

**Isaiah, Building Bridges with the Bad Boys of Ephraim
Watcha Gonna Do When They Come for You?
Isaiah 28:1 – 13**

Scripture quotations are taken from the following translations:

ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB),
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission. www.Lockman.org**

Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2016 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible: International Standard Version® Release 2.0. (ISV) Copyright © 1996–2011 by the ISV Foundation. Used by permission of Davidson Press, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED INTERNATIONALLY.

Some scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), Copyright ©1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

During the ministry of Isaiah, both the northern and southern kingdoms went from being financially and militarily secure, to being insecure in both areas.

The northern kingdom, Israel, was defeated by Assyria and became a vassal state. They rebelled and ultimately the entire nation was removed from the land into exile elsewhere in the Assyrian Empire.

The southern kingdom, Judah, willingly became a vassal of the Assyrian Empire after a series of military defeats and blunders versus the northern kingdom. They too will later rebel against the Assyrian Empire but will rely on the Lord when they do so with a vastly different outcome than the northern kingdom.

It is in the light of the northern kingdom beginning to be taken into exile that Isaiah begins chapter 28. What we see from chapter 28 to the end of chapter 31 are a series of woe oracles. This time it is not good news for the northern kingdom or the southern either. Isaiah is talking directly to those who still do not trust YAHWEH.

Expanding our focus beyond chapter 31 in the lead up to the historical section beginning in chapter 36, in this section of Isaiah, from chapter 28 to 35, “we have prophecies which have a local and past fulfillment, and also there are those that reach into the future and cover the same period as in the previous section. This new section is identified by six woes, and it culminates in the great war of Armageddon in chapter 34, followed by the millennial benefits brought to the earth in chapter 35.” (McGee 1997, 259)

We are about to see near and far prophecies from Isaiah again. The near validating his authority as a prophet and the far giving us a glimpse of things to come. These are things we can absolutely rely on taking place as a result of the validation from the near prophecies being fulfilled.

The northern kingdom of Israel, designated here by the term Ephraim, was soon to go into Assyrian captivity. This was a preview of the coming future day, but it was to be a warning to the southern kingdom of Judah. The first part was fulfilled when Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, invaded Ephraim in 721 B.C., overthrew the northern kingdom, and took the people into captivity. (McGee 1997, 259-260)

This is the only prophecy in the book of Isaiah uttered by the prophet Isaiah against Samaria. It may display some influence of the prophet Amos, his predecessor (cf. Amos 6:1). Samaria had been sharply criticized because of its pride and extravagance, its banquets and its drunkenness, prior to its downfall in 722 B.C. Based on this shocking historical fact of Samaria's end the prophet now reminds Judah of God's terrible judgment that might eventually also befall Judah and Jerusalem. (Widyapranawa 1990, 166-167)

These opening verses are set in the days before Ephraim's destruction by Assyria. But attention will quickly shift to the Jerusalem of later decades. (Tull 2010, 418)

By the way, the New Testament quotes a lot from this section of Isaiah.

Isaiah 28:1-4

"Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, And to the fading flower of its glorious beauty, Which is at the head of the fertile valley Of those who are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent; As a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, Like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, He has cast it down to the earth with His hand. The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim is trodden under foot. And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, Which is at the head of the fertile valley, Will be like the first-ripe fig prior to summer, Which one sees, And as soon as it is in his hand, He swallows it." (NASB95)

One of the characteristics of the Hebrew people seems to have been their ability to ignore the signs of the times (cf. ch. 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. (Oswalt 1986, 507)

The inability to discern the signs of the times is also a problem for today. Not just for the Jews but for the entire planet. Even some believers have difficulty with this. Isaiah covered this earlier.

Isaiah 22:12-13

"Therefore in that day the Lord GOD of hosts called you to weeping, to wailing, To shaving the head and to wearing sackcloth. Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die."" (NASB95)

Welcome to Ephraim.

