

BE WISE AND TRUST THE LORD

28 *Woe to the crown, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards! And [woe] to the fading flower, his glorious beauty! [Woe to the city] situated at the head of the fertile valley— [the city that is] the pride of those who are overcome with wine! ²Look! The Lord has someone [at his disposal] that is powerful and strong—like a hailstorm, like a destructive wind, like a rainstorm with a flooding downpour, he will throw [that city] down to the ground with his hand. ³The crown, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled under foot. ⁴The fading flower, his glorious beauty, situated at the head of the fertile valley, will be like the first ripe fig before harvest: when someone discovers it and sees its goodness, he picks it and immediately eats it up. ⁵On that day Jehovah of hosts will become a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem for the remnant of his people. ⁶He will be a Spirit of justice upon him who sits as judge, and [a Spirit of] strength upon those who repel the onslaught at the gate. ⁷Even these men reel from wine and stagger from strong drink, namely, the priest and the prophet reel from strong drink, they are consumed by wine, they stagger from strong drink. [Consequently,] they misinterpret their visions and they stumble when they pronounce their judgments; ⁸because every table is full of vomit and filth, without a single spot [that is clean].*

⁹*To whom is he trying to impart knowledge? To whom is he explaining his message? [Does he think he is speaking to] children who have just been weaned from their mother's milk, those who have just been taken from their mother's breast?— ¹⁰because [his teaching] is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; a little teaching here, a little teaching there.*

¹¹*On the contrary, by means of men whose lips utter strange words and who speak another language, [Jehovah] will speak to this people—¹²[people] to whom he said, This is the place of rest, give rest to the one who is weary! and, This is the place of refreshment! But they would not listen. ¹³Therefore, the word of Jehovah to them shall be precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; a little teaching here, a little teaching there; so that they may continue on their way and fall backward, be injured, and be snared and be captured.*

¹⁴*Therefore, hear the word of Jehovah, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. ¹⁵Because you have said, We have made a covenant with death, and we have made a pact with Sheol; when the overwhelming scourge passes through [the land] it shall not reach us, for we have made deceit our refuge and we have taken shelter under deception; ¹⁶therefore, this is what the Lord Jehovah says, Listen! I will lay a foundation stone in Zion, a stone that has been proven [to be reliable], a precious cornerstone, for a secure foundation. He who trusts [in it] will not be panic-stricken. ¹⁷Furthermore, I will use justice as the measuring rod and righteousness as the plumb line. But the hail will sweep away your refuge of deceit and the floodwaters will overflow your hiding place. ¹⁸Your covenant with death shall be annulled and your pact with Sheol shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge passes through [the land], you will be trampled down by it. ¹⁹As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through [the land]—the report you receive will bring nothing but terror. ²⁰The bed is too short to stretch out on, and the blanket is too narrow for a man to wrap around himself; ²¹because Jehovah*

will rise up as [he did] at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as [he did] in the Valley Gibeon, in order that he may perform his work, his astonishing work, and accomplish his task, his strange task. ²²Now, therefore, do not go on being scoffers, or else your chains will be made stronger; for the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, has told me the destruction that has been decreed against the whole land.

²³Listen, and hear my voice; pay attention, and understand what I am saying. ²⁴When a farmer plows [the ground] for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? ²⁵After he has leveled the surface [of the ground], does he not sow dill and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in furrows, barley in its [appointed] plot, and spelt along the edge [of the field]? ²⁶[He does so] because his God instructs him and teaches him the right way. ²⁷Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin; [on the contrary,] dill is beaten out with a rod, and cumin with a stick. ²⁸[Grain for making] bread must be finely ground, so [the farmer] will not endlessly thresh it; for although his cartwheel and his horse may tread [the grain], that cannot grind it finely [enough]. ²⁹All this [knowledge] comes from Jehovah of hosts, whose counsel is wonderful and whose wisdom is magnificent. (Isa. 28:1-29)

Introduction

AIDS, drugs, child abuse, environmental concerns—these are all on his agenda. Items like these are on his desk every morning when he arrives at work. His name is Harold Bengsch, and he is the Springfield, Missouri, Director of Health. He holds a masters degree in public health from the University of Missouri. Yet, despite his university training, and his many years of experience, Mr. Bengsch does not rely upon his own wisdom to solve problems—he is wise enough to trust in the LORD. In his own words:

