
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXIII : THE DRUNKEN RULERS OF SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM (28:1-29)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. The Crisis and the Messiah (1:1-12:6)
- II. The Theocracy and the Nations (13:1-39:8)
- III. True Deliverance is Found Not in Egypt but in the Lord (28:1-35:10)
 - A. The Lord's Purpose (28,29)
 - 1. Samaria Ripe for Judgement (28:1-29)

The Folly of Trusting the Nations (28:1-33:24)

Woe to the drunken rulers (chapters 28,29)

28:1-13 Ephraim

28:14-29:14 Jerusalem

29:15-24 those who hide counsel

Woe to those who trust Egypt (chapters 30,31)

30:1-18 woe to the rebellious children

30:19-33 Judah's blessing, Assyria's destruction

31:1-9 woe to those who reject God's help

Behold the King (chapters 32,33)

32:1-8 true leaders

32:9-20 deserted or faithful

33:1-24 the King redeems Zion

Trusting God or the Nations: the Results (chapters 34,35)

Isaiah continues his emphasis, begun in chap 7, upon trusting the nations rather than the Lord. He just finished with a world-wide scope and now he returns to the particular political situations surrounding Judah (similar to chaps 13-23). Before the emphasis was upon ***the Lord being sovereign over the nations***; now the emphasis is upon ***Judah's choice to trust Him or not***.

The time: earlier in Isaiah we saw predictions of Assyria coming upon Ephraim and then upon Jerusalem itself unless they trusted the Lord. Now we see Assyria finishing up with Samaria (28:1-13; destroyed 721 BC) and turning itself towards Jerusalem (29:7,8; probably about 701 BC). "The flood which Isaiah had foretold (8:6,8) is about to burst full force against the southern kingdom.... ***Apparently between the time of Samaria's fall and the attack upon Jerusalem, Judah's policy-makers were turning more and more towards relying upon Egypt for help*** (30:3; 31:1)." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

The structure of this section appears to be three-fold:

chaps 28, 29 paints the picture: foolish leaders, a multitude of enemies, false humanistic counsel that something must be done immediately because the Lord's forsaken us.

chaps 30,31 depicts the proposed solution (trust in Egypt) and the folly of that choice

chaps 32,33 gives the true solution: the true King is in our presence even now

The Drunkards of Ephraim (28:1-6)

Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley — to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine! See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground. That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, will be like a fig ripe before harvest — as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it. In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people. He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.
(NIV)

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up. In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate. (KJV)

Wo [to] the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim. And the fading flower of the beauty of his glory, That [is] on the head of the fat valley of the broken down of wine. Lo, a mighty and strong one [is] to the Lord, As a storm of hail — a destructive shower, As an inundation of mighty waters overflowing, He cast down to the earth with the hand. By feet trodden down is the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, And the fading flower of the beauty of his glory That [is] on the head of the fat valley, Hath been as its first-fruit before summer, That its beholder seeth, While it [is] yet in his hand he swalloweth it. In that day is Jehovah of Hosts For a crown of beauty, and for a diadem of glory, To the remnant of His people. And for a spirit of judgment To him who is sitting in the judgment, And for might [to] those turning back the battle to the gate.
(YLT)

SAMARIA SERVES AS A WARNING TO JUDAH — chap 28,29 is 'alive with scorn' as Isaiah depicts the situation in Judah and its leaders. In the first three verses Samaria's rulers are denounced. Isaiah continues to his main point: the Judean leaders are just like their counterparts; e.g. indulgence manifested in drunkenness, lack of understanding, and the need to be taught as little children. One thing however the Judean leaders had that the Northern Israel leaders did not have is a cynical, mocking spirit which believes nothing and trusts no one. Therefore later Ezekiel

would say Judah's sin was worse than Israel's sin (Ezek 23:11,12). *"To whom much is given, much is required."*

SAMARIA'S FADING GLORY — *"The Assyrian threat appeared on the eastern horizon at a time when the northern kingdom was relatively prosperous. It might have seemed that it was cut off in its prime; but, as this passage shows, the telltale signs of a descent into decay were already present. Flowers there may have been, but they were fading. As Hosea expressed it, with the use of a different image, 'His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he does not notice' (Hos 7:9)."*

