

TRUST IN THE LORD FOREVER

(Isaiah Chapters 27 and 28)

If you recall, when we let off in Isaiah 26, somewhere in the time-frame of 700 B.C., we were talking about songs Isaiah was including among his prophecies. We found, especially in chapters 23—26, that at times Isaiah was so overwhelmed with what God was doing and was going to do that he just had to break out into song:

Isaiah 25:1, NIV:

*O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you and praise your name,
for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things,
things planned long ago.*

Isaiah 26:3, 4, ESV

³*You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.*
⁴*Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.*

Keep in mind that the people Isaiah was writing to were struggling with sin and idolatry. He was warning them that if they didn't get their act together there would be judgment, and they would be taken captive by an oppressive nation and carried away from their beloved homeland. Isaiah therefore had to write of some dark and heavy things, but in the midst of that he could find reasons to praise God and call on the people to put their trust in the Lord.

So let's dig in to Isaiah 27.

Isaiah 27:1:

I In that day the Lord will take his terrible, swift sword and punish Leviathan, the swiftly moving serpent, the coiling, writhing serpent, the dragon of the sea.

Again we see the phrase "*In that Day*" which clues us this pertains to the end times, so this verse, referring to the culmination of God's judgment on the world, ties in with the judgment mentioned in Isaiah 26:21. With a sword the LORD will cut up a great serpent called Leviathan. This swiftly moving serpent is the many-headed sea dragon mentioned in Psalm 74:13-14. In Ugaritic literature (Ugarit being a city-state in North Syria) reference is made to a similar seven-headed creature. Isaiah, though not believing this ancient Semitic myth, simply referred to Leviathan to convey his point. This creature is also mentioned in Job 3:8. Leviathan, the twisting monster of the sea, was viewed in Ugaritic literature as an enemy of order in Creation. But God can and will stop this chaotic state and establish order on the earth and in people's hearts. When God's

judgment comes in that day, when He slays the wicked at the end of the Tribulation, it will be like His slaying the menacing dragon Leviathan.

This verse is loaded with symbolism. Leviathan—the dragon, the serpent—clearly makes us think of Satan who entered the serpent so he could tempt Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Ever since, we have associated the serpent with Satan. In Revelation 12 Satan is pictured as a dragon, who tries to kill the baby of a woman. The woman represents the nation of Israel and the baby represents Christ. The term “sea” in verse 1 is sometimes used in the Bible to symbolize, that is represent, “*nations*” (Isaiah 60:5; Daniel 7:3; Revelation 13:1) or “*people*” (Isaiah 17:12; Jeremiah 6:23).

So you can get a picture from verse one of God punishing Satan (Leviathan), the dragon who has been roaming the earth seeking to devour whomever he can (1 Peter 5:8).

Isaiah 27:2-6: GOD’S POINT OF VIEW

2 *“In that day we will sing of the pleasant vineyard (Israel)¹*

3 *I, the Lord, will watch over it and tend its fruitful vines. Each day I will water them; day and night I will watch to keep enemies away.*

4 *My anger against Israel will be gone. If I find briars and thorns bothering her, I will burn them up.*

5 *These enemies will be spared only if they surrender and beg for peace and protection.”*

6 ***The time is coming when my people will take root. Israel will bud and blossom and fill the whole earth with her fruit!***

Starting with verses 2-11 we encounter another hymn; this one gives us God’s point of view. Again we find symbolism. The vineyard symbolizes Israel (see Isaiah 5:7). In the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 destruction was emphasized; in the song of the vineyard here in Isaiah 27:2-6 the promise of protection is the primary theme. In the first song the vineyard was to be made a wasteland because of the people’s sinful condition. In the second song the vineyard, Israel, is to be made fruitful. After God judges Israel in verse 1, the nation will be spiritually fruitful. This fruitfulness comes because of the Lord’s constant protection and care in verse 3. If the vineyard (Israel) does not please the LORD, He must judge it, verse 4; but He much prefers that they turn to Him in repentance as their Refuge, verse 5. This desire that Israel be in the proper covenant relationship with Him is born out by the comment, “*These enemies will be spared only if they surrender and beg for peace and protection.*”

When the Kingdom Age arrives, that is when Jesus will rule the earth from His throne in Jerusalem), Israel will be productive again (Isaiah 35:1-3, 6-7; Amos 9:13-14; Zechariah 14:8) and will be the nation through which God will bless the world (Genesis 12:3).

