

Session 9 The Forerunner Message in Isaiah 28-29

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Ask the Lord why He wants us to know this information and why He wants us to tell others about it. By asking this, we put ourselves in a conversation with Him, thereby positioning ourselves to grow in understanding.
- B. Isaiah 28-29 addressed the spiritually blind leaders of Jerusalem in his day. He gave three *woe oracles* (28:1-4; 29:1-4; 29:15-16), applicable to the leaders in Jerusalem and the nations today.
- C. Outline for Isaiah 28-29
- 28:1-29 Woe #1—Isaiah’s lament over the leaders of Israel and Jerusalem
 - 28:1-4 Woe #1—to the leadership in Ephraim or Israel (the northern kingdom)
 - 28:5-6 The beauty of the Messiah will be revealed in the end times
 - 28:7-13 The woe to Ephraim is extended to Jerusalem (the southern kingdom)
 - 28:14-22 The leaders of Jerusalem make a covenant of death
 - 28:23-29 Parable of the farmer: Jerusalem must accept God’s wisdom
 - 29:1-16 Woes #2 & #3—God’s judgment of Jerusalem
 - 29:1-4 Woe #2—Jerusalem will be besieged
 - 29:5-8 Jerusalem’s enemies will be destroyed
 - 29:9-14 The blindness of Jerusalem’s leaders
 - 29:15-16 Woe #3—Jerusalem refusing God’s leadership
 - 29:17-24 The restoration and salvation of Israel
- D. Isaiah sought to convince the leaders of Jerusalem not to look to other nations for their national protection, but rather to trust the Lord to save them. Isaiah wanted the people in Jerusalem to avoid the suffering that the northern kingdom of Israel endured at the hands of the Assyrians.
- E. Throughout Isaiah 28-29, the prophecies were fulfilled in part in context to Assyria’s historical aggression against Jerusalem, and will be fulfilled in fullness in God’s promise to restore Israel in the end times.
1. These prophecies refer to the Assyrian scourge that trampled Judah down (28:18) and the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem (29:2-3).
 2. Isaiah 28:1-13 seems to have been given just before the Assyria invasion of Israel in 721 BC.
 3. Isaiah 28:14-29:16 was probably spoken before Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC.
- F. The Lord promised to defeat the Assyrian (29:5; 30:31). The total defeat of the mighty Assyrian king and his empire is a type of the Lord defeating the Antichrist as the “end-time Assyrian.”

II. WOE #1—ISAIAH’S LAMENT OVER THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL & JERUSALEM (28:1-29)

- A. Isaiah lamented the sin and coming suffering of the proud leaders of Ephraim (28:1-4). The Lord longed for the leadership in Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel) to repent of their sin.

¹Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower...²Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one [Assyria], like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring them [Israel] down to the earth with His hand.³The...drunkards of Ephraim, will be trampled underfoot... (Isa. 28:1-3)

1. **Fading flower:** Ephraim had once been admired, but their glory was like a fading flower.
2. **Mighty one:** The mighty and strong one spoke of the Assyrian king and his military might.
3. **His hand:** The hand of God used Assyria to defeat Israel (Ephraim). God is the prime mover via His leadership over historical events. He works through others who are secondary causes.
4. **Trampled:** Assyria violently trampled Israel, coming as a terrible hailstorm and flooding rain (28:2-3). The Assyrians trampled to the ground the once beautiful flower of Ephraim.

- B. The beauty of the Messiah will be revealed in the end times (28:5-6). Jesus is the glorious crown or beautiful diadem of God’s kingdom. Isaiah emphasized the Messiah’s beauty being openly seen in the end times (4:2; 28:5; 33:17). Jesus will save the remnant of Israel, establish justice in their courts, and help their military withstand the armies of the Antichrist (Zech. 14:1-5).

⁵In that day the LORD of hosts [Jesus] will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people, ⁶for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment [their judges], and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate [their military]. (Isa. 28:5-6)

III. THE WOE TO EPHRAIM IS EXTENDED TO JERUSALEM (ISA. 28:7-13)

- A. The priests and false prophets in Jerusalem were alcoholics, like the leaders in Ephraim (28:7-8). Their drunkenness caused them to distort their “visions” and decision-making.

⁷But they also [leaders in Jerusalem] have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way... they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.⁸For all tables are full of vomit... (Isa. 28:7-8)

- B. **They also:** The woe against the leaders of Ephraim (28:1-4) was extended to the leaders in Jerusalem (28:7, 14) who embraced the same sins. There is debate if verse 7 refers to the rulers in Ephraim or Jerusalem. The context of Isaiah 28-29 is God’s word to the leaders in Jerusalem (28:14).
- C. Isaiah’s audience in Judah agreed that God’s judgment on Israel in 721 BC was proof of the consequences of their rebellion. Yet, the leaders of Jerusalem embraced the same sin and pride.

