

Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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Outline of the Book of Isaiah

- I. Isaiah's Warning of Judgment on Israel (1-39)
 - A. Judgement and Hope for Jerusalem (1-12)
 - B. Judgement and Hope for the Nations (13-27)
 1. The Oracles Against the Nations (13-23)
 2. God Will Accomplish All His Purposes (24-27)
 - C. True Deliverance Is Found, Not in Egypt, But in the Lord (28-35)
 - D. The Conclusion of the Assyrian Period (36-37)
 - E. Introduction to the Babylonian Period (38-39)
- II. The Promise of Future Hope in the New Jerusalem (40-66)

True Deliverance Is Found Not in Egypt But in the Lord (Isaiah 28-35)

- Today we move into a new major section of Isaiah (chapters 28-35) where Isaiah *continues* to teach the importance of trusting in the Lord above all else.
- Having established God's sovereignty over the nations both in particular (chapters 13-23) and in general (chapters 24-27), Isaiah now addresses particular situations in Israel and Judah that illustrate the folly of trusting other *nations* rather than trusting the LORD.
- Because a refusal to trust in God will *ultimately* lead to *destruction*, Isaiah begins several of the messages in this section with the word "*Woe!*" (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1).

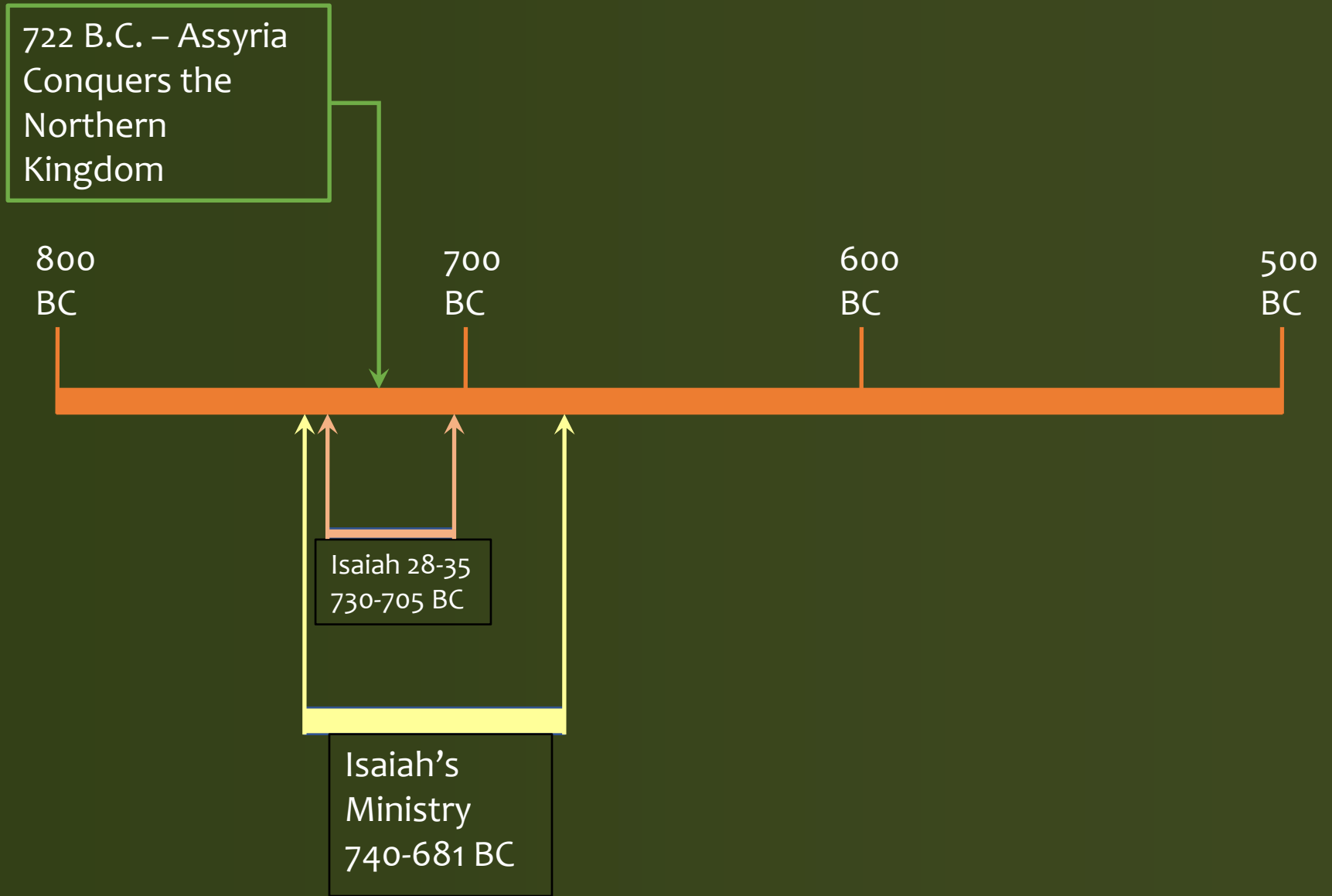
True Deliverance Is Found Not in Egypt But in the Lord (Isaiah 28-35)

