethel and Dan. He encouraged the Jews to worship two golden calves in services led by priests who were Levites, and who were supposed to be God's chosen priests (Exodus 6:25). Many people, including some Levites who truly loved God and wanted to worship Him in the proper manner, left the Northern Kingdom area and migrated south (II Chronicles 11:14,16). The next eighteen kings of the Northern Kingdom were also evil men who turned the population away from God. This period of the northern kings began with Jeroboam I in 931 B.C. and ended with Hoshea in 722 B.C. Because of their exceeding sinful practices, God enabled the Assyrians to conquer and remove them from the land of Israel. This section of Isaiah give details of the nature of the sins the Northern Ten Tribal leaders committed. The Northern Tribes collectively have been called Israel, Samaria and Ephraim after the largest individual tribe of the ten wherein was the capital Samaria.

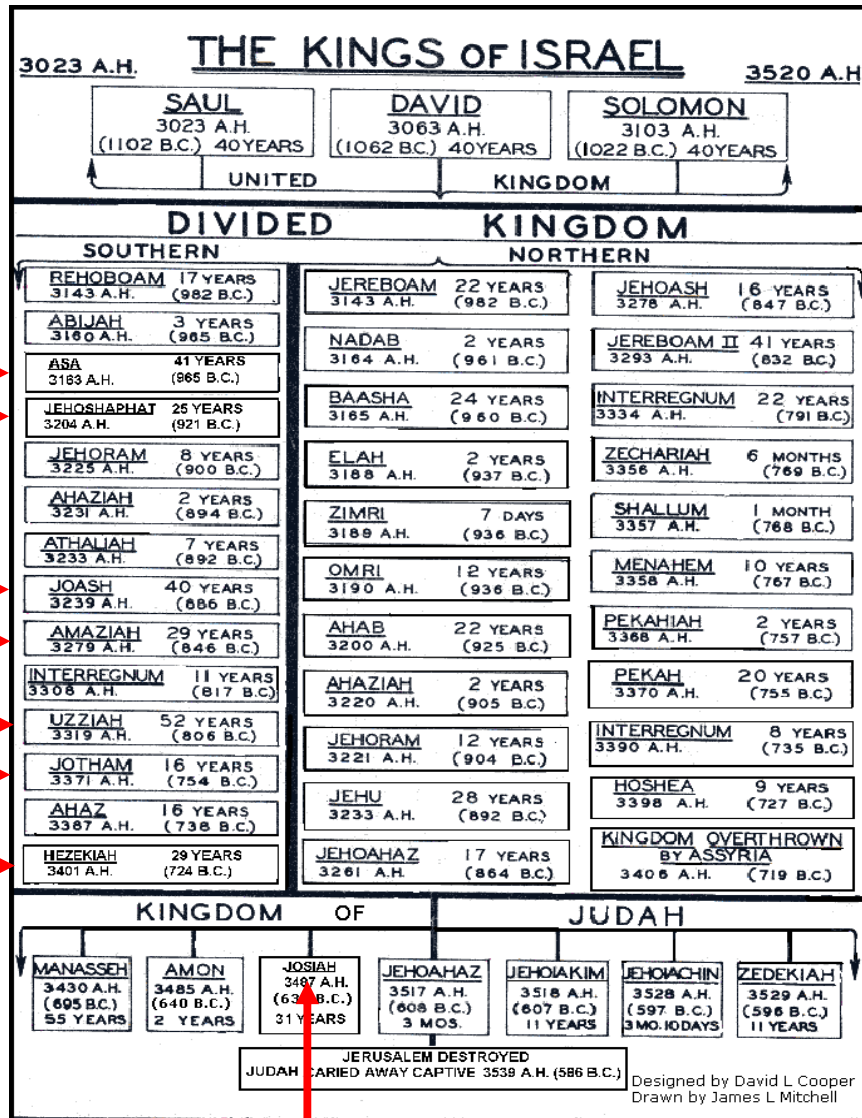
ALL THE LEADERS ARE FAILURES

Isaiah 28:1–3

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,

²Behold, 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.
³The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under foot: (ASV, 1901)!

Every King of Ephraim was sinful and disobeyed God. Judah had eight good kings. They are marked with a red arrow.