Isaiah 27:7-8:

¹ Parentheses added.

*7 Has the Lord punished Israel in the same way he has punished her enemies? No, for he devastated her enemies,
8 but he has punished Israel only a little. He has exiled her from her land as though blown away in a storm from the east.*

Because God cares for His people He will judge them and purify them so they can be fruitful. Isaiah foretold that judgment would come on Israel. But He will not treat her the way He treats her enemies. Even in chastening or discipline God's love and care for His people is evident. He will judge Israel by warfare and exile (Deuteronomy 28:64-68). The east wind in verse 8 may refer figuratively to Babylon, east of Israel, which took Judah into captivity.

The Exile would help purify Judah so that she would not worship foreign gods and goddesses. From the time Israel returned from exile in Babylon she never again worshipped any false gods.

Isaiah 27:9-11

9 The Lord did this to purge away Israel's sin. When he has finished, all the pagan altars will be crushed to dust. There won't be an Asherah pole or incense altar left standing.

10 Israel's fortified cities will be silent and empty, the houses abandoned, the streets covered with grass. Cattle will graze there, chewing on twigs and branches.

11 The people are like the dead branches of a tree, broken off and used for kindling beneath the cooking pots. Israel is a foolish and stupid nation, for its people have turned away from God. Therefore, the one who made them will show them no pity or mercy.

The sin of the nation of Judah had to be atoned for. Of course atonement for all sin is through the death of Jesus Christ. But in view of Israel's covenant relationship with God, she had to be driven out of the land because of her disobedience to the Law (Deuteronomy 28:49-52, 64). Evidence of that atonement would be her pulverizing her altar stones dedicated to idolatrous gods, and removing the Asherah poles, wooden symbols of the Canaanite pagan goddess of fertility.

Because of Judah's sin, her city, Jerusalem, would be destroyed and its people removed. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and was left desolate. Isaiah said calves would graze in Jerusalem's ruins and being hungry would strip tree branches of their bark. Women then would cut off the branches and use them for firewood. In judging His senseless people, God, their Maker and Creator, temporarily withdrew His compassion from them.

Isaiah 27:12-13:

12 Yet the time will come when the Lord will gather them together one by one like handpicked grain. He will bring them to his great threshing

floor—from the Euphrates River in the east to the brook of Egypt in the west.

13 In that day the great trumpet will sound. Many who were dying in exile in Assyria and Egypt will return to Jerusalem to worship the Lord on his holy mountain.

You have to remember that Isaiah is talking to an agricultural society. That is why he uses the farming figures of speech so often. That language spoke clearly to those people, although it is harder for us to understand. In these verses we've just read, the Lord promised that in that day He will thresh, that is he will judge, a large area from the Euphrates River to the brook (or Wadi) of Egypt. In other words, the Lord will judge this large area of land for the purpose of bringing His people back to Jerusalem. The "brook of Egypt" may be the stream that marks the southwest border of Canaan (Numbers 34:4-5; 1 Kings 8:65). Or perhaps it refers to the Nile; since the point of Isaiah 27:12 is that the Lord will re-gather His people from both Assyria and Egypt, two great enemies of Israel throughout most of her history up to Assyria's fall in 609 BC. The people will be re-gathered to the holy mountain in Jerusalem, that is, the temple mount where the Messiah will reign (Isaiah 24:23). In God's kingdom on earth Israel will dwell in the land of Palestine as believers.

Verse 13 of chapter 27 indicates the people will be worshipping the Lord. Their worship would undoubtedly include singing praises to the great Lord God, their Creator, Protector, and Deliverer. Truly the people of Judah would have much to sing about after God brought them out of the dark night of captivity back to their homeland, and from the darkness of being scattered among the nations into internal redemption.