- The material in this major section can be broken into groups of two chapters each:
 - Chapters 28-29 deal with problems in the nation that are being *made worse* by the foolish, drunken leaders
 - Chapters 30-31 condemn the solution being proposed by these leaders: dependence on Egypt
 - Chapters 32-33 present the *true* solution: reliance on the **LORD** who is the *true Leader* and *righteous King*.
 - Chapters 34-35 show God's sovereignty manifested in judgement and salvation
- Most of these chapters are focused on Judah, as might be expected since that is Isaiah's home.
- However, chapter 28 *begins* with a "*Woe!*" addressed to "*Ephraim*," i.e. the *northern* kingdom of Israel.
- It's unclear just how far Isaiah continues addressing *Ephraim* in this section, before turning to address *Jerusalem*.

True Deliverance Is Found Not in Egypt But in the Lord (Isaiah 28-35)

- Clearly, by verse 14 the focus has shifted to *Jerusalem*, and Isaiah doesn't seem to address the northern kingdom any more after that.
- However, most of what is said even *after* verse 14 is still *relevant* to the northern kingdom since it too has entered its final death throes.
- Most of the material in this major section *seems* to be describing events that occurred somewhat *later* than those events recorded in Isaiah 7-8 (during the reign of King Ahaz).
- At the same time, they seem to *precede* the events of Isaiah 36-37 (during the reign of Hezekiah).
- In other words, they fall roughly between 730 and 705 BC.

Isaiah Timeline



True Deliverance Is Found Not in Egypt But in the Lord (Isaiah 28-35)

- When it became clear that the northern kingdom was going to fall to Assyria and that Ahaz's "alliance" with Assyria was as worthless as Isaiah had predicted, the only human hope left was Egypt.
- No other country in the area had the wealth or resources to mount an army of sufficient size to stand up to the Assyrians.
- But Isaiah warns them that trusting Egypt is as foolish as trusting Assyria.
- Although it was unlikely that Egypt would turn on Judah as Assyria had, they were still only flesh and blood (31:3) and are *not* able to offer what the **LORD** can offer.