[Grogan, *Isaiah*] "As the MT has it, this verse has a double meaning. On the one hand, it speaks of garlands of flowers worn on the heads of drunken partygoers. They had looked so attractive at first, but as the night wears on, neither the flowers nor wearers look attractive any more. But there is another garland, one set at the head of a fertile valley. This must refer to Samaria, whose walls crowned a lovely hill in the middle of a rich valley leading out toward the coast. Like the faded garland, Samaria's time of loveliness is gone. The Assyrians are at the gates and it is only a matter of time until the end." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE RAPID DESTRUCTION OF SAMARIA — *"The one who is coming (Assyria) is incredibly powerful and violent. He will burst upon them like a hailstorm, stripping the plants of their leaves, and the following downpour washing away even the ravaged stalks. Everything will be flattened under the oppressor's hand.... The city will be eaten up on sight, like an early fig. These fruits, appearing in June well before the main harvest in September and October, were large and sweet. Thus they were usually eaten at once (Hos 9:10; Mic 7:1; Nah 3:12; Jer 24:2). Samaria would be like that, says the prophet. And although the actual siege took three years, it was but an instant in the long span of time. All the pride of Ephraim, which had been so long in building, would be toppled very quickly unless the drunkards who were her leaders very quickly came to their senses."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE TRUE GLORY OF ISRAEL — "The threat is now followed by a promise. This is essentially the same in character as Isa 4:2-6. The place of the false glory thus overthrown is now filled by a glory that is divine and true.... *After the perishable thing in which they gloried had been swept away, the eternal person of Jehovah Himself would be the ornament and pride of His people.* He, the Lord of the seven spirits (Isa 11:1), would be to this remnant of His people the spirit of right and heroic strength. There would be an end to unjust judging and powerless submission." [K&D, *Isaiah*] *"Indulgence must lose its appeal as more and more exotic forms are sought; the glories of the world's Samarias become so quickly tarnished by greed and oppression, but God remains. His beauty will not fade nor can he be defeated.... But in what sense will God be the crown of his people? He will be the true king as depicted in 11:1-9. Instead of the drunken, craven rulers Israel and Judah had come to expect, he will bring a new spirit to the throne."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *This refers to one of Satan's traps: we are often tempted with the beginning of sin, with the 'just try it' mentality, with the knowledge that a 'one-time experience will not hurt.' But nothing remains stagnant and what gives pleasure today won't give the same pleasure tomorrow. Satan tempts with 'just a taste' of liquor, 'having one with the guys.' Satan would never try to tempt someone to drink by showing him the drunk in the gutter, the one whose mind is eaten from years of alcohol abuse, the family who's split because of alcohol. We cannot hide the fact there is pleasure in sin (Heb 11:25) but the ends thereof is destruction and death.*

The Corrupt Religious Leaders (28:7-13)

And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth. "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there." Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest"; and, "This is the place of repose" — but they would not listen. So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there — so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured. (NIV)

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean. Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

And even these through wine have erred, And through strong drink have wandered, Priest and prophet erred through strong drink, They have been swallowed up of the wine, They wandered because of the strong drink, They have erred in seeing, They have stumbled judicially. For all tables have been full of vomit, Filth — without place! By whom doth He teach knowledge? And by whom doth He cause to understand the report? The weaned from milk, the removed from breasts, For rule [is] on rule, rule on rule, line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there, For by scorned lip, and by another tongue, Doth He speak unto this people. Unto whom He hath said, 'This [is] the rest, give ye rest to the weary, And this — the refreshing:' And they have not been willing to hear, And to whom a word of Jehovah hath been, Rule on rule, rule on rule, line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there, So that they go and have stumbled backward, And been broken, and snared, and captured. (YLT)

CORRUPT RELIGIOUS RULERS — not only are the political rulers untrustworthy but the religious rulers as well. *"In wicked violation of the law of God, which prohibited the priests from drinking strong drink when performing priestly service, and that on pain of death (Lev 10:9; cp Ezek 44:21), they were intoxicated even in the midst of their prophetic visions, and when passing judicial sentences. In the same way Micah also charges the prophets and priests with being drunkards (Mic 3:1)." [K&D, Isaiah] "[Verse 8] reaches the heights of realism and puts the writer's disgust in the strongest terms.... Perhaps these tables had been nicely decorated at the beginning of the evening. Not any more! Now self-indulgence has fully shown its ultimate end in degradation. These who should lead the nation in commitment to God's ways wallow in their own filth and think it amusing." [Oswalt, Isaiah]*

