

ISAIAH – LESSON THIRTEEN

ISAIAH 26:16 - 29

Chapter 26, Continued...

Vv. 16-19 – From Failure to Victory

Jehovah is surely the center of this chapter. *Jehovah* occurs 11 times and *Jah* occurs once. Jehovah's people revisit their affliction and acknowledge that it bought them to their knees in prayer. Their pain was as a woman in labor when they called upon God. Yet they were not delivered. They were disappointed because instead of bringing forth a child they brought forth wind – nothing. It was a false pregnancy. Their own efforts have failed. Their labor has produced neither salvation nor deliverance. The expression “before thee” implies that all of this occurred before God.

In the midst of this failure a cry of hope and encouragement peals forth. There will be victory – the dead shall live – but it will come from God, not man. The assurance is made stronger by repetition. There are three views of this resurrection; 1) the figurative resurrection of the Jewish nation and their return to their land; 2) the final resurrection of the body at the end of time; and 3) a spiritual resurrection in the messianic age. Which is it?

1). The context has made clear that Isaiah is speaking of a resurrection when God's people return to him. It is a resurrection that will include an enlarging of the nation and an expansion of its borders (15). This did not occur in the first restoration from Babylon. It occurs with spiritual Israel and the second restoration (see Ezek. 37).

2). The resurrection of the body has been shown since Moses' experience at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6 – I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Jesus concluded from that that they were all alive, for God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him” (Luke 20:38-38). Moreover, in chapter 27 Isaiah identifies certain events (1-2, 12-13) with 26:19. This confirms that he is not speaking of the final resurrection of the body even though the language is similar. Jesus used similar

language to describe both events in John 5:25-29. John 5:25 refers to a resurrection that “now is,” *i.e.*, in the time of Jesus. John 5:28-29 refers to the final resurrection at the second coming. Note that in the latter verses Jesus said that “all that are in the tombs shall come forth.” The resurrection of which Isaiah speaks is limited in scope. Thus, he cannot be referring to the final resurrection.

3). Viewing the resurrection of which Isaiah speaks as a spiritual resurrection is consistent with the context both of the chapter and the entire book. It is this resurrection of which Jesus speaks in John 5:25 and which was prophesied by Daniel (12:2).

“Thy dew is as the dew of herbs” *i.e.* it is refreshing, vivifying, potent to make even dead bones live. “*Thy dew*” may be said with reference to Jehovah, for changes in the person addressed are frequent in Isaiah; or with reference to the people of Israel, meaning, “the dew which Jehovah will shed *on thee*,” *i.e.* on thy dead.

Vv. 20-21 – Wait for Jehovah

As people seek shelter in the time of storm, Jehovah calls upon his people to enter their chambers and hide themselves because of the coming indignation and to remain there “for a little moment” until it is over. God’s punishment is coming upon the inhabitants of the earth. Literally, the language says that God is coming “to visit the iniquity of the inhabitant of the earth upon him.” “The earth shall also disclose her blood.” More especially, he comes to visit their blood-guiltiness upon them. Isaiah denounced “murderers” in his first chapter (ver. 21). Manasseh’s murders were the main cause of the first destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:4). The second destruction was equally a judgment for the innocent blood that had been shed upon the earth, “from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias” (Matt. 23:35). Bloodshed “cries to God for vengeance” (Gen. 4:10; 9:6). Their sin will no longer be covered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Overthrow of World Power and Ingathering of Israel

Vv. 1-6 – The New Vineyard

Commentators disagree on whether v. 1 should conclude chapter 26 or begin chapter 27. The dispute is another example of worrying about the irrelevant. Chapter and verse divisions are not part of the scripture and are not inspired. The dispute is irrelevant because v. 1 is clearly a transition between the two chapters. “In that day” relates that which Jehovah is doing in this chapter with that which he did in the last chapter, specifically 26:19-21 (but cf. also vv. 2, 12). The Lord’s sword is hard and great and strong. With it he punishes leviathan, the swift and crooked serpent; he will slay the monster that is in the sea. What does leviathan represent? Some say there are three creatures represented and that may well be. It could also be one monster described by three terms to emphasize his nature. Those who believe that it is three creatures suggest that the terms represent three great countries – Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. That seems unlikely, however, because in chs. 13-23 Isaiah discussed the individual nations. In chs. 24-26 he has been discussing the earth in the cosmological sense. There is no reason to think that has changed in ch. 27. If that is the case the creature(s) would represent all of the powers that serve Satan in seeking to overcome God’s purpose. God’s sword is more powerful than them all and he will punish them.