True Deliverance Is Found Not in Egypt But in the Lord (Isaiah 28-35)

- Today we will begin looking specifically at Chapter 28 which breaks up into *four* parts:
 - Beauty and Glory – Lost and Found (Isaiah 28:1-6)
 - Corruption in Jerusalem (Isaiah 28:7-13)
 - The Cornerstone (Isaiah 28:14-22)
 - The Parable of the Farmer (Isaiah 28:23-29)

Beauty and Glory – Lost and Found (Isaiah 28:1-6)

28:1 *The splendid crown of Ephraim's drunkards is doomed, the withering flower, its beautiful splendor, situated at the head of a rich valley, the crown of those overcome with wine. ² Look, the Lord sends a strong, powerful one. With the force of a hailstorm or a destructive windstorm, with the might of a driving, torrential rainstorm, he will knock that crown to the ground with his hand. ³ The splendid crown of Ephraim's drunkards will be trampled underfoot. ⁴ The withering flower, its beautiful splendor, situated at the head of a rich valley, will be like an early fig before harvest— as soon as someone notices it, he grabs it and swallows it. ⁵ At that time the LORD of Heaven's Armies will become a beautiful crown and a splendid diadem for the remnant of his people. ⁶ He will give discernment to the one who makes judicial decisions and strength to those who defend the city from attackers.*

28:1 *The splendid crown of **Ephraim's** drunkards is **doomed**, the withering flower, its beautiful splendor, situated at the head of a rich **valley**, the crown of those overcome with wine.*

- “*Ephraim*” here is the northern kingdom, Israel, at least what was left of it after the severe mauling it received from the Assyrians in 733 BC.
- Its capital city, Samaria, was ideally situated at the head of a fertile “*valley*” which extended westward to the Mediterranean Sea.
- In its heyday it was a beautiful city, and breathtaking views can still be enjoyed from the hill of Samaria where its ruins remain to this day.
- The “*doom*” (or “Woe”) pronounced on it here anticipates its imminent fall, an event which, in fact, occurred in 722 BC.

Samaria, the “Crown of Ephraim”



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100 m Camera: 1,233 m 32°16'31"N 35°11'09"E 403 m

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28:1 *The splendid crown of Ephraim's drunkards is doomed, the withering flower, its beautiful splendor, situated at the head of a rich valley, the crown of those overcome with wine.*

- It's possible that verses 1-13 were originally delivered to Ephraim just **prior** to 722 BC.
- And in its present position here in chapter 28, it serves as a kind of preface to the oracle against the leaders of Jerusalem (given in verses 14-22) who were the **real** targets of Isaiah's preaching in the crisis which led up to the Assyrian invasion by Sennacherib's army.
- If this is the case, then the warnings given to Samaria's leaders had **already** been tragically fulfilled.
- Therefore (see verse 14a) their counterparts in Jerusalem should take careful note and change their ways while they still have the opportunity to do so.

28:1 *The splendid **crown** of Ephraim's drunkards is doomed, the withering flower, its beautiful splendor, situated at the head of a rich valley, the **crown** of those overcome with wine.*

- This verse has a double meaning.
- On the one hand, it speaks of a garland of flowers (“**crown**”) worn on the heads of drunken partygoers.
- They had looked so attractive at first, but as the night wears on, neither flowers nor wearers look attractive any more.
- But there is another “garland” (or “**crown**”), one set at the head of a fertile valley.
- This would be 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.

^{28:2} *Look, the Lord sends a **strong, powerful one**. With the force of a hailstorm or a destructive windstorm, with the might of a driving, **torrential rainstorm**, he will knock that crown to the ground with his **hand**.*

- One of the characteristics of the Hebrew people seems to have been their ability to ignore the signs of the times (cf. Isaiah 22).
- They apparently adopted the view that they would not worry about tomorrow until it came and in the meantime would eat, drink, and play themselves into forgetfulness.
- So here Isaiah does everything he can to try to **alert** his people to their **danger**.
- The “**strong, powerful one**” who is coming (Assyria) is incredibly powerful and violent.
- He will burst upon them like a “**torrential rainstorm**”, stripping the plants of their leaves, with the subsequent downpour washing away the ravaged stalks.
- Everything will be flattened under the oppressor’s “**hand**”.