- D. The false prophets mocked Isaiah's teaching as toddler-level gibberish (28:9-10).
⁹Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? ¹⁰For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. (Isa. 28:9-10)
- E. *The drunken leaders mocked Isaiah for the simplicity and repetition with which he presented the Lord's messages. They scoffed at his remarks as Sunday School moralizing, appropriate for infants but irrelevant to men who understand the art of politics. They accused Isaiah of speaking to them like children by advocating trust in God not in foreign alliances. —Constable.*
- F. Isaiah used the very words of Jerusalem's leaders to warn them about an Assyrian invasion of their land (28:11-12). If they refused to receive God's prophetic words, saying they were too simple, sounding like the babbling of "stammering lips," then He would teach them by foreign oppressors with stammering lips (speaking in a foreign language). He would continue to teach them "a little here and a little there," but this time through the trials of captivity.
¹¹For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, ¹²to whom He said, "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest"...yet they would not hear. ¹³But the word of the LORD was to them, "Precept upon precept...line upon line, here a little, there a little," that they might...be broken and snared [captivity] and caught. (Isa. 28:9-13)
- G. **Caught:** Sennacherib claimed to have taken 200,000 captives from Judah in 701 BC.
- H. **To rest:** God had promised Israel "rest" in the land of Israel if they lived faithful to His covenant.

IV. THE LEADERS OF JERUSALEM MAKE A COVENANT OF DEATH (ISA. 28:14-22)

- A. The rulers in Jerusalem made a covenant of death (28:14-15). This was a political covenant or treaty with a nation—either with Egypt to help protect them from Assyria (Isa. 30:1-3) or directly with the Assyrians to "buy" protection. There is no record of Jerusalem making a covenant with Assyria.
*¹⁴Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scornful men, who rule...in Jerusalem, ¹⁵because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol [hell] we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge [of the Antichrist] passes through, it will not come to us..."
¹⁶"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily. ¹⁷Also...the hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place. ¹⁸Your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it. ¹⁹As often as it goes out it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass over...it will be a terror just to understand the report." (Isa. 28:14-19)*
- B. Isaiah sarcastically told them that their covenant was a covenant with death since it would result in many people dying. Israel had already made a covenant with the Lord for protection (Ex. 19).

- C. ***I lay in Zion a stone***: Israel's safety is not found in political alliances, but in Messiah. God promised to lay a firm foundation in Jerusalem that they could build on and find protection in. Jesus is the tested and proven rock of safety who never fails. (Ps. 118:22; Zech. 3:9; 10:4; Mt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6).
- D. ***A cornerstone***: This most important stone bears the weight and holds the whole building together.
- E. ***Not act hastily***: Those who trust God need not act in hastily in fear and panic.
- F. The context of Isaiah 28 is eschatological. The three chapters preceding Isaiah 28 speak of the end times. The verses following 28:18 are eschatological, describing God's purposes on the whole earth (28:22).
- G. Between Isaiah's *two references* to the "covenant with death" (28:15, 18) is the promise of Jesus coming as the foundation stone in Zion (28:16). This suggests that the activity associated with the "covenant of death" might occur both *before* (28:15) and *after* (28:18) Jesus' first coming as the stone laid in Zion.

V. ISRAEL WILL MAKE A COVENANT WITH THE ANTICHRIST

- A. Gabriel spoke to Daniel about the final 7 years of this age before the Messiah would come to rule the world from Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24-27). Gabriel spoke of these seven years as a *week*. Israel referred to a week as being comprised of years (7 years) as well as a week of days (7 days). This final seven-year period just before Jesus' return is often referred to as "Daniel's 70th week."
²⁷He [Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [7 years]; but in the middle of the week he [Antichrist] shall bring an end to sacrifice [thus, breaking the covenant]... (Dan. 9:27)
- B. Israel's leaders will make a covenant with the Antichrist referred to as "a covenant with death" that will result in them giving their authority to him seven years before Jesus' coming (Isa. 28:14-18; Ezek. 38:8-12; Dan. 9:27; 11:45; 14; 39:26; Zech. 11:16; Lk. 19:11-28; Jn. 5:43; 1 Thes. 5:3).
- C. The Great Tribulation starts with the Antichrist establishing a peace treaty (for 7 years in duration). It results in a counterfeit peace that lasts 3½ years (the first half of the final 7 years), then suddenly the Antichrist will break the treaty, resulting in the termination of Israel's sacrifices in the temple.
³When they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains [Great Tribulation] upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (1 Thes. 5:3)
- D. The Antichrist will use this covenant to get a stronghold in the land of Israel. He will plant part of his headquarters in Israel. The "glorious holy mountain" is in Jerusalem (the site of the temple).
⁴⁵And he [Antichrist] shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas [Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea] and the glorious holy mountain [Jerusalem]... (Dan. 11:45)

- E. Israel will have a short season of peace until they are attacked by the Antichrist (Ezek. 38:8-12). The man who brought them peace is the one who will invade them with foreign armies. Israel's time of peace and safety is seen at this time in that they have no walls for military security in place.