“In that day” is the same period as v. 1. In that day the Lord will plant another vineyard, different from that described in ch. 5:1-7. Jehovah is the keeper who cares for it and protects it day and night. It will surely be watered with the dew of 26:19. The Lord’s wrath has been satisfied; therefore, let the enemies of the vineyard, briars and thorns, come forth. God will do battle and destroy them by fire. On the other hand, if the enemies want peace they can lay hold on God’s strength, bow before him and be

reconciled to him. God is ready to make peace with the enemies of him and his people.

Finally, Isaiah looks to the future of the vineyard. It will bear fruit with which it will abundantly fill the earth. Jacob shall take root; Israel shall blossom and bud; they shall fill the face of the world with truth. The prophet here says, in a figure, just the same as the apostle Paul in Rom. 11:12, *i.e.*, that Israel, when restored once more to favor as a nation, will become “the riches of the Gentiles.”

Vv. 7-11 – Expiation and Desolation

God’s purpose is to plant and nourish his vineyard (2-6), but before that can happen his sword must remove the forces of the world and the land where the vineyard is to be planted (Jerusalem) must be prepared – Israel must be punished for its wickedness and idolatry. The punishment is not to be a slap on the wrist. It is to be an honest, and for that reason severe, expression of God’s reaction to those who have rebelled against his way and who have turned from him to idols. But however severe their punishment may be, it will not be as severe as the punishment administered to those that smote and slayed God’s people. God has promised that that would be the case: “And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am Jehovah their God; Lev. 26:44).

The punishment shall be in measure – commensurate with the crime. Indeed, before he sent them away he contended with them and sought to turn them to repentance. Israel will not be exalted until it has been humbled because of its sin. Jehovah sifted Israel (compare the figure of the threshing-floor in Isa. 21:10), at the time when, by suspending captivity over it, He blew as violently upon it as if the east wind had raged (see Job 27:21). But he only sifted, he did not destroy.

The punishment will act as an expiation and the iniquity of Jacob will be no longer be the object of God’s wrath. The fruit of the judgment will be the abolition of idolatry –

the altars and the Asherim and the sun-images will rise no more. The fortified city¹ is abandoned, deserted and forsaken like the wilderness. It will only be fit for cattle grazing. Why will this city suffer so much more severely than Israel (27:7)? 27:11b reveals a contrast with 27:9. In one circumstance people will come to know the God who really is, be forgiven of sins, and abandon all worship of false gods (27:9), but the people in the fortified city will never come to fully discern how their sinfulness will affect their relationship to God. Therefore, their Creator will have no compassion on them. Later in the book of Isaiah this theme of the stupidity of idolatry is addressed again and again in order to persuade the prophet's audience to understand God and reject pagan worship (44:9–20; 47:10–11). The audience of the prophet needs to understand the ways God works. They need a theological understanding concerning why God sends the discipline of punishment. They need to be motivated to repent of their sins and reject idols. Then they will find that God will forgive their sins, have mercy on them, and defeat their enemies.

Vv. 12-13 – The Ingathering of the Outcasts

Once again Isaiah turns from punishment to promise. There will be a great ingathering of God's harvest. "In that day" connects the event with that which is described in 26:19 and following. The Lord himself shall beat off his fruit. This metaphor is taken either from the beating of the olive tree or threshing with the threshingflail. He shall harvest from the flood of the river unto the brook of Egypt.² The Lord would collect within these limits all that were of Israel. Notice the great care with which spiritual Israel shall be gathered. It will not be en masse; it will be one by one.

1. The fortified city is most likely Jerusalem though other cities (Babylon, Samaria, the cities of Judah) have been suggested.

2. As usual, "the river" (*hannahar*) is the Euphrates (comp. Gen. 31:21; Exod. 23:31; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 24:2, 3, 14, 15, etc.). Its "strong stream," or "flood," is contrasted with the scant thread of water which was alone to be found in the "Torrens Ægypti." The stream of Egypt (*nachal Mizraim*) is generally allowed to be the modern *Wady el Arish*, which was appointed to be the southern boundary of the Holy Land (Numb. 34:5; 1 Kings 8:65).