28:3 *The splendid crown of Ephraim's drunkards will be **trampled** underfoot. ⁴ The withering flower, its beautiful splendor, situated at the head of a rich valley, will be **like an early fig** before harvest— as soon as someone notices it, **he grabs it and swallows it.***

- After the storm has swept over the party nothing will be left but a few bedraggled garlands “*trampled*” in the mud.
- Again, the double imagery is present, for the city of Samaria is also intended, as v. 4 makes plain.
- The city will be eaten up “*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 will be like that, says the prophet.
- 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.

28:5 At that time **the LORD of Heaven's Armies** will become a beautiful **crown** and a splendid diadem for **the remnant** of his people. ⁶ He will give **discernment** to the one who makes judicial decisions and **strength** to those who defend the city from attackers.

- In contrast, there is **another “crown”** available to the people of Ephraim – the Lord **himself**.
- He will be the source of beauty and glory for **“the remnant”** who have abandoned their own pride in glad submission to him.
- **“The LORD”** will give **“discernment”** to the judges and **“strength”** to the soldiers.
- The mention of **“crown”** in verse 5 puts the issue in a clear light: Who is the **real** King?
 - The drunken political leaders?
 - or **“the LORD of Heaven's Armies”**?
- This is the choice they must make.

Corruption in Jerusalem (Isaiah 28:7-13)

^{28:7} *Even these men stagger because of wine; they stumble around because of beer— priests and prophets stagger because of beer, they are confused because of wine, they stumble around because of beer; they stagger while seeing prophetic visions, they totter while making legal decisions.*

⁸ *Indeed, all the tables are covered with vomit, with filth, leaving no clean place. ⁹ Who is the Lord trying to teach? To whom is he explaining a message? To those just weaned from milk! To those just taken from their mother's breast!*

¹⁰ *Indeed, they will hear meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there. ¹¹ For with mocking lips and a foreign tongue he will speak to these people. ¹² In the past he said to them, "This is where security can be found. Provide security for the one who is exhausted. This is where rest can be found." But they refused to listen. ¹³ So the LORD's message to them will sound like meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there. As a result, they will fall on their backsides when they try to walk, and be injured, ensnared, and captured.*

28:7 *Even these men stagger because of wine; they stumble around because of beer— **priests and prophets** stagger because of beer, they are **confused** because of wine, they stumble around because of beer; they stagger while seeing prophetic visions, they totter while making legal decisions. ⁸ Indeed, all the **tables** are **covered with vomit**, with filth, leaving no clean place.*

- Verses 1– 4 spoke of the *political* leaders and the *nobility*, whereas *here* we see that the “*priests and prophets*” are no better off.
- *They too* are consumed with trying to please and satisfy *themselves*.
- The result is that those who *should* be giving clear guidance and teaching in that desperate hour are “*confused*” and staggering around in a stupor.
- The “*tables*” that “*are covered with vomit*” may be tables at which the priests sit to give judgment, or they may just be the tables around which the partygoers sit.

28:9 *Who is the Lord trying to teach? To whom is he explaining a message? To those just weaned from milk! To those just taken from their mother's breast!* ¹⁰ *Indeed, they will hear meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there.*

- Here we see the mockery expressed by these religious leaders for the **true** prophet.
- “Who does he think he is,” they say, “treating us like little children?”
- Of course, childishness is just what alcohol does to a person, but it makes them unable to recognize the fact.
- They denounce the **repetitive simplicity** of the prophet's teaching.
- As they see it, Isaiah should be teaching something more **nuanced** to a people who are as **sophisticated** as they presumed **themselves** to be.

28:11 For with mocking **lips** and a **foreign tongue** he will speak to these people. ¹² In the past he said to them, "This is where security can be found. Provide security for the one who is exhausted. This is where **rest** can be found." But they refused to listen.

- Very well, says Isaiah, since they will not listen to the LORD when he speaks to them through the simple, clear message of the prophets, he will speak to them through the "**lips**" of "**foreigners**" (the invading Assyrians).
- And the result will be not "**rest**" but **ruin**.
- They will **have** what they have **chosen**.
- God is not mocked!
- There will be a price to pay for those who put themselves **above** the word of God.