...if I try to solve a problem on my own, the answers just aren't there. Solutions come when I stop to say, "God, this thing is bigger than me; You're going to have to show me the way." (*POWER*, 12/13/92, p.3)

We all have the tendency to be like the people of Judah as they are described in the twenty-eighth chapter of Isaiah; there we find them disparaging God's divine counsel and placing their confidence in their own human wisdom. But what the Word of God teaches us in this passage is this, if you place your confidence in your own wisdom, rather than in the LORD's counsel, you are following a very foolish and destructive course. Let us learn a lesson from Mr. Bengsch, and from the Word of God: Let us be wise enough to trust in the LORD.

I. Be Wise and Trust the LORD: By Reverently Heeding His Counsel (Isa. 28:1-14)

Verses 1-6 relate a summary of the message Isaiah delivered to the people, and especially the leaders, of Judah. The message was this: Just as the spiritual state of Israel was reproduced in Judah, so, too, would Judah come to suffer the same fate

of judgment. He reminds them of the lifestyle of the northern tribes of Israel; a lifestyle characterized by pride, decadence, and the delusion that they were safe from hostile invasion: *“Woe to the crown, the pride of Ephraim’s drunkards! And [woe] to the fading flower, his glorious beauty! [Woe to the city] situated at the head of the fertile valley—[the city that is] the pride of those who are overcome with wine!”* (vs. 1.) The capitol city of Israel, Samaria, was built upon a hill, and its surrounding wall resembled a crown; from its dominant position the city looked down upon the fertile valleys below. The nation is personified as wearing a crown of pride, being a nation of drunkards, and a society whose once glorious beauty has now become a fading flower. What is portrayed here is a nation that has known prosperity and plenty, but allowed itself to become intoxicated with pride, the pursuit of the “good life,” and wine—it was oblivious to the fact that its glory had faded and it was subject to imminent judgment. Let us never lose sight of the fact that there is a great difference between thankfully enjoying the blessings of God and becoming intoxicated with those good things to the point where they are allowed to usurp the place reserved for God.

Isaiah goes on to inform his hearers of the judgment that shall soon befall that proud, self-indulgent nation:

Look! The Lord has someone [at his disposal] who is powerful and strong—like a hailstorm, like a destructive wind, like a rainstorm with a flooding downpour, he will throw that city down to the ground with his hand. ³The crown, the pride of Ephraim’s drunkards, will be trampled under foot. ⁴The fading flower, his glorious beauty, situated at the head of the fertile valley, will be like the first ripe fig before harvest: when someone discovers it and sees its goodness, he picks it and immediately eats it up. (Isa. 28:2-4)

The LORD’s visitation in judgment is once again described in terms of a great wind and hailstorm and as a raging flood (vs. 2)—such is the graphic depiction of the Assyrian invasion. The consequence of God’s storm of judgment is that *“the crown, the pride of Ephraim’s drunkards, will be trampled under foot”*—i.e.; the nation’s ungodly pride is brought into contempt and utter humiliation, as the city that is the source of their pride is crushed by the attacking armies of Assyria. Furthermore, *“the fading flower, his glorious beauty, [the city] situated at the head of the fertile valley ... will be like the first ripe fig before harvest: when someone discovers it and sees its goodness, he picks it and immediately eats it up”*—i.e.; just as when a man comes upon the first ripe fig, and seeing its succulence, he immediately picks it and eats it, so would the nation be plundered. Note: Verses 5-6 contain the promise that the LORD will be faithful to spare those who are His own in the midst of this decadent nation, though that number is defined as being nothing more than *“the remnant of his people.”*

In verses 7-8 Isaiah brings home the application of this message to his present audience: You are living the same decadent lifestyle, exemplified by none other than your spiritual leaders! In his words,

Even these men reel from wine and stagger from strong drink, namely, the priest and the prophet reel from strong drink, they are consumed by wine, they stagger from strong drink. [Consequently,] they misinterpret their visions and they stumble when they pronounce their judgments; ⁸because every table is full of vomit and filth, without a single spot [that is clean]. (Isa. 28:7-8)

