

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #37

Isaiah 28:1-13

I know of a case in which two children were in the home and one day one of the children arrogantly defied the father who immediately brought discipline down on the child. As the other child watched all of this, that child realized I'm not about to do the same thing. That child just watched a serious judgment leveled against the sibling and had enough sense to not do the same thing. Unfortunately, when it comes to Israel and Judah, they haven't learned that lesson yet.

We come now to a new section in the book of Isaiah. In **chapters 24-27** we saw prophecies that were all futuristic and global. From **chapters 28-35** we have a series of prophecies which are primarily local around Israel and some of the prophecies, not all, have already been fulfilled.

Now this new section may be identified by six "woe" judgments (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1). **A woe judgment is a very negative ferocious judgment of God, and when it is aimed at a specific target the news from God is not good.** That Hebrew word "woe" (hoi) means that God is targeting and threatening something with judgmental misfortune that will leave them lamenting (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 219). Many of the targets in this next section are His own people.

This next section gives these "woe" judgments and then it culminates in chapter 34 with a graphic description of Armageddon. This is followed by an amazing grace chapter 35, which describes the millennial blessings that will eventually be brought to the earth.

Now we come in this section to our first "woe" judgment and it is a judgment against Ephraim. Ephraim is a term that was used by Isaiah to refer to northern kingdom Israel. What is predicted by Isaiah is that Assyria would sweep into Israel and destroy her. The point to see is this:

GOD WARNS ISRAEL THAT HE IS GOING TO POUR OUT HIS JUDGMENT FOR HER ARROGANT REFUSAL TO CAREFULLY LEARN AND APPLY HIS WORD, AND AS HE DOES THIS, JUDAH SHOULD LEARN TO NEVER DO THE THINGS THAT BROUGHT ABOUT THAT JUDGMENT.

Now as we look down through these verses, there are some serious reasons why He brought a judgment against His own people and permitted His own people to be overtaken by a foreign power.

REASON #1 – God was sending His judgment against Ephraim because of her pride.
28:1a, 3

The reason why the tribe of Ephraim is singled out is because of her close location to Judah - just to her north. Anything that would happen in Ephraim would be known in Judah.

Now according to Calvin Delitsch, the reference to “proud crown” is a reference to the capital city of Israel which was Samaria. Samaria was a beautiful city in Isaiah’s day which overlooked a beautiful valley. The people were proud of the beauty of where they lived. It was a prosperous place and it was a party place. As you will see, it was not a place that wanted a careful understanding of God’s Word. God said your beauty is about to fade (**vv. 1, 4**).

REASON #2 – God was sending His judgment against Ephraim because of her drunkenness .
28:1

Now the language of this chapter is not language that describes someone who has a glass of wine or two in the evening with a meal. In fact, the Old Testament Law of God did not demand total abstinence and neither does the New Testament. The language of this chapter describes a bunch of drunks who get up in the morning and start drinking as soon as one can get a drink in his hand and that is something the Law of God did forbid. Drunkenness is a serious sin against God and His Word (Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Proverbs 20:1; 23:20-21, 29-35).

The political leaders of Israel, the religious leaders of Israel and the people of Israel had become a bunch of hard core drunkards. Things had been so prosperous that many in the nation sat around drinking all day.

This is kind of like what happens in certain Indian reservations where people get money from the government and don’t have to work for it. They just get up and start drinking. The Israelites were drinking more than just wine; they were drinking the hard stuff. The language in this chapter makes that point clear.

Look at what Isaiah says about them in **verse 1** and in **verses 7-8**: Isaiah calls them “drunkards” (**v. 1**), “overcome with wine” (**v. 1**), those who “reel with wine” (**v. 7**); those who “stagger from strong drink” (**v. 7**); the priest and prophet “reel with strong drink” (**v. 7**); “they are confused by wine and stagger from strong drink” (**v. 7**); they have visions (**v. 7**); they cannot make proper judgments (**v. 7**) and they vomit all over the tables (**v. 8**). These people were not just drinking wine, they were getting stoned drunk.

There are some key words that show us how bad the problem was: “reel”, “stagger” and “confused.”

The word “reel” means they are so focused on drinking that their minds have wandered far away from everything of virtue or piety when it comes to God. They are so addicted to drink that they lose their devotion to God. They actually go astray from God to drink (*Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 870). People who are this given over to drinking stop worshipping God. They stop going to church to hear God’s Word. They stop fellowshiping with God’s people. They lose any piety that they once had.

The word “stagger” is one that means one is totally intoxicated with drinking alcohol to the point that he will wander astray and even transgress or sin just to drink (*Ibid.*, pp. 804-805).

The word “confused” means they are so focused on swallowing down alcohol that they destroy themselves (*Ibid.*, p. 123).

God was appalled by the drunkenness of His own people. He had seen enough and it was time for Him to step in and bring this capital city and its leaders down.

Years ago a government official in Washington D.C. said, “We have three parties in this city: the Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the cocktail party.” Did you know that Washington D.C. ranks very high on the list of cities noted for its alcohol consumption (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Comforted*, p. 71)?

In **verses 2-4** God warns of precisely what He will do:

(Warning #1) - He has a strong and mighty agent that He will bring against His own people. **28:2a**

(Warning #2) - He will send His agent as a storm to destroy and drown His people. **28:2b**

(Warning #3) - He will cast His people down to the earth with His own hand. **28:2c**

(Warning #4) - He will permit His own people to be trampled. **28:3**

(Warning #5) - He will cause all of His glory to fade away. **28:4**

In fact, God warns that He would permit Samaria to become like a ripened fig that is eaten by some stranger before it could become everything God wanted it to become.