Source: <https://www.biblicalresearch.info>, arrows added

This city of Samaria was built by Omri, a king of Israel (B.C. 925), and he made this city the capital of his kingdom. The city was built on a pleasant and fertile hill, and was surrounded with a rich valley, with a circle of hills beyond; and the beauty of the hill on which the city was built suggested the idea of a wreath or chaplet of flowers, or a *crown*. American biblical scholar, Edward Robinson in his book on Palestine made the following observation of the beauty of this area:

“It would be difficult to find, in all Palestine, a situation of equal strength, fertility, and beauty combined”¹

God through Isaiah now addresses the people of Isaiah’s own generation, beginning with a harsh criticism of those of the Ten Tribes who had not yet been exiled. Woe to the Ten Tribes, whose leader was Ephraim, who exult in their bounty as if they are adorning themselves with crowns. They immerse themselves totally in gorging themselves, drinking to excess and overuse perfuming oils (Amos 6:6). They indulge themselves until they are so drunk they vomit, and then go right back to their hedonistic behavior. In their pride, they ignore God and His commandments and forget that the world is His not theirs.

The drunkenness and excessive use of material pleasures led to the exile of the Ten Tribes. The delight of its glory is a fading blossom. Like a beautiful flower that will eventually wither and die so too will Ephraim. The Lord is blaming their pride on the volume of produce of their land and their addiction to hedonistic pleasures (Hosea 7:5; Amos 6:6).

Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one; Now the Lord goes on to explain how He will correct the sins of Ephraim. He will use a powerful king, with a mighty army, meaning Shalmaneser king of Assyria to bring down the pride of Ephraim, and chastise them for their excessive debauchery: *which as a tempest of hail;* that beats down herbs and plants, and branches of trees, and men and beasts: *and a destroying storm;* which carries all before it, blows down houses and trees, and makes terrible devastation wherever it comes: *as a flood of mighty waters overflowing;* whose torrent is so strong there is no stopping it. All these descriptions are warnings to Ephraim which they did not heed.

Therefore, the Assyrians *shall cast down to the earth with the hand;* the crown of their pride, the people of Israel, and its last king Hoshea. They shall remove the crown from the king’s head, and cast it to the ground very easily with great violence. With the leaders so sorely engaged in drunkenness they will not be prepared for what is coming upon them.

THE SIEGE

Isaiah 28:4

⁴and 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. (ASV, 1901)!

The “beauty” of Samaria would tempt the Assyrians to desire it as soon as they saw it, and would raise an appetite which would be like the attraction of *the first-ripe fig before the summer*. As soon as the fig is seen it is immediately eaten. Samaria’s siege, once begun, was intense, carried out without any breaks, and lasted less than three years (2 Kings 18:9, 10).

¹ Robinson, Edward, *Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arab Petrea*, Published by Crocker & Brewster New York 1841. Pg. 146

THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM WILL BE SPARED FOR NOW

Isaiah 28:5–6

⁵*In that day will Jehovah of hosts become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people; ⁶and a spirit of justice to him that sitteth in judgment, and strength to them that turn back the battle at the gate (ASV, 1901).*

This verse switches to a new subject, and affirms that at the time the kingdom of Israel will be destroyed, the kingdom of Judah would be preserved for they will *become a crown of glory*. The Lord shall reign there as its king, and he shall guard and defend the remnant of his people there. This reign of Jehovah shall be to them far better than palaces, towers, walls, and fruitful fields, and shall be a more beautiful ornament than the proud city of Samaria was to the kingdom of Israel. The Lord's Temple was there in Jerusalem. He goes on to further describe His presence in Judah as *a diadem of beauty* or a beautiful garland. The phrase makes a distinction to the wreath of flowers or the diadem which was represented as adorning the kingdom and capital of Israel. Jehovah and his government would be to Judah their chief glory and ornament. *Unto the residue of his people* describes the kingdom of Judah, comprising the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This doubtless refers to the blessed times of the reign of Hezekiah and the other seven faithful kings of Judah.

The sense of this passage is, that Jehovah would enlighten the judges of the land, so that they should understand what was right, and be led to do it. *To him that sitteth in judgment* refers to those who sat as judges in the courts, which is, the magistrate in general. Finally, the Lord assured Judah His Divine protection, when He says, *And, for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate*. That is, to the very gate of their enemies, who not only repel their enemies from their own city, but who drive them even to the gates of their own cities, and besiege them there.

JUDAH WILL EVENTUALLY FOLLOW EPHRAIM

Isaiah 28:7–8

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. ⁸For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean (ASV, 1901).*

The Lord through Isaiah uses the fate coming on Samaria to warn the rulers of the Southern Kingdom. Because they also have erred. Even though there were eight good kings the rest were apostates. The text says that *they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment*. It is repeated here for emphasis and to show the severity of the sin in carrying out the most responsible sacred function declaring God's revealed will. The priests stumbled in judgment in their sacred responsibility in carrying the Law to the people (Deuteronomy 17:9; 19:17).