SLAVES TO SIN — in the midst of Isaiah’s description of the drunken religious leaders, he accurately portrays the enslaving power of sin by his use of ‘*befuddled by wine, swallowed up by wine*’. The self-indulgent always believe they are in control, they can ‘*stop whenever I want*’. ***“But it is a law of human nature that unrestrained passion soon rules the person in its unrelenting demand for greater satisfaction. Wine has now swallowed its drinkers.”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] ***“Such a high destiny and such a low life style! The vivid picture of spiritual guides lacking not only supernatural insight but even common reason — this surely is what ‘befuddled’ suggests — is horrifying. We could wish it were caricature, but prophets declare truth without exaggeration. Nor unhappily is the drunken ‘minister’ unknown to modern Christendom. The realistic description of the environment is v. 8 bears all the marks of eyewitness reporting.”*** [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *‘Jesus replied, I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’* (John 8:34) *‘For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.... When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!’* (Rom 6:6,7,20,21)

THE UNREPENTANT MOCK THOSE WHO POINT OUT THEIR SIN — ***“So here, the drunkards lash out at the prophet, telling him that they are old enough to know what they are doing and that they do not need somebody to keep harping on their sins.*** Of course, the irony is that a drunk is more childish than a child. At least the milk an infant draws from its mother’s breasts will make it more mature and not less so, unlike the alcohol they are drinking. ***How odd that the more correction we need, the less we think we need it.”*** [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *Those weaned from milk* = those drunkards accused the prophet of treating them like toddlers in attempting to teach them righteousness. “As the prophet declared the word of God in this drink-dominated setting, his hearers made their response. The NIV is probably right in treating both these verses as a quotation of the words of the drunkards. ***They felt insulted. Were they not themselves spiritual leaders, well able to teach others? What right had this man to place them in the classroom and teach them the spiritual ABC’s? ... Was drunkenness the peoples main sin? No, for more serious still was their failure to hear God’s word offering rest to those who insisted on rejecting it.... The effects of drink may pass off, but unbelief can be a permanent barrier to God’s word.”*** [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

‘BLAH, BLAH, BLAH’ — although this verse is difficult grammatically, the general sense is plain: ***they continue to accuse the prophet of teaching them little by little, using simple, repetitive instruction as when teaching children.*** The NIV margin says the Hebrew is ‘*sav lasav sav lasav / kav lakav kav lakav.*’ “Many commentators have been puzzled by v. 10 and have wrestled to make sense of the Hebrew. The truth of the matter seems to be, as the NIV margin suggests, that it is not meant to make sense. Isaiah’s words had hardly penetrated the alcohol - impregnated atmosphere that surrounded his hearers. What they picked up were simply a few stray syllables, some of them repeated, like the baby-talk that delights the child but would insult the adult. They mouth this gibberish back at the prophet. The transmitter was as strong and clear as ever; it was the receivers that were at fault. Their judgment, meantime, lay in their failure to hear the word that could have led them back to God; but there was another judgment on its way, most appropriate in its form.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “Among the other alternatives proposed are: (1) meaningless words used in mockery (such as in English ‘blah, blah, blah’); (2) meaningless words used to teach children to walk; (3) drunken babbling; (4) as puns on ‘vomit’ and ‘filth’; (5) as portions of a rubric used to teach the alphabet; (6) actual Akkadian, to be read as ‘*Go out, let him go out...! Wait, let him wait...! Servant, listen...!*’ ” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE HARDENED HEART — “The atmosphere of the segment is grimly realistic. *There is no more hardened nor cynical person in the world than a religious leader who has seared his conscience. For them, tender appeals which would move anyone else become sources of amusement. They have learned how to debunk everything and to believe nothing (Heb 10:26-31), all the while speaking loftily of matters of the spirit (Jas 3:13-18).*” [Oswalt, Isaiah] Elsewhere Isaiah further describes his listeners as ‘scoffers’ (v14), the strongest negative term used in the OT to describe the wicked, the opposite of ‘faithful’. “*Not only does this person choose the wrong way, but he mocks the right way. He is not merely misled, he delights to mislead others. So he is the very opposite of the wise man, who understands the order of things correctly (Prov 15:12; 21:24; 22:10; 29:8; Hos 7:5).*” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