In fact, God says in **verses 5-6**, when all is said and done only a remnant of my people will be left and those who are left will worship Me and honor Me as the beautiful crowning glory, the royal diadem. There will be justice in judgment and strength given to those who repel the sin. God literally did do this in allowing Assyria to move into ten tribes and overthrow them in 721 B.C.

Now before we move on, we need to make a few key observations:

- 1) God’s people must guard against pride.
- 2) God’s people must guard against drunkenness.
- 3) When a religious leader claims he has received a message or vision from God, he is out of his mind.
- 4) God wants His leaders and people making just judgments.

REASON #3 – God was sending His judgment against Ephraim because it mocked His prophet who was carefully teaching God’s Word verse by verse. **28:9-13**

The tragedy described in **verse 9** is that God could not find anyone in Israel who was interested in actually hearing and understanding the Word of God in a systematic way. God says, “To whom can I even teach My knowledge and who can interpret My word?” He said, I can’t teach it to babies who have just been weaned from their mothers, but there is no one else in Israel who even wants to understand My Word.

Now there are some key words in **verse 9** that are critical to hermeneutics, which is the art and science of Bible interpretation.

The goal of careful systematic study of Scripture is “knowledge.” That Hebrew word “knowledge” is one that means to know something at an intelligent and wise level of understanding (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 205). God wants His people to be very intelligent and wise in their understanding of His Word.

Now, in my opinion, here is one of the great texts which presents to us the three-part formula as to how this happens. This text should be studied in every seminary, Bible college and Bible institute. This text should be understood by every pastor, board member and by every member of the congregation. If you are a believer interested in truly growing, then when you go to church you should expect and even demand that this formula be followed. It is not my concept of hermeneutics, it is inspired by God.

Formula Part #1 - Careful preparation and interpretation .

The one who is presenting the message must give a careful “interpretation” of God’s Word. That word “interpret” is one that means it is the minister’s job to carefully understand and discern precisely what the text is saying and then communicate this in a skillful way that causes (Hiphil stem) others to be able to understand it (Ibid., pp. 113-114).

If you are to grow to a skilled and intelligent and wise level of knowledge of God’s Word, then this is a key part of the process. No minister has any right to just stand up and wing it or randomly share thoughts that he says, “God laid on his heart,” which may or may not be true. His job is to carefully understand a text of Scripture and then handle it in a very skillful way. If he is doing his job, then the potential of real growth is very real.

Formula Part #2 - Accurate public communication .

The process by which God’s people gain this knowledge is by listening to a message being communicated by a man of God. The word “message” refers to instruction, teaching, doctrine which is heard (Ibid., pp. 833-834). As you go to a place to hear the Word of God carefully taught, your knowledge level increases and you begin to become intelligent and wise in your understanding.

Here was exactly the problem with Israel. God could not find any who actually wanted to go and be taught His Word by even a skilled prophet like Isaiah. It is a shame that people all over this area do not get this point. You do not grow simply because you go to a church service. You grow by carefully and accurately understanding God’s Word. Unfortunately, in most churches this is not the goal and that is why you do not have any real growth or real depth.

Formula Part #3 - Careful systematic exposition.

God demands that He wants His Word taught “order on order, line on line, a little at a time.” What this certainly reveals is that He wants His people to carefully go through every one of His books and doctrines so they thoroughly understand them.

Now teaching, learning and accurately interpreting the Word of God is a serious systematic process. It is slow, patient, continuous work. To go through God's Word order on order, line on line, a little at a time takes time, a lot of time. Just to get to this point in the book of Isaiah has taken us some 37 studies and we have been traveling at a relatively consistent pace. It took us seven years to carefully go through all the major doctrines.

God wants His people going through His Word this way; but in Isaiah's day He could not find any in Israel who were interested in that approach. They did not want to learn God's Word, so in **verse 11** God says I'll speak to you another way, in a different way - I'll permit a foreign power who does not speak Hebrew to come into your land and destroy you.

God says you are a bunch of arrogant drunks who don't see the need of carefully and accurately understanding My Word, so I'll let a foreign power come into your land and let them rest right here (**v. 12**). God says, I'll force you to get back to the basics of the importance of My Word (**v. 13**). Israel will be brought to the place where she will be forced to go backwards and realize she should have been focused on God's precious Word.

Had Israel been interested in accurately understanding and applying God's Word, God would have blessed her and she would not have found herself threatened by anyone. But she got away from God's Word and found herself in a serious mess.

I believe churches today are in the same mess as Israel. Most of them are not serious about carefully understanding every book of the Bible so people can grow.

I want to read something that was written by J. Vernon McGee back in the 1980s:

"There are many Christians today who are not satisfied with their Christian lives. To be brutally frank, they are ignorant of the Word of God. Then they hear about a wonderful two-week course that will give them the answers to all their problems. They will learn how to handle their marital problems, how to get along with their mother-in-law, how to guide their children aright, and how to become model employees. My friend, let me say this to you very candidly. Neither a little course nor some great emotional experience will solve your problems. There is no shortcut to success in the Christian life. There is only one way to grow as a Christian, and it is so commonplace and ordinary that I hesitate to say it. The Word of the Lord was given unto Israel precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little. It was the daily grind of getting into God's Word. What happened? Israel did not follow through. They fell backward; that is, they were in a backslidden state. There are many Christians in the same condition today. It is not that they are weaker than anybody else; it is simply that they do not spend enough time in the Word of God. I realize that this method is not very exciting, but line upon line and precept upon precept is the only way you are going to grow in the Christian life" (*Thru the Bible*, Isaiah, Vol. 3, p. 261).

Do not ever make the mistake of arrogantly thinking you no longer need careful exposition of God's Word. Do not be intoxicated by the direction of most churches today. You stay faithful in a church where you are carefully taught the Scriptures. You go every week and take in a little here and there and your spiritual life will be solid as a rock.