

We are beginning the new year in a new section of Isaiah. Commentators see chapters 28 – 35 as God affirming that He is able to carry out the salvation that He promised in chapters 1-27. Ray Ortlund describes this section this way: God looks us right in the eye and claims that he can and will deliver on every single promise in the gospel. Do we believe him? Does Jesus rule over the mess called my life, or in unsparing realism must I despair? May I expect a new work of the Holy Spirit in my experience, or is my past the measure of my future? Isaiah now prompts us to rethink our lives with questions like these. They have the potential to help us break the faith barrier into a new sense of God's power and love.

Chapter 28 is a call from God to the northern ten tribes referred to as Ephraim, and to Judah to recognize their true condition. When I first read the chapter and the ones that followed, I admit I was wondering what I could possibly preach that we have not already covered. Even after reading one of the most complete commentaries on this passage I was thinking of lumping all six woes that begin here and through the following chapters in one message. But after reading Raymond Ortlund's message on this chapter, I realized I was missing the richness of the passage. I begin by acknowledging the inspiration he received and I am borrowing for this message.

The chapter begins contrasting two crowns. There is the crown of the proud drunkards of Ephraim and the fading flower of Samaria. From other sources we know that Samaria had become a wealthy city with beds of ivory (Amos 6:4; 1 Kings 22:39). The other crown is that in verse five, a crown of glory, who is the Lord Himself.

Though the people of the northern tribes had long since turned to idolatry, there were some who had seen a brief revival in Jerusalem and defied their own government by going to celebrate the feasts in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:11). But the nation as a whole was entrenched in idolatry. Their pride convinced them that Assyria would not prevail over them. They took their blessing of prosperity and used it as an excuse for excess. God was warning them that they were drunken with their pride, symbolized by their drunkenness from wine. Pride and luxury had blinded them to the reality at hand.

God presented to Ephraim and presents to us two types of crowns. **There is the crown of self-reliance or the crown of the Lord Himself as our glory.** When we put it that way, the choice looks so obvious, but in the midst of the threats we face, we fear that God's way of rescuing us will not be what we would choose. So, we turn to what we think is more predictable, our own ingenuity and cunning. Our cry is, "Yes, we can!" And God responds, "Not without me, you can't!" But we try anyway. And time and time again we find that God's way would have ultimately been the best way.

The suddenness of Ephraim's ruin was described as an overwhelming flood. Israel has flashfloods similar to our own. A torrential downpour could turn a dry wash into a

**Commented [PW1]:** Preaching the Word – Raymond Ortlund – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners

**Commented [PW2]:** Amos 6:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> "Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall,

**Commented [PW3]:** 1 Kings 22:39 (ESV)

<sup>39</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

**Commented [PW4]:** 2 Chronicles 30:11 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

raging torrent in seconds, sweeping away man and beast. That was the description of the coming Assyrian invasion. God also described it as someone coming upon a first ripe fig. It goes from the hand to the mouth in the blink of an eye, and down the hatch. It's devoured.

The remnant would choose the crown of glory in the Lord. These are *not* those that survive the Assyrian invasion, for we will see that Judah was just as bad if not worse. These are the ones who in the future will choose the cornerstone that God sets in the midst of Jerusalem. It includes all those who place their faith in God's provision of the Messiah. <sup>5</sup> *In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people,* Isaiah 28:5

Ephraim's condition shows us history was repeating itself. The goodness and patience of God prospers a nation. The nation starts to live for the material blessings and turn from God. "The fading flower of its glorious beauty" is phrase that can be applied to everything this world prizes. The beauty of youth is short lived (Ecclesiastes 11:10). Today's treasures belong to someone else tomorrow or they fade away and are rubbish (Matthew 6:19). Pride blinds us to the threats that surround us as nations gather to take the blessings for themselves. Suddenly the nation that thought itself invincible is brought to its knees. Faith in man and his ingenuity is demolished (Jeremiah 17:5).

Malcom Muggeridge asks, Can this really be what life is about, as the media insist? This interminable soap opera going on from century to century, from era to era, whose old discarded sets and props litter the earth? Surely not. Was it to provide a location for so repetitive and ribald a performance that the universe was created and man came into existence? I can't believe it. If this were all, then the cynics, the hedonists and the suicides would be right. The most we can hope for from life is some passing amusement, some gratification of our senses, and death. But it's not all.... As Christians we know that here we have no continuing city, that crowns roll in the dust, and every earthly kingdom must sometime flounder, whereas we acknowledge a king men did not crown and cannot dethrone, as we are citizens of a city of God they did not build and cannot destroy.<sup>2</sup>

You would think, living in the times that we do, that man could see more clearly now than ever before that we need God. If ever the gospel should ring true to man, this is the time. Communism, socialism, and every other ism of man has only shown the heart of man to be evil through and through. We are watching democracy prove the same point. Regardless of the system, those in power will prove themselves corrupt. Why can't everyone see this truth? Is it because they don't want the alternative, which is to place our trust in God?