Now let's move on into Isaiah chapter 28.

Isaiah Chapter 28

This chapter introduces a new series of prophetic messages covering chapters 28-33. This section is characterized by six oracles which remind us of those in Isaiah 5. These, however, have to do with Israel and the surrounding nations in the last days, although the first one has already had a partial fulfillment in the judgment that fell on Ephraim when Shalmaneezer, King of Assyria, overthrew the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. But that judgment was a forerunner of an even greater disaster that will yet fall upon the land to which Israel returned in 1948 and is now recognized once again as an independent nation.

Isaiah 28:1-29 NLT:

*1 **DESTRUCTION IS CERTAIN FOR THE CITY OF SAMARIA**—the pride and joy of the drunkards of Israel! It sits in a rich valley, but its glorious beauty will suddenly disappear. Destruction is certain for that city—the pride of a people brought low by wine.*

2 For the Lord will send the mighty Assyrian army against it. Like a mighty hailstorm and a torrential rain, they will burst upon it and dash it

to the ground.

3 *The proud city of Samaria—the pride and joy of the **drunkards** of Israel—will be trampled beneath its enemies' feet.*

4 *It sits in a fertile valley, but its glorious beauty will suddenly disappear. It will be greedily snatched up, as an early fig is hungrily picked and eaten.*

5 *Then at last the Lord Almighty will himself be Israel's crowning glory. He will be the pride and joy of the remnant of his people.*

6 *He will give a longing for justice to their judges. He will give great courage to their warriors who stand at the gates.*

7 *Now, however, Israel is being led by drunks! The priests and prophets reel and stagger from beer and wine. They make stupid mistakes as they carry out their responsibilities.*

8 *Their tables are covered with vomit; filth is everywhere.*

9 *They say, "Who does the Lord think we are? Why does he speak to us like this? Are we little children, barely old enough to talk?"*

10 *He tells us everything over and over again, a line at a time, in very simple words!"*

11 ***Since they refuse to listen**, God will speak to them through foreign oppressors who speak an unknown language!*

12 ***God's people could have rest in their own land if they would only obey him, but they will not listen.***

13 *So the Lord will spell out his message for them again, repeating it over and over, a line at a time, in very simple words. Yet they will stumble over this simple, straightforward message. They will be injured, trapped, and captured.*

14 *Therefore, listen to this message from the Lord, you scoffing rulers in Jerusalem.*

15 *You boast that you have struck a bargain to avoid death and have made a deal to dodge the grave. You say, "The Assyrians can never touch us, for we have built a strong refuge made of lies and deception."*

16 *Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem. It is firm, a tested and precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never run away again."*

17 *"I will take the measuring line of justice and the plumb line of righteousness to check the foundation wall you have built. Your refuge looks strong, but since it is made of lies, a hailstorm will knock it down. Since it is made of deception, the enemy will come like a flood to sweep it away.*

18 *I will cancel the bargain you made to avoid death, and I will overturn your deal to dodge the grave. When the terrible enemy floods in, you will be trampled into the ground.*

19 *Again and again that flood will come, morning after morning, day and*

night, until you are carried away.” This message will bring terror to your people.

20 For you have no place of refuge—the bed you have made is too short to lie on. The blankets are too narrow to cover you.

21 The Lord will come suddenly and in anger, as he did against the Philistines at Mount Perazim and against the Amorites at Gibeon. He will come to do a strange, unusual thing: He will destroy his own people!

22 So scoff no more, or your punishment will be even greater. For the Lord, the Lord Almighty, has plainly told me that he is determined to crush you.

23 Listen to me; listen as I plead!

24 Does a farmer always plow and never sow? Is he forever cultivating the soil and never planting it?

25 Does he not finally plant his seeds for dill, cumin, wheat, barley, and spelt, each in its own section of his land?

26 The farmer knows just what to do, for God has given him understanding.

27 He doesn't thresh all his crops the same way. A heavy sledge is never used on dill; rather, it is beaten with a light stick. A threshing wheel is never rolled on cumin; instead, it is beaten softly with a flail.

28 Bread grain is easily crushed, so he doesn't keep on pounding it. He threshes it under the wheels of a cart, but he doesn't pulverize it.

29 The Lord Almighty is a wonderful teacher, and he gives the farmer great wisdom.

Certainly you get quite a feel in these verses for what God is going to do. So let's now go through the chapter in greater detail. In verses 1-8 we see the doom of the drunkards of **Ephraim**.

Isaiah 28:1-8.

1 Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!

2 Behold, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters, he casts down to the earth with his hand.

3 The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden underfoot;

4 and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley, will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer: when someone sees it, he swallows it as soon as it is in his hand.

5 In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people,

6 and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

7 These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and

the prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed by wine, they stagger with strong drink, they reel in vision, they stumble in giving judgment.

8 For all tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left.

The declining Northern Kingdom, Israel, sometimes referred to as Ephraim, is set forth as a warning example to the Kingdom of Judah. Though God had Assyria poised to deliver the final blow of destruction, the Ephraimites continued to trust in the fertility of their soil and in economic prosperity, and to lead a life of unrestrained immorality in which even the clergy participated with disgusting excess; much as is depicted on that new program coming to NBC in January, “*The Book of Daniel*.” Israel was puffed up by self-confidence and a groundless optimism. They scorned the power of Assyria, feeling secure in their own might. But their armies were totally defeated. Ephraim should be a warning to us concerning the foolishness of trusting in self rather than in the power of God. **Had Israel been worshipping God and living for God, they could have counted on Him to defend them against every enemy.**

The time frame shifts in verse 5 and 6 to the end times. The phrase “*In that day*” invariably is the signal shifting the focus to the end times. A time when the remnant of Israel will be saved. In contrast to this behavior of Ephraim stands the Lord himself, who is Israel’s only true glory, and who will some day be recognized as such by the remnant of true believers. He will empower them for righteousness in judgment and for victory in warfare.

Isaiah 28:9,10:

9 “To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast?”

10 For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”

The drunken leaders resented it when Isaiah and other true prophets treated them as toddlers by reminding them of elementary truths of right and wrong. They scoffed at his remarks as Sunday School moralizing, appropriate for infants but quite irrelevant to grown men who understand the art of practical politics. Here we see the drunkards’ sarcastically mocking response to corrective advice from the prophet. These imitations of a young child’s babbling ridicule Isaiah’s preaching.

Isaiah 28:11-13:

11 For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the Lord will speak to this people,

12 to whom he has said, “This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose”; yet they would not hear.

13 And the word of the Lord will be to 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.

Since the drunkards would not listen to Isaiah, God responded by predicting they would be overrun and conquered by a nation (Assyria) that would give them instructions in a language they didn't understand. God gave them instructions in simple language, a simple way out of their predicament if they would just obey him, but they refused to listen. As a result of their rejection the Lord imitated the mockery of the drunkards in babbling they could not understand.

Isaiah 28:14,15:

14 Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem!

15 Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter."

These scoffers are identified as the top officials in the government, who had backed Ahaz' foreign policy of bribing Assyria to engage in a treaty of alliance. Assyria wielded her power in the interests of Hell, and she spread death and destruction in her wake. Yet the Jews had chosen her, rather than God, to be their protector, vainly supposing they would thus escape her devastating might. They had made a compact with a heathen power that regarded inconvenient treaties as mere scraps of paper.

