

A Sure Foundation

Today we have a passage announcing judgment on Israel and Judah and some beautiful pictures of the Lord Jesus to bless the hearts of believers then and now. The apostles drew on these verses to encourage their own generation and their testimony still stands sure and firm. Our God has laid in Zion a chief corner stone 'and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded'.

A crown of pride

Drunkenness is frequently denounced in scripture as a source of shame and a cause for judgment, so, too, is man's sinful pride. Isaiah declares that Ephraim, used for the ten tribes of Israel, is guilty of both drunkenness and pride; sensual indulgence and abusing God's kindness. The Lord is about to use Assyria, a mighty and strong enemy, to tread the nation down. Ephraim means fruitfulness but for its sin Israel had become a fading flower and a fruit ripe to be eaten.

A crown of glory

Isaiah contrasts Israel's 'crown of pride' with the 'crown of glory' which the Lord is to His remnant people. 'In that day' again points us beyond immediate historical events and partial fulfilment to the full crown of glory manifested in the gospel age and the blessings of Jesus Christ. Judah, as distinct from Israel, would remain independent under the reign of Hezekiah and others for a hundred years after Israel fell to Assyria. However, spiritually speaking the 'crown of glory' and 'diadem of beauty' more fully direct us to Christ's kingly and priestly offices.

Swallowed up by wine

Despite the Lord's temporal blessings on Judah it, too, stumbled under drunkenness. After the reign of Hezekiah and with the exception of Josiah its national and particularly its religious leaders failed the people and became shameful in their ignorance and also for the disgusting filthiness that followed excess intoxication. Strong drink prevented the leaders from judging rightly and disqualified them from useful service before God. The people largely followed the example of their leaders.

Broken, snared and taken

When the Lord sent faithful prophets to speak gently to the nation telling them, 'This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing' Judah would not listen even when taught with great simplicity, a little at a time, as children might be taught, instruction by instruction. But as with Israel, the Lord sent judgment on Judah, too. He would speak in a severe, rough manner by His providences and bring a people against them who spoke a strange language and with whom they could not make peace.

Babylon and Rome

These prophecies were partially fulfilled when Babylon conquered Judah and perhaps more fully point to the later destruction by Rome. By this time it is clear the Jewish religious leaders were no longer listening to God's message at all or serving God's people. By the time of Christ's ministry they had become a self-serving elite who assumed they could strike a deal with the devil and lie and deceive their way to survival. Isaiah calls this making 'a covenant with death', and confessing 'with hell are we at agreement'.

A better covenant

Despite rejection by the Jews Christ the Messiah has been laid as a durable foundation and chief corner stone by God Himself according to the eternal purpose of grace and salvation. Christ was the tried stone in whom Old Testament saints trusted. He is a stone of great value; precious to His Father and all who rest on Him for mercy and life. He is a sure foundation for personal faith and everlasting comfort and will endure for ever granting peace and joy to all who build upon Him. Judgment for the wicked and mercy for the elect unites and coalesces in Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42-44).

Too big for your bed!

Isaiah mocks God's enemies with a telling metaphor against those who seek comfort and rest outside of Christ. A short bed and a small blanket give little comfort and must prove inadequate for real rest. In closing the chapter the prophet

indicates that the Lord manages the needs of His church with personal attention and individual care. A good farmer manages his land. A good husbandman protects his crops. Our Lord 'is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working' for the wellbeing of His church.

Amen

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