

"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 shall not be in haste!' (Isaiah 28:16)

Remember last week's lesson on Isaiah 25-27? Where Isaiah seemed to see himself as one of the resurrected saints who will "on that day" return to the earth to join the survivors who will have persevered through the tribulation, to sing praises to God for His "wondrous works," as the glorious millennial reign of Christ begins!

And, as he envisioned it, he couldn't help but burst forth in his own "psalm of praise" to the God who has done such great wonders! Then, with the tribulation apparently still fresh on his mind, he writes these three chapters of prophesy, with a "blending" of snapshots of the coming millennial kingdom, with a few "look-backs" at the tribulation, and some "lessons for living" life through the good days and the bad days (which apply to us especially today!--ending chapter 27 with the assurance that, "on that day, at the trumpet's call," people from all nations will join "the sons of Israel" in worshiping the Lord on the holy mountain of Jerusalem!

And that brings us to Isaiah 28, and a new section of "prophesies of judgment and blessing"--beginning with Isaiah looking at life as it was, first in the northern kingdom of Israel (or Ephraim), then in the southern kingdom of Judah, at the time he was writing the book of Isaiah! And it wasn't pretty!

"Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty...!" A metaphor of drunkenness dominates this episode, presenting a picture of Ephraim's "stumbling and bumbling" life during the last decade of its existence (740-721 B.C.) A nation, and a people, whose pride is "ripe for judgment"! (II Kings 17 records more about how, by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and worshiping idols, these people provoked the Lord's anger!) And verse 2 says, "Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent (Assyria)--likened to a storm of hail, and a tempest of destruction ...with mighty flowing waters cast down to the earth by His hand"--ready to "swallow it whole," as quickly as the "first-ripe fig prior to summer is seen by one who plucks it, pops it in his mouth, and swallows it"! (Isaiah, and its commentators, have a way with words!) And so the soon approaching judgment and end of Ephraim!

And yet Isaiah writes (in verse 5) that "In that day (believed to be the millennium) the Lord of hosts will become a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people!" Wow! Isaiah 10:20-21 says, "In that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel! A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God!" (Isaiah once again closes his pronouncement of judgment with a note of mercy, and the assurance that God will never go back on His promise to preserve His people!)

Then, beginning with verse 7, Isaiah turns his focus on the northern kingdom of Judah and, somewhat surprisingly, reports that "these also (speaking of the religious leaders of Jerusalem)...are confused by wine and stagger with strong drink...and reel while having visions...and totter when rendering judgment...and their tables are full of filthy vomit"! Ugh! According to Constable, Judah "was in an even more dangerous position than Israel, because its leader at the time was Ahaz who was not only spiritually dull but also very cynical of Isaiah's advice and revelations from God"!

And so they "scoffed and mocked" Isaiah (in verses 9-10), Constables says, for the "simplicity and repetition with which he presented the Lord's message to them" (calling it, in effect, "just a bunch of blah, blah, blah")--and particularly about how they needed to trust in the Lord for security, rather than in alliances with other nations! Who was Isaiah, after all, to lecture them "as grown men who understood the art of practical politics"?

(Such opposition should not have come as a surprise to Isaiah, who was warned by God at his commissioning (in Isaiah 6:9-12) that he would be called to "go to a people who would listen but not perceive, whose hearts would be insensitive, ears dull, and eyes dim..."! Like centuries later, when Jesus would use parables to speak to the scribes and Pharisees, who would respond in a similar way, because their "hearts were far from Him"!

And so, in verses 11-15, Isaiah responds to the scoffers by predicting that because they have "made a covenant with death and with Sheol" (speaking of the foreign nations with whom they made alliances), they would hear "through stammering lips and a foreign tongue" a message that they wouldn't be able to understand, rather than the message of "rest to the weary" from the word of the Lord, a message that they could (conceivably) understand but one to which they would not listen! And he concludes his response (in apparent jest) with the same "blah, blah, blah" language they used in mocking him!

(Interesting that the apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 14:21-22, would make reference to this passage to explain how, centuries earlier, the Lord had predicted how He would use men of "other tongues" (the "jabbering" of the Assyrians) as a sign to unbelieving Israel of coming judgment!)

In Isaiah 28:14, Isaiah appeals to the scoffers ("who rule this people who are in Jerusalem") to repent--with a prophetic promise, in verse 16, that "the Lord God would lay in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed (and that) he who believes would not be disturbed!" Wow! This great prophecy would be repeated, or referenced, throughout the Scriptures:

In Psalm 118:22-23, "The stone which the builders would reject would become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!"

Jesus would refer to this prophesy (in Matthew 21:42-43) in speaking to the chief priests and elders, noting that because "the stone would be rejected by the builders ...the kingdom of God would be taken away from you (!) and given to a people producing the fruit of it!"

The apostle Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," addressed the Sanhedrin (in Acts 4:11-12), proclaiming that Jesus was the stone that "was rejected by them (!), the builders, and has become the Chief Corner stone"! And he continues that "...there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved!"

Paul notes in Romans 9:32 that "Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness by works and not by faith...stumbled over the stumbling stone"!

And Peter again, in I Peter 2:7-8, refers to the stone "as the precious cornerstone for those who believe, but for those who disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected has become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, for they stumble because they were disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed!" Wow!

Interesting that this "stumbling" had its roots in the very hearts of the ones Isaiah was embattled with, in Isaiah 28!

And what does Isaiah say the results would be of their rejection (in verses 18-21)?

Their expected alliance with Egypt and other nations would fail!

The "overwhelming scourge" (of Assyria) will "pass through the land of Judah, and bring sheer terror" (although not penetrating the city of Jerusalem, as we'll see)!

The "bed will be too short" and the "blanket will be too small" (confirming that foreign alliances are inadequate preparations for their defense)!

The Lord "will rise up against them" (His "chosen people") just as He rose up against the Philistines at Mount Perazim and the valley of Gibeon!

But Isaiah gives one last appeal in verse 22: "Don't carry on as scoffers, or your fetters (the "bands that bind you"!) will be made stronger!"

Isaiah says that "he has heard from the Lord God of hosts"! So "listen and hear my words," he urges! (The word of God!)

And so Isaiah ends this chapter with the analogy of a farmer who "sows and reaps" his crops, to describe how God works among His people! About a wise farmer who follows a carefully devised plan for plowing and planting so that each type of seed will grow as He wishes! And just like the farmer works in different ways with different crops, so God works with in different (and "wondrous") ways with His people! (God would allow Sennacherib and the Assyrians to destroy Samaria, but not Jerusalem--which would ultimately fall to another invading army, the Babylonians!)

"This also comes from the Lord of hosts (Isaiah emphasizes) Who has made His counsel wonderful and His wisdom great!"

O the folly of trusting in anyone, or anything, other than our Lord!

His counsel is wonderful! His wisdom is great!

Whoever believes in Him will not be "in sudden panic"--or be disappointed!

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