⁸In the latter years you [Antichrist] will come into the land of those...gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel...brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. ⁹You will ascend, coming like a storm...you and all your troops and many peoples with you...you will make an evil plan: ¹¹you will say, "I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely... ¹²to stretch out your hand against [Israel]..."
(Ezek. 38:8-12)

VI. THE LORD'S UNUSUAL ACT (28:21-22)

- A. The Lord will arise to do an awesome work and an unusual act (28:21-22).

²¹For the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim; He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—that He may do His work, His awesome work, and bring to pass His act, His unusual act.

²²Now therefore, do not be mockers, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a destruction determined even upon the whole earth. (Isa. 28:21-22)

1. ***Mount Perazim***: The Philistines attacked David and Israel's army at Mount Perazim. God released a sudden, total breakthrough for David (2 Sam. 5:17-20).
2. ***Valley of Gibeon***: David defeated the Philistines by God's help at the Valley of Gibeon (1 Chr. 14:13-16). In the Valley of Gibeon, God sent hailstones to help Joshua defeat an Amorite alliance of nations (Josh. 10:10).
3. ***Unusual act***: He would come against His own people, scattering them to a distant land in captivity. The work of judgment is called "unusual" or "strange" since He delights to deliver His people. Defeating the Israelites was unusual for the Lord because He customarily defended them. This disciplining of His own people by the sword of foreigners was strange act to God (Hab. 1:5).

⁵"Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. ⁶For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans [Babylonians], a bitter and hasty nation..." (Hab. 1:5-6)

- B. The parable of the farmer exhorting Jerusalem to accept God's wisdom (28:23-29): Isaiah described a farmer who accepts God's instructions in farming (28:26, 29) instead of rejecting them like the leaders of Ephraim and Judah did. The farmer's response illustrates that God teaches people how to live (28:26) and gives people wonderful counsel (28:29). He advises them to follow the example of the farmer who receives wise instruction and not trust political alliances with Egypt or Assyria.

VII. GOD'S JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM (ISA. 29:1-16)

- A. In this second woe, Isaiah predicts a siege of Jerusalem (29:1-14). Here, Isaiah continued the theme of God's judgment on Jerusalem from 28:17-22. Both the Lord (29:2-3) and an enemy nation (29:7-8) will encamp around Jerusalem. Then God will suddenly destroy Jerusalem's enemies (29:5). God will do astonishing things against His people (29:1-3), but also against their enemies (29:5-7).

¹“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!...²Yet I will distress Ariel; there shall be heaviness and sorrow...³I will encamp against you all around, I will lay siege against you with a mound...⁴You shall be brought down...and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.”
(Isa. 29:1-4)

- B. Isaiah spoke this woe oracle to Ariel, referring to Jerusalem (29:1) and Mount Zion (29:8). The Hebrew word *Ariel* means the *Lion of God* or the *altar* where sacrifices were burned (Ezek. 43:16). Jerusalem was prophetically called Ariel since she would become like the altar—a scene of burning. This went against their “Zion theology” which presumed that God would never destroy Jerusalem.

- C. Jerusalem's enemies will be destroyed in an instant (29:5-8). The sudden destruction of Jerusalem's enemies occurred “in an instant” (29:5) and was fulfilled when God killed 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night (37:36) in 701 BC. God will gather all nations to fight Jerusalem. Afterwards, He will destroy those nations whom He used to discipline Israel (Joel 3:2, 12; Zech. 12:3; 14:2, Rev. 16:14).

⁵Moreover the multitude of your foes [enemies] shall be like fine dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones like chaff that passes away; yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly. ⁶You will be punished by the LORD of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire. ⁷The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel, even all who fight against her...shall be as...⁸when a hungry man dreams...and his soul is still empty...so the multitude of all the nations...who fight against Mount Zion. (Isa. 29:5-8)

- D. Isaiah addressed the spiritual blindness of Jerusalem's leaders (29:9-14).

- E. Woe #3—Jerusalem refused God's leadership (29:15-16). They determined to hide from God. Isaiah laments that the leaders of Jerusalem make plans that they think God does not see. They make their plans in the dark without consulting God who is sovereign over all the nations.

¹⁵Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the LORD...they say, “Who sees us?” and, “Who knows us?” ¹⁶Surely you have things turned around! (Isa. 29:15-16)

- F. The restoration and salvation of Israel (Isa. 29:17-24). Jacob, or Jerusalem and all Israel, will one day trust, love, and fear the Lord in the overflow of seeing His great goodness.

¹⁸In that day the deaf shall hear...and the eyes of the blind shall see...¹⁹The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD...²⁰For the terrible one is brought to nothing...²²Jacob shall not now be ashamed... ²³but when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will hallow My name, and hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel. (Isa. 29:18-24)