Total trust in God is the great adventure of faith that always lies before us. Who else is utterly trustworthy? Certainly not any man or woman, including ourselves! Like Israel, we are invited to step out in faith and follow wherever He leads. We leave our little practical ways behind and head into the adventure He has for us. Because faith is what pleases God (Hebrews 11:6) He is always stretching our faith, inviting us to step out and trust Him. Unless we act on that invitation, we will never know the all-sufficiency of

**Commented [PW5]: Ecclesiastes 11:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

**Commented [PW6]: Matthew 6:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,

**Commented [PW7]: Jeremiah 17:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.

**Commented [PW8]: Malcom Muggeridge, *The End of Christendom*, Eerdmans 1980, pp 50-52**

As quoted in *Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

**Commented [PW9]: Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

God. We'll never see the things He was willing to do through us. **Of all the resources God has given us, He is by far the greatest but least tested.** How the history of these nations would have been different had they received the message from God's prophet!

Isaiah's message moves to Judah and its capitol, Jerusalem. Though they lived in "the valley of vision," they were no better than Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> *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.* <sup>8</sup> *For all tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left.* Isaiah 28:7-8

The priests and the prophets are so drunk on their own vain philosophies that they defile everything as they spew their ideas. This reminds me of the Jesus Seminar and so many other secular Bible teachers. Many seminaries today are so filled with vomit, what comes from inside their own minds, that there is no space left for the reality of the Word of God. The message is not simply unheeded, it is mocked.

These priests and prophets ask <sup>9</sup> *"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?"* <sup>10</sup> *For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.*" Isaiah 28:9-10 They are asking if Isaiah thinks he is teaching little babes. "Who does he think we are!" And then the Hebrew text sounds like baby talk, repetitive sounds, *ṣav lāsāv ṣav lāsāv qav lāqāv qav lāqāv*. They are mocking the message from God. It's not sophisticated enough for them. "Repent and trust in God. That's not the intelligent thing to do," they say. But it is the wise thing to do. The priests and prophets drunken on their own philosophies didn't realize how profound the Word of the Lord from Isaiah really is.

God turned it around on them and told them that if it sounds like babbling to them, he'll use the tongue of a foreigner to instruct them. The Assyrians will tell them how to do their tasks as slaves. <sup>11</sup> *For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people,* <sup>12</sup> *to whom he has said, "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose"; yet they would not hear.* Isaiah 28:11-12

The apostle Paul quoted this passage to tell the church that God speaks clearly to those who will hear, but to those who refuse to believe He speaks in a way they cannot comprehend. Those enslaved by sin will only hear babbling. Those who believe will hear and receive the Word (1 Corinthians 14:20-22).

God offered them rest and repose, but they would not hear Him. **God offers us so much more than the world could ever deliver, but many refuse to listen.** That is the indictment against every rebellious soul. This why there is a place called hell. Many will insist that God is not trustworthy. They will insist on turning away from God, mock His Word, and reject His offer of rest. But the offer still goes out to all (Hebrews 4:11).

Jesus told His listeners that this rest is found in Him. <sup>28</sup> *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* <sup>29</sup> *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* <sup>30</sup> *For my yoke*

**Commented [PW10]: 1 Corinthians 14:20-22 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

<sup>21</sup> In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."

<sup>22</sup> Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

**Commented [PW11]: Hebrews 4:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

*is easy, and my burden is light.* Matthew 11:28-30 To hear Jesus and receive Him is to receive God's Word and know the rest and repose God offers us. To receive Him is to follow Him wherever He leads (Luke 9:23). It's to place your *total*/trust in Him.

Judah rejected the Word of the Lord from the prophet to the point of even mocking it. We see this today on a regular basis in our entertainment world. **We live in a world where people perceive two very different realities.** To us, the Word of God is rich and profound. It's like a feast, which is an analogy that Isaiah already used. In it we find rest from striving to please God, for Jesus is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). We are accepted by God in Him. We no longer try to find a reason to feel of value, for we know God has adopted us into His family (Ephesians 1:5). We know where we are going when we die, and we know where our loved ones in Christ wait for us. We know that the all-powerful God loves us and will work all things together for good in our lives (Romans 8:28). We've entered His kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

Yet, to the rest of the world, we are ignorant fools bound by religion as if addicted to a drug, believing in a world that doesn't exist. To them there is no reason for hope or joy except in the fleeting pleasures this world offers. The destructiveness of sin is seen as pleasure to be indulged in, which they think we are missing out on. Selfishness is natural and immorality is self-actualizing. It's the same world viewed from completely different perspectives. One declares man's nature to be good, the other declares it is evil. What does the evidence show us?

What do you hear? When the Word of God is preached in a worship service, one person hears the voice of God speaking to their soul. They are thrilled to get His direction for their lives and can't wait till next Sunday to hear more (Jeremiah 15:16). The person next to them can hear the same sermon and think of it as simple moral lessons to make children behave. Does God's Word delight and change you or annoy you? Or do you care at all?