“Even these men ... the priest and the prophet”—those who have been divinely set apart by the LORD to be His ministers and spokesmen—even they have become as degenerate as the nation at large. Because of their drunken, decadent condition, “they misinterpret their visions and they stumble when they pronounce their judgments”—i.e.; they cannot rightly comprehend the Word of God and thus they misrepresent God to the people. They do so because they themselves are not walking in the ways of the LORD, therefore, they no longer know how to counsel the people in the ways of the LORD. Verse 8 confronts us with this disgusting scene: “every table is full of vomit and filth, without a single spot [that is clean].”

Verses 9-10 reveal to us the reaction to Isaiah’s message on the part of the people, especially the leaders of the nation:

To whom is he trying to impart knowledge? To whom is he explaining his message? [Does he think he is speaking to] children who have just been weaned from their mother’s milk, those who have just been taken from their mother’s breast?—¹⁰because his teaching is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; a little teaching here, a little teaching there. (Isa. 28:9-10)

With arrogance and contempt they ask, “Does Isaiah think he is addressing children?” (vs. 9.) They are offended that Isaiah speaks to them of such elementary matters and with such repetition (vs. 10.) Note: Their criticism recorded in verses 9-10 is probably referring to all of Isaiah’s preaching, not only this present message—all of his preaching in which he called for a secular and sinful people to repent and return to their God. How do **we** react to the Word of God as it is preached and taught? Do we view the preaching/teaching as being too elementary and repetitious? Do we tune it out if we do not perceive that it is addressing our “felt needs?” Do we ever reach the stage of spiritual maturity where we have “outgrown” our need to be reminded and confronted with the great fundamental truths of the faith? The Apostle Paul, writing to one of the most spiritually mature congregations, declared, when speaking to them about the fundamentals of the faith, *“to write the same things to you is not tedious for me, and for you it is safe”* (Phil. 3:1.)

These Old Testament people had a great familiarity with the fundamentals of the faith, but these great spiritual truths had little or no impact upon their lives. We must be cautious to avoid imitating their negative interaction with the Word of God. The more we mature in Christ the more we should stand in awe of the most fundamental biblical truths; the reaction of impatience and boredom upon

hearing the great truths of Scripture is often a sign of spiritual immaturity, and not infrequently an indication that these truths have not gripped a person's heart, they have merely accumulated in his head.

According to verse 11, because of their contemptuous response to his God-given message, Isaiah informs the people that soon God will speak to them by men speaking a foreign language: *"by means of men whose lips utter strange words and who speak another language, [Jehovah] will speak to this people."* The invasion of the nation by a foreign power speaking a foreign language will be God's judgment upon a people who spurned His clear and straightforward call to repentance. By way of personal application: Sometimes we may encounter a devastating experience in our lives and ask, "Why has this happened?" In answer, we may discover that God's previous communications to us were repeatedly spurned as being too elementary, or too familiar, to be heeded and acted upon. In verse 12 we are reminded that all this is about to come upon a people to whom the LORD had repeatedly made known the way of peace, but who repeatedly had refused to heed that message; here was a people *"to whom he said, 'This is the place of rest, give rest to the one who is weary!' and, 'This is the place of refreshment!' But they would not listen."*

Verse 13 indicates that because of their contempt for God's clear message to them—and up until the time God finally spoke to them by the foreign language of the Assyrian invader—the LORD would continue to speak to them in the most elementary terms: *"Therefore, the word of Jehovah to them shall be precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; a little teaching here, a little teaching there; so that they may continue on their way and fall backward, be injured, and be snared and be captured."* The LORD initially spoke to these people in the most elementary terms (concerning faith, repentance, commitment) because, despite their intellectual knowledge of these things, their lives indicated that this is what they needed to heed and put into practice. But now that they have responded to these fundamentals with contempt instead of reverence and personal application, the LORD will continue to address them in these same simple terms as a form of judgment, knowing that the familiarity and repetitiveness of the message will produce a judicial hardening in the lives and hearts of these people; note, again, Isaiah 6:9-10,

He said, "Go and tell this people, 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰Cause the heart of this people to become callous. Cause their ears to become closed, and shut their eyes; so that they may not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return to me and be healed." (Isa. 6:9-10)

What is presented here is a very mysterious and sobering phenomenon. It is a form of judgment enacted by God against those who have the privilege of hearing His Word, but who passively ignore or actively resist that sacred Word and do so constantly. May we not let this happen to us. May we not let the Word of God,

which is intended to give us spiritual life, become the means of giving us spiritual paralysis of the heart that will lead to spiritual death and finally to damnation, all because of a willful and continual disregard of that life-giving Word.

Let us be wise and trust the LORD; and do so by reverently heeding His counsel:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt. 7:24-27)

II. Be Wise and Trust the LORD: Rather than Relying upon Your Own Ingenuity (Isa. 28:14-22)

Verses 14-15 indicate that the reason these people were rejecting God's counsel and viewing it as suited for juveniles was because they were placing their confidence in their own sophisticated ingenuity. The rulers of Judah are addressed as "*scoffers*," the last degree of ungodliness; note Psalm 1:1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers."

The leaders of Judah were confident that they had made "*a covenant with death*," a covenant that would assure their safety (vs. 15.) This is apparently a reference to a covenant contracted between Judah and Assyria, as described in 2 Kings 18:13-16,

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ¹⁴So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish, "I have offended you. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁵So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of Jehovah and in the treasuries of the royal palace. ¹⁶At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of Jehovah, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kgs. 18:13-16)

"*We have made a covenant with death*" is referring to the fact that Judah had made a covenant with Assyria, whom they view as being the instrument and administrator of death. "*When the overflowing scourge passes through [the land,] it shall not reach us*"—i.e.; when the flood of the Assyrian army invades Palestine, Judah is confident that they shall not be "drowned" because of their covenant with the invader. When the leaders of Judah declare, "*We have made deceit our*

refuge,” they are apparently referring to the intrigue and covert operations by which they formed their secret alliance with Assyria; or, Isaiah, in quoting them, is using the terms “*deceit*” and “*deception*” to rightly communicate to them the fact that they have been deceived by the Assyrians when they entered into their covenant with this ruthless invader. Thus the leaders of Judah are confident that they have solved their problem. They now have a (false) sense of security, and it is from that position of confidence that they scoff at God’s counsel for them. Do we ever rely upon our own ingenuity rather than upon the counsel of God’s Word? Do we ever achieve some measure of security as a result of our ingenuity and human effort? ... and does that achievement fill our hearts with a sense of self-confidence that would cause us to quietly scoff at God’s counsel?

In verses 16-19 the LORD presents His response to these scoffers:

... therefore, this is what the Lord Jehovah says, Listen! I will lay a foundation stone in Zion, a stone that has been proven [to be reliable], a precious cornerstone, for a secure foundation. He who trusts in it will not be panic-stricken. ¹⁷Furthermore, I will use justice as the measuring rod and righteousness as the plumb line. (Isa. 28:16-17a)

Whereas the leaders of Judah assume that they have devised a protective fortress for the nation, the LORD declares that He Himself has laid the cornerstone upon which He will build a truly safe and secure refuge for those who trust in Him—the cornerstone is the key element in establishing a sure foundation. The LORD declares that He will use “*justice as the measuring rod*” and “*righteousness as the plumb line,*” as opposed to the intrigue, pragmatism and deviousness employed by the leaders in their negotiations. The instruments of righteousness employed by the LORD will insure that the refuge He constructs for His people shall be trustworthy and durable. Ultimately, there is here the reference to the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of atonement as the sure and only Refuge for our soul from the righteous judgment of God. Note 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 and Ephesians 2:20,

By the grace of God that was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation; and someone else builds upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it; ¹¹for no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 3:10-11), this is the Apostle Paul’s testimony concerning his gospel ministry

Those who believe in Christ are described as being “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20); the reference is to the gospel teaching of the apostles and prophets, with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone of our faith and life.

But with regard to the scoffers in the nation, the LORD declares,

But the hail will sweep away your refuge of deceit and the floodwaters will overflow your hiding place. ¹⁸Your covenant with death shall be annulled and your pact with Sheol shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge passes through [the land], you will be trampled down by it. ¹⁹As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through [the land]—the report you receive will bring nothing but terror. (Isa. 28:17b-19)

The LORD emphatically declares that Judah's self-constructed "*refuge of deceit*" (i.e.; a deceptive, insecure refuge) shall not stand. On the contrary, it will be swept away by the storm of God's righteous judgment. Verse 20 contains a proverb, "*The bed is too short to stretch out on, and the blanket is too narrow for a man to wrap around himself.*" The lesson being conveyed is this: When you place your confidence in yourself or in any counsel other than the LORD, you will discover such counsel to be inadequate.

Looking back to the LORD's promise to provide a true and sure Cornerstone (vs. 16), verse 21 contains the further promise that, as in times of old, so once again, the LORD will rise up in defense of His people and will rout their enemies. The reference is to the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian armies as recorded in Isaiah 37:36-37,

Then the angel of Jehovah went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! ³⁷So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. (Isa. 37:36-37)

Based upon this revelation of what the LORD will do, there comes the exhortation and warning of verse 22, "*Now, therefore, do not go on being scoffers, or else your chains will be made stronger; for the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, has told me the destruction that has been decreed against the whole land.*"

Let us be wise and trust the LORD; rather than rely upon our own ingenuity:

Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not depend upon your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths. (Prov. 3:5-6)

III. Be Wise and Trust the LORD: Because the LORD is a Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 28:23-29)

Verses 23-28 provide us with an elaborate example from agriculture, illustrating the excellence of God's counsel.

The farmer goes about his work with skill and understanding: *“When a farmer plows [the ground] for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil?”* (vs. 24.) The point is that the farmer recognizes that there is a time for plowing and a time for sowing the seed. Verse 25 goes on to say, *“After he has leveled the surface [of the ground], does he not sow dill and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in furrows, barley in its [appointed] plot, and spelt along the edge [of the field]?”* The farmer recognizes that the various types of seeds are to be planted in different ways: some types are scattered, some are sown in furrows, and some are sprinkled along the edge of the field. Then, according to verses 27-28, he further recognizes that there is an appropriate way to harvest and thresh the various types of grain he has sown:

Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin; [on the contrary], dill is beaten out with a rod, and cumin with a stick.²⁸[Grain for making] bread must be finely ground, so [the farmer] will not endlessly thresh it; for although his cartwheel and his horse may tread [the grain], that cannot grind it finely [enough]. (Isa. 28:27-28)

Verse 26 informs us that the farmer’s skill and understanding is to be attributed to God who gives the farmer wisdom: *“his God instructs him and teaches him the right way.”* Verse 29 provides the conclusion and application of this example: *“All this [knowledge] comes from Jehovah of hosts, whose counsel is wonderful and whose wisdom is magnificent.”* The LORD is the Wonderful Counselor; therefore, we should seek and heed His counsel, as the Apostle James exhorts us, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (Jam. 1:5.)

Let us be wise and trust the LORD, because the LORD is the Wonderful Counselor. As Christians, it is not only our privilege, it is also our obligation, to look to the LORD for guidance and direction so that we may live in the way that is pleasing to Him for His glory. As one who has been redeemed by Christ and who now belongs to Christ, and has promised to live for Christ, do you look to Christ and His Word for counsel concerning the decisions of your life, such as dating and marriage, career choices, etc.? Do you ask Him, “How do You want me to serve You? How and where do You want me to invest my time, my talents, my life in Your service?” If you are not asking these questions, why are you not doing so?

Conclusion

We all have the tendency to be like the leaders of Judah and disparage God’s counsel while we place our confidence in our own human wisdom. But if we really are wise, we will pay attention to the message of God’s Word as it is presented to us in Isaiah 28; namely, if you place your confidence in your own wisdom, rather than in the LORD’s counsel, you are following a very foolish and destructive course.

Let us remember the testimony of Mr. Harold Bengsch:

... if I try to solve a problem on my own, the answers just aren't there. Solutions come when I stop to say, "God, this thing is bigger than me; You're going to have to show me the way." (*POWER*, 12/13/92, p.3)

Following the example of Mr. Bengsch and the counsel of Scripture, let us be wise and trust the LORD.