GOD WILL CORRECT GENTLY OR HARSHLY, BUT HE WILL CORRECT — Isaiah takes the mockers’ words and turns them back upon themselves. Since they refused the prophet’s words, God Himself will teach them ‘*command upon command, standard upon standard*’ but from the lips of their Assyrian taskmasters. “*Their sin had turned the word of God through Isaiah into a meaningless noise that might just as well have been a foreign language. Very well, then, the next message will come through foreigners (v. 11).*” The Assyrian devastation of Judah (cf. 1:5-9) is surely in view. There is a striking aptness about this, because just as the drunkards picked up a few familiar sounds but no connected meaning, so the people of Judah would detect some similarities between the Akkadian of the Assyrians and their own Hebrew (both being Semitic tongues), without being able to understand what was being said. Of course, in reality it was through the Assyrians’ swords rather than their words that God would speak his message to Israel.” [Grogan, Isaiah] *More will be discussed concerning this verse at the end of the lesson.*

GOD OFFERED REST BUT ISRAEL REFUSED — “Actually, God’s words had been simple and straightforward. He had made it plain to his people that they could rest in him, but that there was no rest in defensive alliances or military hardware (30:15; 31:1-3). *Ultimately, the only security is in the conviction that God cares for us and will bring all the strands of the life committed to him to a joyous climax. But something within the human heart wants to find its security in its own devices over which it has final control. So they would not listen.*” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

ACTIONS BRING CONSEQUENCES — “‘*So that they will go and stumble*’ reiterates the truth which many modern child psychologists have discovered: *in order for maturity to be reached, the child must be allowed to suffer the consequences of its actions. For the parent to intervene constantly and to nullify the results is to give the child a wholly misshapen understanding of life.* So these events come upon God’s people in order that they may fall and thus learn.” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

The Cornerstone, Precious and True (28:14-22)

<i>Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. You boast, “We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot</i>	<i>Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto</i>	<i>Therefore, hear a word of Jehovah, ye men of scorning, Ruling this people that [is] in Jerusalem. Because ye have said: ‘We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we have made a provision, An overflowing scourge, when it passeth over, Doth not meet us,</i>
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touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.” So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place. Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the grave will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through.” The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror. The bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you. The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon — to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task. Now stop your mocking, or your chains will become heavier; the Lord, the LORD Almighty, has told me of the destruction decreed against the whole land. (NIV)

us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth. (KJV)

Though we have made a lie our refuge, And in falsehood have been hidden.’ Therefore, thus said the Lord Jehovah: ‘Lo, I am laying a foundation in Zion, A stone — a tried stone, a corner stone precious, a settled foundation, He who is believing doth not make haste. And I have put judgment for a line, And righteousness for a plummet, And sweep away doth hail the refuge of lies, And the secret hiding-place do waters overflow. And disannulled hath been your covenant with death, And your provision with Sheol doth not stand, An overflowing scourge, when it passeth over, Then ye have been to it for a treading- place. From the fulness of its passing over it taketh you, For morning by morning it passeth over, By day and by night, And it hath been only a trembling to consider the report. For shorter hath been the bed Than to stretch one’s self out in, And the covering hath been narrower Than to wrap one’s self up in. For as [at] mount Perazim rise doth Jehovah, As [at] the valley in Gibeon He is troubled, To do His work — strange [is] His work, And to do His deed — strange [is] His deed.’ And now, show not yourselves scorers, Lest strong be your bands, For a consumption, that is determined, I have heard, by the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, [Is] for all the land. (YLT)

TRANSITION FROM EPHRAIM TO JUDAH — There appears to be a shifting of emphasis from Ephraim / Samaria in v1-13 to Jerusalem, indicated by Isaiah's use of *'therefore'* (some place the transition at v7). "If a terrible fate has befallen Samaria, this is no time for rejoicing, says Isaiah. For the rulers of Jerusalem (28:14-22; 29:15-17) are as senseless as those of Samaria, and the priests and prophets are as drunken and blind (29:1,9-14). Therefore, *Jerusalem's fate will be as severe as Samaria's*.... The segment 28:14-22 is directed to those foolish leaders of Jerusalem whose plans are based upon the cynical and faithless projections of the future. But Isaiah tells them that cynicism cannot provide a secure foundation against the shocks of life (v19). Only faith can do that (v16)." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE SCOFFERS COMMANDED TO HEAR — *"This passage underlines the objectivity of the word of God. Men may have lost their capacity to hear it, but this does not modify its character as God's word one whit. There is no question of its having to become his word in the context of experience. They are commanded to hear it, even though it is unlikely to penetrate to their understanding simply because it is his and men are culpable if they do not hear."* [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

JUDAH'S COVENANT WITH DEATH — *the rejection of God's word and confidence in our own often go hand in hand. 'We have made a covenant with death'* could be taken either literally or cynically. If a literal quotation, then the rulers of Jerusalem did indeed make an agreement with the gods of the underworld: Death (*Mot*) and Plague (*Reshef*). In fact, an alliance with Egypt could have involved *Isis* and *Osiris*, both related to the underworld. Isaiah may have been speaking sarcastically however, referring to their alliance with Egypt against Assyria. *'Lie ... falsehood'* is Isaiah putting words into their mouths to show the true import of what they have done.

ON WHAT IS OUR FAITH BASED? — "In the earlier passage (8:14), the Lord himself had declared that he would be both a sanctuary — and Judah's sanctuary at Jerusalem was made of stone and a stumbling stone for the people of Israel. Faith would make the difference." [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *"God is establishing a structure in Zion which will be a source of comfort and encouragement to those who will trust him but a bar of judgement for those who refuse to do so. The imagery of laying the foundation for a building is used to make a point. If the foundations are cheap stones, shoddily laid, it is not possible for the building to survive the shocks which will come to it (Matt 7:24-27).* That is what these rulers have done. They have rested the nation's survival upon the promises of the idolatrous rulers of Egypt, the negotiations perhaps engaged in secretly to avoid the wrath of such persons as Isaiah. By contrast, God is also laying a foundation whose very nature should be such as to condemn the false trusts which are filling Jerusalem." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Several possibilities are given for the historic reference here by Isaiah: the law, the temple, the Lord Himself, the Lord's saving work, the Lord's relation to his people, the Davidic monarchy, true believers, Zion, the remnant, the Lord's promise, and faith itself. *"Perhaps no one identification is correct. The cornerstone may be the whole complex of ideas relating to the Lord's revelation of his faithfulness and the call to reciprocate with the same kind of faithfulness toward him."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE NT APPLICATION OF THIS PASSAGE — *"Without doubt this passage is of great importance in the messianic teaching of the prophecies of Isaiah. It is treated as messianic in the NT and is quoted in application to Christ several times in the apostolic writings (Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:4-6).* It is important, however, for us to see its appropriateness and to seek to determine its precise meaning within its OT context. In 8:14, in an oracle from the time of Ahaz, the prophet had used the stone analogy in a most significant way. The Lord himself was calling

men to faith. If they responded in faith, he would be a sanctuary, a holy place, to them. As the altar of God in the temple was treated as a place of refuge (Exod 21:14; 1 Kings 1:50), so God himself would be a holy place of refuge for them (cf. Ezek 11:16). If, however, they refused belief, he would be a stone of stumbling they would fall over. The altar of stone was, of course, set within a temple of stone, so that both the promise and the threat there rest on the spiritualizing of the stone. The context here is very similar. The leadership of Judah was again refused the way of faith and sought alliance with Egypt. The prophet returned to his previous image but developed it differently. The stone-built temple is once again a picture of the God they are to trust in. Instead of reapplying the stone illustration in a threat, Isaiah declared God's condemnation of the poor Egyptian makeshift the rebellious and unbelieving people had constructed as a substitute for faith in their God.... *A comparison of the language of 8:14 and the present passage shows us that there the sanctuary and stone were God himself whereas here the stone is laid by God. If this passage is a development of the former, then we are bound to ask, 'Who, in Isaiah's prophecies, is both God and distinct from him?' The clear answer is 'the Messiah,' as 9:6 (cf. 7:14) shows.*" [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *"The NT makes it plain that the ultimate foundation for trust in God is the character of God as revealed in Jesus. In his life and work all that the Bible has said about the trustworthiness of God comes to its fulfillment* (Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet 2:4-6; 1 Tim 1:16). Nor is there any incongruity between those assertions and the sense of this verse. *The question being dealt with here is the basis for life's choices: the machinations of people or the trustworthiness of God.... The issue remains the same today as then: upon what shall we build our lives, human schemes or divine trustworthiness.*" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