28:13 *So the LORD's message to them will sound like meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there. **As a result, they will fall on their backsides** when they try to walk, and be injured, ensnared, and captured.*

- Since they would *not listen* to the gentle words of God, but *mocked* them, the people of Samaria were doomed to learn the effects of sin at the hands of a much *harder* teacher – experience.
- “*As a result, they will fall on their backsides*” reiterates the truth which many parents have discovered: in order for maturity to be reached, a child must sometimes be allowed to suffer the consequences of his actions.
- If a parent to *constantly* prevents a child from ever experiencing the negative results of his bad decisions, it will result in that child being *unprepared* to deal with the challenges of *real life*.
- So the LORD also brings difficult events into the lives of his people in order that they may “*fall*” and therefore *learn*.

New Testament
Usage of
Isaiah 28:11-12

Isaiah 28:11 **For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people** ¹² to whom he has said, “This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose”; **yet they would not hear.** (ESV)

1Cor 14:21 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.”** ²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. (ESV)

- The Apostle Paul cites **Isaiah 28:11,12b** in **1 Cor 14:21** as a part of his argument against the Corinthians use of the gift of speaking in foreign languages (“*tongues*”) in the public assembly.
- Paul introduces his quotation by identifying it as something written “*in the Law*,” meaning that it is a quotation from Scripture (it is not, strictly speaking, from the law).

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- In Paul's case, the issue is the use of a supernatural ability that some had in that day to speak a foreign language that they had never learned.
- Paul is interested in this text because of its reference to God's use of foreign languages to communicate a message to his people.
- In the OT context the experience of the invading Assyrians was God's execution of the covenant curses on his unbelieving and unfaithful people.

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- Just as the experience in Isaiah 28:11-12 did not result in the conversion of the hearers but instead expressed **alienation** between God and his people, so also Paul indicates that the use of foreign languages in the church will result, not in the **conversion** of unbelievers, but rather in their further **alienation**.
- Paul draws a theological conclusion about the appropriateness (or, rather, the inappropriateness) of the use of foreign languages ("*tongues*") in the congregation based on its function in Israel's experience in Isaiah 28:11-12.

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- God spoke to his people in the **old** covenant through unknown languages as a sign of their **alienation**.
- Now that Christ has inaugurated the **new** covenant, the **prophetic message** (i.e. preaching) which “*speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation*” (1 Cor 14:1) is to be employed in the public assembly as the means of accomplishing God’s purposes, rather than speaking in unknown languages (“*tongues*”).

Next Time

I plan to begin looking at the remainder of **Isaiah 28** beginning with **verse 14** where Isaiah tells us how the LORD will “*lay... in Zion... a precious cornerstone*”.

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- One of my commentaries on Isaiah made this comment about the text that we looked at today:
 - *When... leaders... sin it is the whole community that suffers. Isaiah will have nothing of the currently fashionable separation of public and private morality, with its corollary that the private lives of public figures are entirely their own affair, for which they should not be called to account. Nor, at a later time, would John the Baptist. That doughty warrior lost his head for confronting a powerful political figure with the truth about his private conduct. Jesus, too, humanly speaking, sealed his fate by his uncompromising exposure of the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders of his day. Our own relative silence on such matters today probably springs more from cowardice and unfaithfulness than from any careful reflection on whether such costly confrontation is required of us.*
- What do you think about this comment?

Class Discussion Time

- What do you think about the practice of “speaking in tongues” that takes place in modern charismatic churches?
- Have you ever seen an example of “tongues” spoken in a modern charismatic church where there was an identifiable foreign language being spoken so that someone present who spoke that language could then translate what had been said for the congregation, as the Apostle Paul commands:
 - *If someone speaks in a tongue* [during a public gathering for worship – see verse 26], *it should be two, or at the most three, one after the other, and someone **must interpret***. (1 Cor 14:27 NET)