This section starts off with the word that no one who is listening to Isaiah wants to hear, "woe." As soon as that word is heard coming from the prophet, the listener would pay attention to see who this is about. Can they relax as it is not about them, or is it directly addressed to them? There is always the problem with Isaiah too, of him circling back to pick up others along the way.

Here the warning is addressed directly to the northern kingdom and being called the drunkards of Ephraim is not intended to be a compliment about their lifestyle choices.

As Isaiah starts off, he assumes we are familiar with the locale of the capital of the northern kingdom.



(Bolen, Samaria aerial from north 2012, Used with Permission)



(Bolen, Samaria Israelite wall 2012, Used with Permission)



(Bolen, Watchtower in Ephraim hill country 2012, Used with Permission)

Ephraim had his name from fruitfulness, their soil being very fertile and the products of it abundant and the best of the kind; they had a great many fat valleys (v. 1, 4), and Samaria, which was situated on a hill, was, as it were, on the head of the fat valleys. Their country was rich and pleasant, and as the garden of the Lord: it was the glory of Canaan, as that was the glory of all lands; their harvest and vintage were the glorious beauty on the head of their valleys, which were covered over with corn and vines. (Henry 1994, 1128)



(Bolen, Sheep and watchtower near Taiyibeh, Ophrah, Ephraim 2012, Used with Permission)

The problem with the rulers of Ephraim is that they have turned to cocktail parties to deal with the changes taking place in the kingdom. Drunkenness has become a problem among the people. Amos talked about it and expressed a bit of his opinion about those doing so as well. “Listen to me, you fat cows living in Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and who are always calling to your husbands, “Bring us another drink!”” (Amos 4:1, NLT)

The law did not command abstinence. Wine was considered to be a gift from God and a source of joy. “And wine delights the heart of a person, to gladden the face; with olive oil and bread he strengthens the heart of a person.” (Psalm 103:15, LES2)

Warning was however provided in the Torah regarding the misuse of wine and food.

Deuteronomy 21:18–21

“But if someone has a disobedient and rebellious son who does not listen to his father’s voice and his mother’s voice, and they discipline him, and he does not listen to them, after also laying hold of him, his father and his mother shall bring him on to the council of elders of his city and on the gates of the place. And they shall say to the men of his city, ‘Our son, he is disobedient and quarrelsome; he does not listen to our voice; he is a glutton; he is a drunk.’ And the men of his city shall stone him with stones, and he shall die, and you shall remove the evil one from yourselves, and those remaining will hear, and they will be afraid.” (Lexham Press 2020, Deut 21:18-21)

Just Saying

I find it interesting that the per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages in Washington DC is currently 3.77 gallons per person per year. Second only to Vermont at 4.67 gallons. What was going on in Samaria was not that much different than what happens here today. (World Population Review 2020)

As we have previously discussed, prior to the onset of judgement, both kingdoms were doing well economically. That was also a serious problem up north as they had already abandoned their worship of YAHWEH under Jeroboam I. Ironside describes the conditions.

This gives a very vivid description of the luxurious conditions prevailing in Samaria before the captivity. Under Jeroboam II and the later kings of Israel, the city of Samaria had become a grand and glorious metropolis; built upon a high hill the sides of which were terraced and planted with delightful gardens and groves, it was perhaps the loveliest city in all Palestine. The valley below, reaching to the great plain of Esdraelon, or Jezreel, abounded in orchards, vineyards, and fruitful fields. So richly had God Himself lavished His benefits upon the people of the entire region that in their enjoyment of His gifts they utterly forgot the Giver and turned to idolatry of the vilest kind; idolatry copied from the nations round about them. With the worship of false gods they turned also to the ways of the heathen so that, revelling in luxury, they gave themselves to drunkenness and licentiousness until as a people they became so corrupt that God Himself could no longer tolerate them. (Ironsides 1952, 167)

The northern kingdom has squandered all that YAHWEH has given them. The numerous warnings from the prophets sent to them have not been heeded. Repentance is the furthest thing from their mind as they are too busy numbing their minds. They also sought an altered state of consciousness in order to worship the false gods they were following.