The leaders of Judah were making a secret deal with Egypt (30:1-2). God invited them to trust Him, but the leaders thought they knew better than God. God called this deal with Egypt a covenant with death. The leaders thought it would save them, but God knew it would destroy them. It does matter which is true! Differing views don't change reality. There is your truth and my truth but the only real truth is God's truth! Assyria was going to deal with Egypt before it dealt with Jerusalem. The leaders were trusting in a false hope.

But God would bring a sure hope to Jerusalem in days to come. *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.'* *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.* Isaiah 28:16-17 God would bring salvation in spite of the failure of the leaders to turn to Him. Jesus is that tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation. Jesus is the

**Commented [PW12]: Luke 9:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

**Commented [PW13]: 1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

**Commented [PW14]: Ephesians 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

**Commented [PW15]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**Commented [PW16]: Romans 14:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [PW17]: Jeremiah 15:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.

**Commented [PW18]: Isaiah 30:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "Ah, stubborn children," declares the LORD, "who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; <sup>2</sup> who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!

cornerstone of the church. That is not of its history, traditions or rituals, but of the people who place their trust in Him. He is the plumb line. It is His righteousness that is the standard, and He freely credits it to those who place their faith in Him. (Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Ephesians 2:19-20). While the leaders looked to Egypt, the people of faith look to God's provision. In Him they find rest and repose. Through Him they become a part of God's eternal city (Revelation 21:2).

Those who place their faith in the cornerstone will not be in haste. They won't be frantically running to the world for a solution. They will wait on the Lord (Psalm 27:14). Their spirits will not be agitated when times of testing come. I see this battle in my grandchildren and am reminded of my own times of testing. Something disturbs our world and we run to look for solutions here and there. But those of real faith are not in haste. Our trust is in an all-knowing, all-powerful God who allowed our circumstances and will work through the circumstances for our good (Isaiah 26:3).

Isaiah goes on to describe what is coming to Judah, to those who do not trust in God but instead in their own cunning and abilities. The scourge of Assyria was about to sweep through the land by day and night. Like a bed that was too short to stretch out on or a covering too narrow to cover oneself, so their false hopes would bring them little comfort.

*<sup>21</sup> 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!* Isaiah 28:21 One of the references is to a time when David was anointed king over Israel, the Philistines rose up to try to defeat him. Instead he won an overwhelming victory and destroyed their idols (2 Samuel 5:17-21). The other reference is to Joshua's defeat of the armies of Canaan that allied against Israel (Joshua 10:5-11). In these cases God was saving Israel. Now He is anointing Judah's enemies to save them from their own destruction. Judah's pride and self-reliance was their greatest enemy. Defeat is a strange work but a necessary one. There are times when God must take His children through times of difficulty to save them from their own ways.

The chapter closes with words of comfort. Those words start with a plea to listen. They wouldn't listen to words of instruction, but perhaps they would listen to God's purposes. *<sup>23</sup> Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech.* Isaiah 28:23 Just as God gives the farmer wisdom to plow enough and plant in ways that are best for each crop, as well as how to uniquely deal with each harvest, so God knows how to deal with His people. He is not utterly destroying them, but bringing out what is of value while getting rid of what is worthless. He won't plow them too long or thresh them too severely, but just enough to bring about the best harvest. *<sup>29</sup> This also comes from the LORD of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.* Isaiah 28:29

The same is true for our lives. We need times of plowing our hearts so that the Word can take root (Hebrews 13:6). We need a harvest time when the Word becomes productive. It is often followed by a winnowing when that which is worthless is removed. God knows how to transform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). It's

**Commented [PW19]: Romans 9:32-33 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

**Commented [PW20]: 1 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

**Commented [PW21]: Ephesians 2:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

**Commented [PW22]: Revelation 21:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

**Commented [PW23]: Psalm 27:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

**Commented [PW24]: Isaiah 26:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

**Commented [PW25]: 2 Samuel 5:17-21 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. But David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. <sup>18</sup> Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim.

<sup>19</sup> And David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand."

<sup>20</sup> And David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. And he said, "The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood." Therefore the name of that place is called Baal-perazim.

<sup>21</sup> And the Philistines left their idols there, and David and his men carried them away.

**Commented [PW26]: Joshua 10:5-11 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it. ... [1]

**Commented [PW27]: Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

**Commented [PW28]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

not an easy path, but it's incomparably better than the path the world has chosen. It requires that we listen to Him and be willing to let Him change us.

#### Questions

- 1 What is this section of Isaiah about?
- 2 What are the two crowns?
- 3 How fast can destruction come?
- 4 What can we call a flower of fading beauty?
- 5 What did priests and prophets of Judah do wrong?
- 6 How did they respond to Isaiah?
- 7 Who can't understand God's message?
- 8 Where can we find rest and repose?
- 9 How do people see life so differently?
- 10 Why is it so urgent that we hear?

**Joshua 10:5-11 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it.

<sup>6</sup> And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, “Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us.”

<sup>7</sup> So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor.

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you.”

<sup>9</sup> So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal.

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

<sup>11</sup> And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword.