

A Great Work in Progress

This week's passages, which suggest a cosmic-scale disaster cleanup, cover a lot of ground, but what beautiful territory! For greatest enjoyment and benefit, 2 (or 3) study sessions may be best.

Invitation to pray: "He will guide you into all truth." John 16:13. Each time you open God's Word, ask and rely on the Spirit to be your "personal trainer," to guide, teach, and work His will.

The next 3 lessons finish Isaiah's first section, "The Book of Judgment," with God's final words to the prophet concerning the Assyrian and far-off Babylonian invasions. The deep insights of chs. 28-33 and historical accounts of chs. 36-39 round out our understanding of the judgment and cleansing God must perform for His people. As we finish, we'll continue to see the constant interplay of wrath/judgment with tenderness/hope, reminding us that God's holy work ends in great deliverance, a major theme of Isaiah's final section (chs. 40-66), The Book of Comfort.

Section 1: Isaiah 28. Isaiah opens with "woe" for Samaria, Israel's beautiful hilltop capital, then turns his focus to Judah. As Jerusalem, Judah and then their enemies all hear their own 'woes' in chs. 29-33, *recall the prophecies: the "mighty floodwaters" of Assyria will overrun Israel and sweep on into Judah "up to the neck" (8:6-8); then that army, great as Lebanon's cedars, will see Israel's Holy One become a flame that consumes them "in a single day" (10:17, 33).*

1. a. **Read** 28:1-4 (re: Samaria) and 7-8 (re: Judah's religious leaders) to **picture** and **understand** the current situation in the northern and southern kingdoms.
- b. Noting contrasts with those verses, what has God always desired for them (vv. 5-6), which will finally become reality in His future reign? (V. 5 lit. *He Himself will be their adornment of splendor and beauty.*)
- c. How do we have a taste of vv. 5-6 today? Galatians 3:26-27, 2:20; I Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 6:10.

Scan 28:9-22. In a section full of terms about *communication*, it's vital to know who's speaking, and about what. In vv. 9-10, the men of vv. 7-8 use meaningless sounds or mimicry to mock Isaiah. In vv. 11-15, Isaiah speaks of Judah's political rulers, vv. 16-19 are God's words, vv. 20-22 are Isaiah again. V. 15 refers to the leaders' pagan beliefs and alliances with Egypt or Assyria.

2. a. From v. 12, what has God been saying to His people, and what is their response?
- b. In v. 10, they continue to say, "Nonsense!" to the prophet's clear truth from God. How do you think verses 11 and 13 connect with that response?

- c. Notice all that God offers His people in v. 16. (He's first of all reminding them of who He's always been for them.) What are they choosing instead, in vv. 14-15?

3. Scanning vv. 17-22, how would you sum up the outcome of their responses/choices?

For your own heart: Verse 16 is a beautiful prophetic picture of the Lord Jesus and who He is for us now. (It's quoted in Romans 10:9-13.) How do these words encourage you today?

To Dig Deeper: Read Romans 9:30-33 (from Isaiah 28:16 & 8:14) and I Peter 2:4-8.

Verse 21 refers to past times when all Israel trusted God in impossible situations, and He had *gone to battle for them* in miraculous ways. (II Samuel 5:17-21, Joshua 10:1-14 tell the stories.)

4. Now, in vv. 21-22, 29:2-3, see what's happening instead. What insight does v. 21b give us?

5. Vv. 23-28 seem to be the Master Gardener telling how to raise good produce. But noting v. 29, and seeing that these verses wrap up the chapter, what do you think God is saying?

6. What title or wrap-up phrase would you give to all of chapter 28?

Section 2: Isaiah 29-31. Read 29:1-2. In v. 1, woe is pronounced on *Ariel* (lit. *altar hearth*), a grievous name for Jerusalem! As Assyria's future invasion closes in, the city of the Temple's atoning altar will be surrounded with bloodshed, becoming itself like a giant altar of sacrifice.

Read Isaiah 29:3-8. Building on the vivid pictures of ch. 28, here we see the pattern of God's awesome, holy work among His people to cleanse and renew—in Isaiah's time and in the future.

7. To perceive His redemptive pattern: what do you see happening in vv. 2-4? In vv. 5-8?

Note: These and later verses will show God's work through Assyria, but the profound levels of judgment and deliverance often apply most fully to the Babylonian and end times experiences.

8. In 29:9-12, Isaiah now gives the reason for the "woe" and the actions of vv. 1-8. Recalling also 28:9-13, what is Jerusalem's present spiritual condition that God must address?

We've seen the inevitable, ugly fruit of this condition in individuals and society throughout all of Isaiah's writings we've studied so far. Now, God reveals the roots of His people's desperate state and shows His specific responses. *The message is to the nation, but He's speaking to each heart.*

9. In these first two woes, what does God make clear about the real core issues of spiritual blindness— *the deepest roots of sin itself, in all of us?*
29:1, 13 (V.13 NAS “they remove their hearts far from me..”)

29:15-16

To think about: How do you think vv. 14 and 17 fit in, as they follow the verses shown above?

Read 29:18-24. To a degree, these verses reflect what God's great hand of judgment and rescue will bring about in the Assyrian and later Babylonian experiences. *But most fully we see the results of His final victory as His kingdom is one day ushered in.* Note: Verse 23 may speak of lives amazingly spared through the war and of new lives given as the exiles return.

10. Remember the attitudes shown in 29:9-16. *As God works and is revealed* in His holy judgment and might, what do you see happening in the following passages?
29:18-21

29:22-24

For your own heart: Judah's spiritual blindness (inability to understand truth and eventual mockery) began as they stopped listening and responding to God's faithful Word. In holiness, power and mercy, He acted to open eyes to reality! Now consider one (or more) of the following:

- In your everyday life, are you *listening* and *responding* to Him, *learning of your awesome God from His mighty works*? How can you grow in this?
- How do the closing verses of ch. 29 “open your eyes” in your relationship with your Lord?
- Though ch. 29 started with “woe,” does this chapter about God's work bring you understanding and hope in any personal concerns?

Isaiah 30 completes the picture of Judah's blindness and God's great work in them. Recall that at this time, Egypt and Assyria were continually seeking the upper hand in Palestine, vowing aid to allies and punishment to vassals who rebel.

11. **Scan** 30:1-5 and 9-14, which address the nation's leaders (31:1-3 is similar). Briefly note what characteristically happens as people continue on into increasing blindness.

12. **Read** 30:15-17. Then notice verse 18, the opening words of the next beautiful section. What stands out to you in these verses? (*Therefore* or *Yet* in v. 18 is full of meaning.)
13. **Read** Isaiah 30:18-26. These verses will only be fully realized in Christ's coming kingdom, but they are intended to further open Judah's eyes (and our own) concerning the Lord who is at work in us. As time permits, comment on the phrases you find most striking.

Section 3: Isaiah 32-33. **Read** 32:1-8, depicting what it will be like when the Lord fully rules.

14. Speaking of verses 1-2, the NIV Study Bible says "The Lord's redeemed...will reflect Him." How might believers today live out the words of verse 2?
15. Verses 15-20 show a world where the Spirit has full, unhindered influence! What are the eternal hallmarks of His work?
16. As time permits:
 - A final strong warning about complacency is placed between these two accounts of the Lord's coming reign (32:9-15a). Why is this significant?
 - What sure, meaningful final promise is given once again in 33:1, the Lord's last "woe?" (If you wish, see also 30:27-33, 31:4-9.)
17. **Scan** 33:1-12. Here Isaiah honestly lays out for Judah and himself their true situation, including both God's sure truths/promises and the coming dire circumstances. Why is his reaction in v. 2 the one sensible, realistic response to it all?
18. Finish by enjoying 33:13-24, underlining phrases that lead you to worship. Why are the very last words a fitting "bottom line" for these chapters about God's mighty works?