Accompanying the ingathering will be the sounding of the trumpet³ bringing from Assyria and Egypt those who were about to perish. They will come to Mt. Zion to worship God. The trumpet may be to call them to worship or an announcement that an atonement for sin has been provided in the perfect sacrifice to which the law points. This is surely that of which the Hebrew writer wrote (Heb. 12:22-24):

“22 but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel.”

SECTION FOUR

JERUSALEM-ZION: WARNINGS AND PROMISES

Chapters 28-35

This section of Isaiah's prophecy is also called "The Book of Woes" (Delitzsch), "Oracles of Woe" (Beyer), "Human Schemes and God's Plan" (Webb), "True Deliverance Is Found Not in Egypt But in the Lord" (Young), and "The Folly of Trusting the Nations" (Oswalt). All of these headings together provide a good insight into that which Isaiah is discussing. He pronounces seven woes against 1) the drunken rulers of Ephraim, 2) the drunken rulers in Judah, 3) Ariel (Jerusalem-Zion), 4) those who hide their plans from God, 5) the pro-Egyptian policy, 6) those who go down to Egypt, and 7) an unnamed destroyer. Interspersed throughout the woes are promises of good things to come that will be accomplished during the reign of a righteous King described in later chapters as the Servant of Jehovah.

3. A trumpet was sounded to call an assembly together or to introduce a feast (Num 10:7, 10; Joel 2:15). The Day of Atonement was announced by loud trumpets sounded throughout the land.

Most commentators agree that chapters 7-12 relate to the period of Ahaz's reign while chapters 28-35 relate to Hezekiah's reign. The data in 2 Kings 18:1, 9 seems to place the beginning of Hezekiah's reign in 727 B.C. Others have different dates. For example, Thiele and those who follow his theory of accession and nonaccession years of dual dating date Hezekiah's reign from 715-686 B.C. This seems to be supported by the accounts of Hezekiah's religious reforms and the great Passover in the first year of his reign (2 Chron. 29-30). One cannot be dogmatic about either date.

The key issue in chs. 28-35 is whether Judah, epitomized by its leaders, will rely on Egypt or Jehovah in the face of the growing threat from Assyria. Chs. 30-31, which are wholly taken up with this issue, are central to this section. 31:1 succinctly states the issue: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and rely on horses, and trust in chariots, because *they are* many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!"

By way of structure, chapters 28-31 contain the announcement of woes with one additional woe found in 31:1. The latter woe signifies a shift from judgment to salvation as the message of these chapters unfolds and begins to move toward its climax. The climax comes in chapter 35 (especially v. 10) with the joyful return of the Lord's redeemed people to Zion. Chapters 34 and 35 are paired, with chapter 34 telling that the land of those who have rejected the Lord is reduced to a sterile judgment under. Thus these chapters present the twin themes of judgment and salvation that have run through these chapters as a whole.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Drunkards – and the Stone in Zion

Vv. 1-6 – Woe to the Drunkards of Ephraim

Ephraim is the northern kingdom, Israel, or at least what is left of it after Assyria's invasion. Samaria, its capital, was situated at the head of a fertile valley that extended to the Mediterranean Sea. The woe here pronounced upon it anticipates its eminent fall. Assyria, though unmentioned by name, is the mighty and strong one that would come as a destroying hailstorm and an overwhelming flood. Ephraim, whose leaders staggered from wine and strong drink (vv. 1, 3, 7-8), had no chance for victory. What Assyria had already begun would be finished, all under God's direction. Still, God will protect the remnant and be to them a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty (5-6).

Vv. 7-13 – Woe to the Drunken Rulers in Judah

Almost all commentators agree that "And even these" refers to Judah. Judah, no less than Ephraim was given to indulgence with intoxicants.⁴ 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, cf., Ezek. 44:21), they were intoxicated even in the midst of their prophetic visions (הָרְאָהָ, literally "the thing seeing," then the act of seeing). All the tables of the carousal are full, without there being any further room.

4. It has been questioned whether literal intoxication is meant, and suggested that Judah "imitated the pride and unbelief and *spiritual intoxication* of Ephraim" (Kay). But the numerous passages which tax both the Israelites and the Jews of the period with drunkenness (ch. 5:11, 22; 22:13; 56:12; Hos. 4:11; 7:5; Amos 6:6, etc.), are best understood literally.

Worse yet, they mock the true prophets of God. The people's understanding had become so shallow that they could not understand the prophets' teaching. Their spiritual understanding had declined drastically.