The people of Ephraim were impressed with their own press clippings. Pride was a problem, even though they had already been humbled once and were turned into vassals of Assyria, they were proud enough to presume they had the wherewithal to defeat Assyria and would ultimately rebel. The ruling elite were proud of who they were and their position in life and this was picked up by the people and became an expression of the nation.

When pride was combined with the false gods they worshipped, their number was up.

2 Kings 17:1–5

“In the twelfth year of King Ahaz’s reign over Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king over Israel. He reigned in Samaria for nine years. He did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not to the same degree as the Israelite kings who preceded him. King Shalmaneser of Assyria threatened him; Hoshea became his subject and paid him tribute. The king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was planning a revolt. Hoshea had sent messengers to King So of Egypt and had not sent his annual tribute to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria arrested him and imprisoned him. The king of Assyria marched through the whole land. He attacked Samaria and besieged it for three years.” (NET)

Isaiah 28:2

“Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent; As a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, Like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, He has cast it down to the earth with His hand.” (NASB95)

The agent’s name, as we saw in 2 Kings 17, was Shalmaneser of Assyria. The picture being drawn for us by Isaiah would be one familiar to anyone living in an agrarian culture of disaster.

The Assyrians are compared first to a hailstorm. Hail destroys the crops. As the Assyrian army moves through the countryside, they would take and use anything they could get their hands on, crops would be used to feed them as would any livestock in the field.

This picture of a hailstorm, or a heavy thunderstorm with flooding are pictures that bring devastation to the mind of all hearing and reading. The Assyrian army would do the same to Samaria when they moved in. “The audience could easily connect the Assyrian defeat of Samaria in 721 BC with this descriptive metaphor, for the prophet had already employed imagery of Assyria as a mighty flood that would overflow its channels in 8:7; 17:12; and 25:4.” (Smith 2007, 477)

Isaiah 28:3–4

“The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim is trodden under foot. And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, Which is at the head of the fertile valley, Will be like the first-ripe fig prior to summer, Which one sees, And as soon as it is in his hand, He swallows it.” (NASB95)

With prophetic perfect tenses, Isaiah predicted the overthrow of Ephraim and its leaders. It was as good as accomplished. With hand (v. 2) and foot (v. 3) God would throw down and trample His people. (Constable 2003, Is 28:3)

Early figs were considered to be a delicacy. When you see one, you grab it and eat it. The first crop of figs in Palestine comes in June, is comparatively scanty, and is used up as soon almost as it is ripe enough to eat: plucked as a dainty to be at once eaten. From August to November the later and larger fig crops come, and are stored for subsequent use. (Bannister and Hemenway 1886, 130)

This is a picture of how the Assyrian army would operate as they moved throughout the region in response to the rebellion of Hoshea. Greedily and hastily. The final fall of Samaria took three years. "According to the Hebrew mode of reckoning parts of years as full years, the siege lasted three years. Actually the siege need not have lasted longer than one full year and parts of two other ones, i.e., a little over one year. Samaria held out as long as it could, awaiting the promised aid from Egypt. Finally in 722 B.C. Samaria fell to "the king of Assyria," either Shalmaneser, or to Sargon who claimed the throne that same year. The Assyrian records relate that 27,290 persons were carried captive from Samaria, and doubtless many others from smaller villages round about." (J. E. Smith 1995, 609)

Isaiah 28:5–6

"In that day the LORD of hosts will become a beautiful crown And a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people; A spirit of justice for him who sits in judgment, A strength to those who repel the onslaught at the gate." (NASB95)

The first words from Isaiah are pointers for us, pointers to a future time.

"In that day." What day? The day of the Lord at the end of the age. "In that day is a standard prophetic expression for a time in the future when Yahweh will act in judgment or salvation. It is repeated in verses 17 and 20 and elsewhere in Isaiah, as well as in other prophetic books. It is a very general reference to a certain period of time, not to one specific day or the daytime." (Ogden and Sterk 2011, 96)

The northern kingdom is to be trampled down by Assyria. YAHWEH is not finished with Israel yet. Even though the judgement is severe, they are not destroyed. There is a remnant.