The shocking condition of those who pretended to serve God was also described by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 48:26). The text concludes with a vivid description of the filthy residue of their debauchery. The tables at which they sat as they engaged in excessive drinking were filthy and remained that way. There was no place in their houses which was free from the disgusting garbage produced by their drunkenness from the excessive use of wine.

CONTEMPT FOR GOD'S WORD

Isaiah 28:9–10

⁹Whom 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? ¹⁰For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little (ASV, 1901).

The prophet Isaiah is now mocked by those leaders who have been strongly criticized by the Lord, namely, the priests and the false prophets. Isaiah introduces his adversaries as replying to him with taunting speeches “*Whom will he teach knowledge?*” they ask. Then they taunt Isaiah as if he is treating them as infants when they ask, “*them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?*”

Does he forget that we are grown men, priests and prophets? And what poor teaching it is! What endless petty teasing. The priests were supposed to teach the law and the prophets received visions from which they spoke for God. These now mock him, saying that his teaching and admonishments are meaningless and not worth listening to. Maybe babes would listen to him, but they would never understand a word. Or it may be that the priests and prophets are asking, “Does he consider us as infants ‘weaned from the milk?’” They say, “For it is precept upon precept ... line upon line ...”. This literal translation of the Hebrew text might be described as proclaiming it as meaningless, boring, and superficial teaching of Isaiah.

To most of the world today the prophetic word of God sounds rather boring or simply old myth. It sounds like childlike chatter, it is illogical, and it belongs to an old not-with-it tradition.

Their intention is to throw ridicule upon the character of the prophet's chidings. Knowledge ... doctrine. These are technical terms in Isaiah's teaching, which his adversaries seem to have ridiculed as “catch-words.” The term translated “doctrine” means properly “tidings,” and involves the idea that the prophet obtained the teaching so designated by direct revelation from God. They can't specifically argue against the actual text of his doctrine so they engage in ad hominem attacks on the quality of his teaching.

They say that the whole teaching is nothing but an accumulation of precept upon precept, rule upon rule, one little injunction followed up by another, here little, there a little. The objectors profess to find in the prophet's teaching nothing grand, nothing broad—no enunciation of great Godly principles. They accuse him of producing petty maxims and rules, which are beneath these men who had had the training of priests and prophets, but should have understood God's admonishment to them. They were simply revolted at a teaching which seemed to them narrow, childish, and wearisome. Here we hear the babbling of the drunken scoffers who are taking the attitude of their superiority and denial of God's corrective message coming through Isaiah. The Word of God came to them so plainly that they rejected it. They did not think it applied to them. They wanted something they thought was more sophisticated for their so-called learned and experienced ears. So, they reject its direct straightforward admonition of their sinful behavior.

NOW GOD HIMSELF WILL TEACH THEM

Isaiah 28:11–13

¹¹Nay, but by men of strange lips and with another tongue will he speak to this people; ¹²to 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. ¹³Therefore 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 (ASV, 1901).

The prophet replies. The LORD has been patient and merciful towards the people of Judah, because he considers them to be a tired and weary people (Isaiah 28:12). But now the prophet proclaims a clear message, urging the people to repent and to receive peace in the LORD. But instead they look forward to receiving support from Egypt and to enjoying themselves with banquets and wine, even as they oppress the poor (Jeremiah 7).

Therefore, God Himself brings the message to the mockers, the proud who rejected the soft message from Isaiah as he rebuked them according to the simplicity of God's Word. Now God says He will speak to them in quite a different way, that is, in the foreign speech of a conqueror. The nature of God's message coming through the prophet Isaiah in their own tongue was "comforting for the weary," or a tender message of grace. Sadly, they would have none of it, and rejected it completely resorting to mockery. Which means they refused the gentle first delivery of the truth, and now they will see a more severe Divine delivery of God's judgment. Thus, Jehovah will continue to speak in simplest, clearest words; *precept upon precept; line upon line here a little, there a little.*

As a result of the leaders refusing to listen to the Word of God in their own language and bend their behavior to it people will be forced to listen to their oppressors, although they will not be able to understand them. The people must now obey continuously all the alien's precepts and rules. They will feel tempted to disobey and flee away, but the consequences would be even worse. They would fall backward, bruised and broken, like an animal that has been snared and captured (24:18). Such then will be the fall of Jerusalem and of its leaders. Though God had offered Israel rest and repose they refused to listen to Him and His messenger. Therefore, the Lord would turn their mocking back on them and they would be injured, snared, and captured by a people whose language they did not understand. Such is the fate of unbelievers who mock the Word of God and lead people away from its saving grace to eternal punishment.

NEXT MESSAGE: THE JUDGMENT AGAINST JUDAH CONTINUED

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