TOPSTONE OR FOUNDATION STONE? — *"The stone is probably defined in a twofold way. First of all, it is a tested or testing stone ... [indicating] that the foundation stone has been tested for strength and shape.... [Secondly, it] may well refer to a topstone, shaped by the master mason for placing at the end of the whole building process, so forming a test of trueness of line for the whole edifice.* This idea is found in Psalm 118:22 and is applied to Christ in Mark 12:10. He comes as the consummation of the divine building project (sent 'last of all,' Mark 12:6); and, although rejected by the religious leaders of his day — the spiritual counterparts of the unbelieving leaders here — he was, in fact, God's proof of the soundness of the whole structure of messianic promise.... *If we are right in seeing both topstone and foundation stone here, we have evidence of the freedom of the prophet — and behind him of the inspiring Spirit — in the use of analogies. In architecture the same stone cannot fulfill both purposes; but God gives one great answer to the totality of human need, and that answer is Christ.*" [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

REPEATED TRIALS TEST THE BUILDINGS BUILT ON SAND OR ROCK — The Lord builds on righteousness and justice (v17-19) while the lost build on falsehood. *The Lord's building stands the test of time while the trials of life wash away the houses built upon sand. These trials are not a one-time event neither; v19 speaks of repeated judgment and is historically accurate. The Assyrians were known for repeated attacks to the same area, each time accompanied with vast slaughter and pillage. These attacks occurred over years, reducing the inhabitants to 'sheer terror' as Isaiah notes.*

THE PROMISES OF THE PAGAN ALLIES ARE EASY TO MAKE BUT DIFFICULT TO KEEP — Isaiah quotes a probably-popular proverb of the time (v20), the sense being *'they cannot do what they claim'*. "The situation into which they are brought is like a bed too short for a man to stretch himself in, and like a covering which, according to the measure of the man who covers himself up in it, is too narrow or too tight. So would it be in their case with the Egyptian

treaty, in which they fancied that there were rest and safety for them. They would have to acknowledge its insufficiency. They had made themselves a bed, and procured bed-clothes; but how mistaken they had been in the measure, how miserably and ridiculously they had miscalculated!" [K&D, Isaiah]

GOD WILL FIGHT HIS ENEMIES — Perhaps Isaiah's foes remembered God's past works when He 'came through' just in time for Israel against their enemies: at Mount Perazim against the Philistines (2 Sam 5:20; 1 Chron 14:11) and in the Valley of Gibeon against the Canaanites (Josh 10:11). *"But who are God's enemies? Those who do not obey him (Ps 139:19-24). Thus God will work, he will perform his deeds, but they will be strange and foreign because they will be against his people, not for them."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THERE WAS STILL TIME TO CHANGE — as mentioned above, sin enslaves its practitioners. *"The scoffers are already in bondage because of their mockery of God, and unless they stop at once, they will have forged their chains so tightly that nothing can break them. The sin from which there is no return is not merely refusing to listen to God, but making fun of the very means by which he addresses us (Heb 10:26-31; 1 Jn 5:16,17). Ultimately such a person cannot even recognize the truth when it confronts him."* [Oswalt, Isaiah] "But the possibility of repentance was still open to them, and at least a modification of what had been threatened was attainable." [K&D, Isaiah]

A Concluding Parable (28:23-29)