Representatives of each tribe, those who were YAHWEH worshipers, were part of the group taken into exile or escaped into Judah.

Tobit 1:5–7

"All my kindred and our ancestral house of Naphtali sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected in Dan and on all the mountains of Galilee. But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the festivals, as it is prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree. I would hurry off to Jerusalem with the first fruits of the crops and the firstlings of the flock, the tithes of the cattle, and the first shearings of the sheep. I would give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar; likewise the tenth of the grain, wine, olive oil, pomegranates, figs, and the rest of the fruits to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem. Also for six years I would save up a second tenth in money and go and distribute it in Jerusalem." (NRSV)

In that day, when the Lord establishes the Millennium, the remnant will be honored by the Lord and will be under the One who sits in judgment. (Martin 1985, 1077)

We are directed by Isaiah in verse 5 to the future, the day when YAHWEH of the heavenly armies returns in power for His own. That picture is drawn for us in Zechariah 14 as well as Revelation 19:11-19.

In those sections of scripture we see the Lord returning in power and He returns with the Heavenly Host. "And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses." (Revelation 19:14, ESV) "Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle." (Zechariah 14:3, ESV)

It is the conquering Lord of hosts who is the beautiful crown.

Isaiah 28:5–6

“On that day the Lord Sabaoth will be the crown of hope, woven of glory for the people who remain. They will remain on a wind of judgment, on judgment and power, preventing destruction.” (Lexham Press 2020, Isaiah 28:5-6)

“...And a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people;” (Isaiah 28:5b, NASB) YAHWEH is the true crown because the leadership of Ephraim has failed. Only the true King can be the glory of the remnant. It is a mark of the people of the Messianic day that they see the Lord himself as their true adornment. Furthermore, the Lord is actively present to create a true and secure society, becoming himself ‘a spirit of judgment to him who sits in judgment and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate’. ‘Judgment’ is more than the narrow concept of justice. It is ‘a right judgment in all things’, a truly kingly quality. (Motyer 1996, 230)

When the True King is on the throne and He is the crown of His people, then a new spirit comes to the throne. This new spirit rules with righteousness unlike the manner Ephraim or Judah were ruled.

Ezekiel describes what that will be like.

Ezekiel 34:11–15

“For this is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy, dark day. I will bring them out from among the peoples and gather them from foreign countries; I will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams and all the inhabited places of the land. In a good pasture I will feed them; the mountain heights of Israel will be their pasture. There they will lie down in a lush pasture, and they will feed on rich grass on the mountains of Israel. I myself will feed my sheep and I myself will make them lie down, declares the sovereign LORD.” (NET)

Where God and his character are lifted up, there is a whole new spirit about the enterprise (4:4; 11:2, 3; 30:1; 37:7; 54:6; 57:15; 65:14): we may dare to be just, because he is just (Deut. 17:8–12; 2 Chr. 19:5–8); we may fight with courage because God’s side will prevail, whether in our life or in our death. But there is also a meaning other than simply a changed atmosphere. There is divine empowerment. Ultimately, the human spirit is not able to do what it must. There must be an infusion of the divine spirit if life is to replace death, if victory is to come rather than defeat (32:14; 44:3, 5; 59:21; 61:1). (Oswalt 1986, 509)

As we see from Ezekiel and Isaiah, the clear intent of YAHWEH is when He is the one who is the crown of the people, He sits in judgement and is the one who completely cares for His people.

Isaiah 1:26

“Then I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning; After that you will be called the city of righteousness, A faithful city.” (NASB95)

Isaiah 28:7–8

“And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink: The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, They are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink; They reel while having visions, They totter when rendering judgment. For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place.” (NASB95)

Back to the current problem with Ephraim. Isaiah tells us exactly what it is he is seeing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He is the witness of a celebration of some kind. As we saw earlier in 2 Kings 17, King So of Egypt had been turned to for an alliance and perhaps this is the celebration of that alliance. Isaiah will say more about this in chapter 30. Or could this be about Judah?

The clear intention is to draw an analogy between the behavior and ensuing fate of the Northern Kingdom and that of present Judah. What then follows in the oracle seems to be a genuine confrontation between Isaiah and drunken officials, prophets and priests, which erupts in a verbal exchange. (Childs 2001, 206)

Isaiah temporarily misdirects his hearers. The fact that this situation potentially applies to more than one set of players reinforces the applicability of the passage to repeated situations throughout history—Israelite and Judean history and, sadly, many religious leaders since. (Tull 2010, 423)

This is about Ephraim, home of false prophets who worked with the false gods and priests who were not priests of YAHWEH but the same false gods.

Placing oneself into an altered state of consciousness was a SOP of false god worship. Judah is beginning to move in that direction but has not fully arrived there yet. In the interim, YAHWEH shows them, through Isaiah, a picture of the final vile days of the ruling elite of Ephraim. “And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink: The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, They are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink; They reel while having visions, They totter when rendering judgment. For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place.” (Isaiah 28:7–8, NASB95)

But now Isaiah presses beyond drunkenness to something even more profoundly disturbing in the behaviour of these leaders, namely, the contempt they show for any who dare to speak the truth to them from God. There has already been a hint of this in the almost casual way the word pride has been used twice in verses 1 and 3. Now it is unpacked: the proud city has proud, unteachable leaders. (Webb 1996, 119)

Isaiah 28:9–10

““To whom would He teach knowledge, And to whom would He interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast? For He says, ‘Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there.’” (NASB95)

This is the response of the ruling elite of Ephraim. They are insulted because they are the leaders of the nation and resent being treated like children. This will also be the response of the ruling elite of Judah soon, when Manasseh takes the throne.

They make fun of Isaiah and what it is he has to tell them. Even to the point of using gibberish to mock him.

The Hebrew text of verse 10 repeats two short expressions (with a linking preposition) four times each: *tsav latsav tsav latsav, qav laqav qav laqav*. The NIV translates *tsav* (*şav*) as do (from *tsvh* [*svh*], ‘to command’) and *qav* as rule (possibly related to *qavqav*, ‘might’). But in fact the lines in question are quite obscure and there is no consensus among scholars about how they should be rendered.¹⁵ Most likely *tsav* and *qav* are not words at all, but artificial syllables used for teaching infants the letters of the alphabet (in this case *ts* and *q*). The drunken leaders mock the word of God through the prophet as infantile nonsense, childish prattle. (Webb 1996, 119-120)

The response of Isaiah, providing the word of the Lord to their mocking is telling. It calls to remembrance the words of Moses.

Deuteronomy 29:1–4

“These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb. Moses proclaimed to all Israel as follows: “You have seen all that the LORD did in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, all his servants, and his land. Your eyes have seen the great judgments, those signs and mighty wonders. But to this very day the LORD has not given you an understanding mind, perceptive eyes, or discerning ears!” (NET)

Isaiah 28:11–13

“Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, He who said to them, “Here is rest, give rest to the weary,” And, “Here is repose,” but they would not listen. So the word of the LORD to them will be, “Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there,” That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive.” (NASB95)

They have rejected the Lord. They have rejected His word. They have rejected any of His prophets who have come to tell them of His word.

Deuteronomy 28:49–50

“The LORD will raise up a distant nation against you, one from the other side of the earth as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of stern appearance that will have no regard for the elderly or pity for the young.” (NET)

To a people who refused to hear the divine offer of salvation (v. 12; cf. 30:15), the word of God will be turned into gibberish for them, and from the lips of alien conquerors they will hear the same incomprehensible nonsense: *šaw lāšāw šaw lāšāw!* (Childs 2001, 207)

They refuse to listen to what He says to them. YAHWEH provides a guarantee to them. “Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue,” (Isaiah 28:11, NASB95)

This is God’s response to their rejection of His prophet. In essence He says, “If you are having a hard time understanding his basic ABC’s, wait until you hear the assyrian language.” (Utley 2001, 288)

YAHWEH is letting it become clear to Ephraim that since they have mocked the prophets over the years and repeat their words as sing song nonsense, you will hear words of a foreign language as you are being held captive. A language that you will not understand and that will sound like nonsense.

In the past, the word to the northern kingdom has been clear. “He who said to them, “Here is rest, give rest to the weary,” And, “Here is repose,” but they would not listen.” (Isaiah 28:12, NASB95)
The Lord had made very clear to the northern kingdom that what was required of them was simple obedience. They would receive rest and peace if they simply obeyed, “but they would not listen.”

Because they would not listen, because they would not be obedient, then the word of the Lord will be very different for them.

Isaiah 28:13

“So the word of the LORD to them will be, “Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there,” That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive.” (NASB95)

Now, the word of the Lord is revealed by looking at the verbs of the last half of the verse. The northern kingdom will “stumble,” “be broken,” “be snared” and be “captured.” In order to reach full maturity, they must be allowed to suffer the consequences of their actions. But they are not mature because YAHWEH uses the same gibberish they used earlier.

Yahweh’s speech to the Israelite leaders will be the same unintelligible baby talk of which they accused the prophet (verse 10). The point is not that Yahweh will speak nonsense, but that it will seem like nonsense to the people. We can say “So Yahweh’s word will become for them nothing more than baby talk.” (Ogden and Sterk 2011, 731)

Theirs was a basic unreadiness to bow before the voice of God. The refused simplicity (10) becomes the unintelligible babble of violent and dominant conquerors (13). To reject the word of God is not to escape it. (J. A. Motyer 1999, 210)

He takes their gibberish and turns it into an instrument of judgement. “They still are gibberish that makes no sense, but A. van Selm has connected these phrases to the strange, obscure, and incomprehensible language of the Assyrians (cf. 33:19), which the people would not be able to understand. After comparing these words to Akkadian, van Selm suggests that:

- the first phrase means: “Go out! Let him go out!”
- the second phrase means: “Wait! Let him wait!”
- the third phrase means: “Servant, listen!” (G. V. Smith 2007, 483)

For Ephraim, the incompetence of their leadership at the end, coupled with their hubris, the idea that they could do no wrong, and reliance on a perceived foreign alliance with Egypt; all led to one bad decision after another. The message would be garbled, just like what they made fun of the prophets telling them.

Listen to our politicians today, many who show the same symptoms of the ruling elite of Ephraim and later of Judah. Incompetent do nothings filled with pride who speak in circles that mean absolutely nothing.

This is not limited only to political leadership, but this also shows up way too often in the business world. I have suffered under it more than once. It is also a characteristic of the Laodicean church too.

Revelation 3:15–17

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,” (NASB95)

Incompetence and pride lead to bad decisions and a garbled message, for those who do not truly listen to God are doomed to fail God and his people. (G. V. Smith 2007, 483)

And with that ends the “woe” directed towards the northern kingdom. As I promised earlier, Isaiah moves from talking and including Judah in a round about way to pulling them back into the conversation as the center of the discussion.

As they are all nodding up and down about Ephraim getting what is due them, Isaiah pivots around to Judah.

Isaiah 28:14

“Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers, Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,” (NASB95)

This is Isaiah’s way of obtaining the attention of his audience, and this is not the first time he has done this. You would think they would know by now how he twists a story about someone you are glad to see get what is due to them to suddenly, it is all about you.

The first thought going through their minds is “how does this even apply to us?” Unfortunately, many today would also say the same thing. Once again Solomon was right

Ecclesiastes 1:9–11

“History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, “Here is something new!” But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. We don’t remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.” (NLT)

Isaiah knows his listeners too; he calls them out as scoffers. Solomon was right about them as well.

Proverbs 13:1

“A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.” (ESV)

Our world today is filled with scoffers. “The word translated “scoffer” in English can mean “one who mocks, ridicules, or scorns the belief of another.” In Hebrew, the word translated “scoffer” or “mockers” can also mean “ambassador.” So a scoffer is one who not only disagrees with an idea, but he also considers himself an ambassador for the opposing idea. He cannot rest until he has demonstrated the foolishness of any idea not his own. A scoffer voices his disagreement, ridicules all who stand against him, and actively recruits others to join his side. In the Bible, scoffers are those who choose to disbelieve God and His Word.” (Got Questions Ministries 2002-2013)

We see the progression of unbelief in Psalm 1:1, and we also get a clear instruction about what to do with scoffers.