“Whom will he teach knowledge? and whom will he make to understand the message?” The best explanation seems to be that the prophet dramatically introduces his adversaries as replying to him with taunting speeches “Whom does he think he is teaching? Mere children, just weaned from their mother's milk, and taken away from the breast? Does he forget that we are grown men—nay, priests and prophets? And what poor teaching it is! What endless petty teasing—precept upon precept,” etc. The intention is to throw ridicule upon the smallness and vexatious character of the prophet's interminable and uninterrupted chidings. The whole teaching is nothing but an accumulation of precept upon precept, rule upon rule, one little injunction followed up by another, here little, there a little. The objectors profess to find in the prophet's teaching nothing grand, nothing broad—no enunciation of great leading principles; but a perpetual drizzling rain of petty maxims and rules, vexatious, cramping, confining; especially unsuitable to men who had had the training of priests and prophets, and could have appreciated a grand theory, or a new religious standpoint, but were simply revolted at a teaching which seemed to them narrow, childish, and wearisome.

God's response is that he will speak to them on their level. The unintelligible speech would fall from the lips of Assyrian conquerors. The school experience is a hard one, but it is the only course open when ears are closed to God's word.

Vv. 14-22 – The Rulers' Covenant with Death and Jehovah's Foundation Stone in Zion

Having dealt with the priests and prophets, Isaiah now turns his attention to the rulers.⁵ They thought that they would escape judgment. They had no fear because they had made or were about to make agreements that they thought would secure their

5. Although Hezekiah was a “good” king, he seems to have surrounded himself with those who did not measure up to that standard on the plus side and were scoffers on the negative side.

safety. The Assyrians could do them no harm. What they failed to realize was that their covenant was with death and the grave (Sheol) and their anticipated help (Egypt, 30:1-7; 36:6-9) was a lie. Moreover, they were in David's City with God's temple in their midst. Sadly, they trusted in lies rather than in God.

God would rebuild Jerusalem, but he would rebuild it in his way (16-17). It will begin with the laying of a foundation stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation. Justice and refuge will be the plummet line⁶ and hail⁷ will sweep away the refuge of lies, and water will overflow the hiding place. It is there that security will be found and he that believeth will not be ashamed.⁸

The result will be that the covenants will be annulled, the people will be overwhelmed by the overflowing scourge and then be trodden down. As often as it sweeps through it will destroy more of the population. "It shall be naught but terror to understand the message." This alludes to v. 9. They had scorned Isaiah's doctrine or teaching when he taught them by word of mouth. They will understand it all too well and find it "nothing but terror" when it is preached not by word but by fact (18-19).

The bed which the Jews have made for themselves is one in which they can find no comfort – the bed is too short and the cover too small (20). Moreover, Jehovah is going to rise up as in Mt. Perazim.⁹ Then God was on the side of his people, but now God was to be on the side of the enemies of his people, who were to suffer as the Philistines had suffered in the olden times. This punishment of his own people by the sword of foreigners was strange work on God's part—a strange act. But it was their

6. I will execute justice and judgment on the earth with all strictness and exactness.

7. The Assyrian invasion.

8. The LXX. has "He that believeth shall not *be ashamed*" or "*confounded*." Paul (Rom. 9:33) follows this rendering. It is conjectured that the Hebrew had originally *yâbîsh* instead of *yâkîsh*.

9. The "Mount Perazim" of this passage is probably the same as the "Baal-Perazim" of 1 Chron. 14:11. Where David completely defeated the Philistines by the Divine help. This victory is connected with another over the same nation in the valley of Gibeon (1 Chron. 14:13-16).

strange conduct that caused God's strange action. They had become, as it were, Philistines (21).

The final words of this section (22) are difficult. Isaiah calls upon them to cease scoffing because if it continues their bonds will be made strong. This does not mean that their bonds were weak, but that there will be less likelihood that they will be loosed. The reason that Isaiah gives is that he has heard a decree of destruction from the Lord upon the whole earth. Isaiah seems to be saying that there is room for repentance, but it can only affect the bonds. It cannot avoid the end that Jehovah has announced "upon the whole earth." This judgment is probably that found in chapters 24-27. It will affect the whole earth in that it issues in the kingdom. For the Jews it is the end because the theocracy is effectively over and in A.D. 70 will be literally over.