Isaiah 28:16:

16 therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

In contrast to this supposedly clever diplomacy of power politics, God declares the true basis of Israel's safety: the person and work of Jesus Christ. "Foundation ... Stone" implies that Christ's atonement is the basis upon which Israel and the Church are built; apart from Him and His merit, there could be no Church at all. "In Zion" speaks of the appointed place of revelation, the only valid disclosure of the one true God; and of blood sacrifice, the only way of salvation. "A tested stone" is one with no faults or cleavages. Christ proved equal to the subtlest and craftiest temptations Satan could bring against him in the wilderness. "Precious corner stone" means that Jesus is of greater value than anything in the whole world. He alone makes the difference between eternal heaven and eternal hell for the sinner. "Will not be in haste" might better be expressed "shall not be excited or alarmed."

We could also look at verses 14-16 as a lesson that the Church could benefit from, even though these verses are not expressly directed to the Church. Unfortunately, there are too many so-called Christian churches that have built their theology and approach to ministry on the foundation of liberal theology. That is to say, they have built on a deceptive foundation of half-truths and distortions of the Gospel, which lead many people astray.

That foundation will one day crumble into destruction and all that lean on it will perish.

You may be wondering what sorts of deception we are referring to. Some of the false doctrines include the ideas that there are many ways to heaven, that there is no Hell, that Jesus was a good teacher but that He was not virgin born, and that the resurrection was not a bodily return from the grave but merely a renewal of the ideas that Christ taught. Unfortunately, many of those views are taught from far too many pulpits today.

Contrast that with verse 16, which is quoted in 1 Peter 2:6:

1 Peter 2:6, NIV

For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

As we said a few minutes ago, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, precious and firm, a solid foundation. We are to believe in Him and in all His teachings as He gave them. When Christ said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me*" (John 14:6), we need to believe it and act on it. Woe to any of us who water it down or who say Jesus is just one of many ways to God.

Isaiah 28:17,18:

17 And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter."

18 Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol (Hell)² will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it.

When the Messiah rules His kingdom, justice and righteousness will be the norm, and will contrast strongly with the string of lies in which Jerusalem's leaders engaged and, we might add, those in which current day theologians engage. For the people in Isaiah's day trusting in neighboring countries to help protect them will fail miserably. And today trusting in watered down theology will also fail miserably.

Isaiah 28:19-22

19 As often as it passes through it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.

20 For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.

21 For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim; as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused; to do his deed—strange is his deed! and to work his work—alien is his work!

² Parentheses added.

22 Now therefore do not scoff, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord God of hosts against the whole land.

The punitive incursions of the Assyrians would be recurrent and of mounting intensity right up to the dreadful campaign of **701 B.C.** "*The bed is too short*" suggests that even with Egyptian aid, Judah's resources would be wretchedly insufficient to meet the pressure of the Assyrian attack. "*Mount Perazim*" is the place where David, with God's help, routed the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:20). But now that power of God was to be turned against his own covenant children, a "*strange deed*," which God was required to do because of their disobedience.

Isaiah 28:23-29:

23 Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech.

24 Does he who plows for sowing plow continually? does he continually open and harrow his ground?

25 When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border?

26 For he is rightly instructed; his God teaches him.

27 Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod.

28 Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever; when he drives his cart wheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it.

29 This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

Judah's situation is here set forth in a parable. The farmer doesn't plow for the sake of plowing, but rather to prepare for his intended crop. So also God prepares his garden for the crop he wishes to reap, the crop of righteousness from a holy people. The farmer does his different tasks, each in the right season and proportion, adopting His methods to His purposes. God's purpose was not to destroy His people, any more than the farmer's objective by threshing and plowing is to ruin his crop. A farmer doesn't plow and turn the soil endlessly. He also plants according to what is proper for each crop. After preparing the soil, the farmer carefully plants his seed. Farming intelligently is a God given gift. God-given understanding prevails in the threshing of various types of grain. If God's way in the physical realm of farming is best, why did Jerusalem persist in refusing to accept His spiritual guidance?

Let's think for a moment about the implications of that last verse for us today. God is "*wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.*" When we follow His directives and guidelines, we find the true way to joy, and peace, and to a fulfilling life that will climax in an eternity spent in Heaven. Doesn't it, therefore, make sense to place your trust in God and to walk in His ways? If you would like more information on exactly how to do this please talk with one of the pastors.