Psalm 1:1

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;” (ESV)

The progression, first we listen to and take advice from unbelievers, then we begin to stand alongside unbelievers in their causes, and ultimately, we are scoffers as well and no better than an unbeliever. Who are we listening to? Where do we get our advice?

1 Corinthians 15:33–34

Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Sober up as you should, and stop sinning! For some have no knowledge of God—I say this to your shame! (NET)

We are living in the last days. Scoffers are a fixture of these times “knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”” (2 Peter 3:3–4, ESV)

Getting away from scoffers is our desire. We would like to not have to listen to the consistent bombardment from the news media about how backwards and ignorant those who trust in Jesus are. I mean after all we believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that hell is a real place where the wicked will be for all eternity. Do not lose heart in these last days. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11, ESV)

We will cover the growing problem of Judah next time.

Works Cited

- Bannister, H., and F. D. Hemenway. 1886. *Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah, Commentary on the Old Testament*. Edited by D. D. Whedon. Vol. VII. New York, NY: Hunt & Eaton.
- Bolen, Todd. 2012. "Samaria aerial from north." *Pictorial Library of Bible Lands Revised & Expanded, Samaria and the Center, Volume 2*. Prod. Todd Bolen.
- Bolen, Todd. 2012. "Samaria Israelite wall." *Pictorial Library of Bible Lands Revised & Expanded, Samaria and the Center, Volume 2*. Prod. Todd Bolen.
- Bolen, Todd. 2012. "Sheep and watchtower near Taiyibeh, Ophrah, Ephraim." *Pictorial Library of Bible Lands Revised & Expanded, Samaria and the Center, Volume 2*. Prod. Todd Bolen.

- Bolen, Todd. 2012. "Watchtower in Ephraim hill country." *Pictorial Library of Bible Lands REvised & Expanded, Samria and the Center, Volume 2*. Prod. Todd Bolen.
- Childs, Brevard S. 2001. *Isaiah: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library*. 1st Edition. Edited by William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom and Brent A. Strawn. Louisville, KY: Westminster John KnoX Press.
- Constable, Tom. 2003. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software.
- Got Questions Ministries. 2002-2013. *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.
- Henry, Matthew. 1994. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Ironside, H. A. 1952. *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers.
- Lexham Press. 2020. *The Lexham English Septuagint*. Second Edition. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- Martin, John A. 1985. *Isaiah*. Vol. 1, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- McGee, J. Vernon. 1997. *Thru the Bible Commentary*. Electronic Edition. Vol. 3. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Motyer, J. A. 1996. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Motyer, J. Alec. 1999. *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. Vol. 20. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Ogden, Graham S., and Jan Sterk. 2011. *A Handbook on Isaiah, United Bible Societies' Handbooks*. Vol. 1 & 2. Reading: United Bible Societies.
- Oswalt, John N. 1986. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapid, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Smith, Gary V. 2007. *Isaiah 1-39, The New American Commentary*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.
- Smith, James E. 1995. *The Books of History, Old Testament Survey Series*. Joplin, MO: College Press.
- Tull, Patricia K. 2010. *Isaiah 1-39, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*. Edited by Samuel E. Balentine. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated.
- Utey, Bob. 2001. *Isaiah: The Prophet and His Day (1-39), Study Guide Commentary Series*. Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.
- Webb, Barry. 1996. *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings, The Bible Speaks Today*. Edited by J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Widyapranawa, S. H. 1990. *The Lord is Savior: Faith in National Crisis: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, 1-39, International Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- World Population Review. 2020. "Alcohol Consumption by State 2020." *World Populaiton Review*. Accessed October 14, 2020. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/alcohol-consumption-by-state>.