Vv. 23-29 – A Parable from Agriculture

Isaiah's warning is over, but there is still a message that needs to be given to correspond to vv. 4-5 – a fringe of promise. The prophet has alarmed the scoffers, now he uses that alarm to urge repentance that he might pluck some of them out of the fire (Zech. 3:3; Jude 23). Here the consolation is wrapped up in a parable from agriculture. Isaiah first calls upon his hearers to hear his voice and attend to his words. The farmer's tasks are many but he does not do them all at once or one of them all of the time. In turn he plows, harrows, sows, and harvests, harvesting each crop with the appropriate implement. After the harvest he carefully chooses the manner in which he processes each crop. All of these tasks require knowledge. From whence did it come? It comes from Jehovah of hosts who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

Isaiah has in his mind the wisdom of God in a higher sphere. The wise, divinely inspired course adopted by the farmer in the treatment of the field and fruit, is a type of the wise course adopted by Jehovah in the treatment of His nation. Israel is Jehovah's field. The punishments and chastisements of Jehovah are the plowshare and harrow, with which He forcibly breaks up, turns over, and furrows this field. But this does not last forever. When the field has been loosened, smoothed, and rendered fertile once more, the painful process of plowing is followed by a beneficent sowing and planting in a wisely ordered fullness of grace. Again, Israel is Jehovah's child of the

threshing-floor (see Isa. 21:10). He threshes it; but He does not thresh it only: He also knocks; and when He threshes, He does not continue threshing for ever. As soon as His purpose is attained, and the husks of sin are separated from those that have been punished, the punishment ceases, and only the worst in the nation, who are nothing but husks, are swept away by the punishments" (compare Isa. 1:25; 29:20, 21). This is the lesson and consolation taught by the parable. Jehovah punishes, but it is in order that He may be able to bless.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Woe to Ariel — and to Those Who Hide Their Counsel from God

Vv. 1-14 – Woe to Ariel

Isaiah's woe against Jerusalem consists of three elements: 1) God's siege of Jerusalem, 2) God's spiritual judgment, and 3) God's woe against those who hide their plans from God.

The meaning of "Ariel" is disputed but its identification is not. 29:8 identifies it as Mt. Zion (Jerusalem). Jerusalem's problem is that they allow feasts to come year to year but their worship is ritual for ritual's sake.¹⁰ Isaiah describes God's coming judgment against the city (2-4). Isaiah names no invader but many associate it with Sennacherib's invasion. Mourning and lamentation would follow being ground into the dust.

10. Isaiah's language in v. 1 is generally considered to be sarcastic. It is not considered as a compliment. Judgment follows.

Isaiah also describes the defeat of Jerusalem's enemies (5-8). As suddenly as God had brought judgment, he would bring deliverance to his people. The same theme is developed in Zechariah 14:1-5.

The ritual approach to worship (v. 1) was symptomatic of a deeper spiritual issue. The people spoke words of praise to God but their lives revealed their true hearts (13). Their worship focused on their traditions rather than on God's revealed truth or nurturing a relationship with him.

APPLICATION: Many church-goers today also suffer from shallowness of faith. We answer roll call each time the doors are open, even for Sunday School and Wednesday Bible study. But we rarely if ever open our Bible's at home. Our only bible knowledge comes from what we hear on these occasions. If we are asked a Bible Question the best we can do is to say that "somewhere in the Bible it says . . ." If we have a shallow relationship with God it is not surprising that we do not appreciate his word all that much. If we have not really embraced the fact that the Bible is God's word we will not really give it the respect that it is due and we will not be all that concerned about submitting to its teachings. 2 Tim. 2:15.

As a result of Jerusalem's attitude, God sent a spiritual stupor upon his people (9-10). READ THESE VERSES AND EXAMINE THYSELF (2 Cor. 13:5). Isaiah's roll is sealed so his hearers cannot read it, but even without the seal they could not read it because his hearers were not learned.

Vv. 15-24 – Woe to Those Who Hide Their Plans from God

Isaiah is about to announce a special message of deliverance for the house of Jacob (17-24). But first he deals with those who made their own plans in bold defiance of God's intentions. They thought that they could hide their conduct from God, but they could not. In fact, they totally misunderstood their place in the universe. God had made them individually and nationally. He was the potter they were the clay. They did not have God's wisdom. He knew them better than they knew themselves. They

did not need to make their own plans or even include God in their plans. What they needed to do was to align themselves with God's purpose for their lives.