<i>Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. All this also comes</i>	<i>Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen.</i>	<i>Give ear, and hear my voice, Attend, and hear my saying: The whole day plougheth the ploughman to sow? He openeth and harroweth his ground! Hath he not, if he have made level its face, Then scattered fitches, and cummin sprinkle, And hath placed the principal wheat, And the appointed barley, And the rie [in] its own border? And instruct him for judgment doth his God, He doth direct him. For not with a sharp-pointed thing threshed are fitches, And the wheel of a cart on cummin turned round, For with a staff beaten out are fitches, And cummin with a rod. Bread-[corn] is beaten small, For not for ever doth he sorely thresh it, Nor crushed [it] hath a wheel of his cart, Nor do his hoofs beat it small. Even this</i>
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from the LORD Almighty, This also cometh forth from from Jehovah of Hosts hath wonderful in counsel and the LORD of hosts, which is gone out, He hath made magnificent in wisdom. (NIV) wonderful in counsel, and counsel wonderful, He hath excellent in working. (KJV) made wisdom great! (YLT)

GOD THE TEACHER TO THOSE WHO LISTEN — “Broadly speaking, the prophet is pointing to a simple peasant who farms according to certain principles which he has learned from God. Thus he knows when to plow and when to sow. He knows what needs to be sown where (vv 24,25) and how to adapt his threshing techniques to the different plants so as not to destroy the grain (vv 27,28). *How does he know these things? God, the great teacher and counselor, has shown him (26:29).*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “The point made in v. 24 is that agriculture requires the farmer to change his activity from time to time. Plowing is needed, but it is not a year-round activity. So *God’s purposes require him to act differently at different seasons*, perhaps sparing Jerusalem in 701 B.C. and destroying it in 586 B.C. Then a farmer does not normally sow all his fields with only one plant variety (v. 25). In a mixed farming economy, space is found for a variety of crops. Once again, *the variety of God’s ways with people is being underlined*. The farmer learns such things from God, by a study perhaps of nature (v. 26). *Why then is man so reluctant to learn from God in spiritual things?* Verses 27-29 take the illustration further. When it comes to harvest time, *threshing takes different forms, each form dictated by the type of crop harvested* (v. 27). More than this, *threshing time comes to an end, for the ultimate aim of all this activity is to produce edible food* (v. 28). Plowing, sowing, threshing, and grinding are all means to this end. So *God has his purposes in history*, and through a sequence of events he brings them to pass (v. 29). *God’s power (‘the LORD Almighty’) and wisdom, united in his nature, bring forth a pattern of events in the story of man. Most of the agricultural processes here can suggest pain, perhaps implying therefore that it is possible to find oneself on the wrong side of God’s purposes in history and so to experience his judgment.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

VERSE 11 AND THE MODERN CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

It is interesting Paul quotes this verse in 1 Cor 14:21 when speaking about glossolalia (speaking in tongues): ‘*Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written: “Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.*’ (1 Cor 14:20-22 NIV) What is the context of Isaiah 28? The Lord is rebuking the leaders of Judah for refusing Him. Since they refused to listen to His prophets, the Lord would therefore teach them by other means: the Assyrians. There are therefore things to be remembered when evaluating Paul’s usage of the Isaiah passage:

- **‘tongues’ is a known language** — God sent prophets yet the people refused them, therefore He would bring the Assyrians to teach His people. They would speak a language foreign to that of Judah and therefore unintelligible; but it would still be a known language. The same is true when we turn to the NT. ‘*Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. [Gk dialektoi, dialect] And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in*

our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.’ (Acts 2:6-11 KJV)

● **‘tongues’ was not a sign for believers but unbelievers** — As we look at the Isaiah passage, would the Lord bring forth the Assyrians because His people were faithful? No, they would have rather relied upon Egypt than upon the Lord, so God sent the Assyrians to cure their unbelief. In like manner Paul says *‘Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.’* (1 Cor 14:22). The gift of tongues were originally given on Pentecost as a sign to unbelievers in an evangelistic, missionary setting. The Corinthians however had made it a ‘status symbol’, misusing the gift for their own ends. *‘He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.... Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.’* (1 Cor 14:4,12) Paul said ‘tongues’ (the gift of speaking to foreigners in their own language) were for unbelievers, preaching was for believers’ edification. *‘I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.’* (1 Cor 14:18,19).

“So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay
a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious
cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who
trusts will never be dismayed.’”

— *Isaiah 28:16 NIV*