

## **The Book of Isaiah, Teacher's Guide**

### **Lesson 11: Woe to Drunkards and Scoffers; the Sure Stone**

#### **Isaiah 28:1–29:24**

#### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

Isaiah 28–29 sets two contrasting pictures side by side, and your aim is to help the class feel the contrast and apply it. On one side stand the staggering drunkards, the mocking scoffers, the rulers trusting a covenant with death, and the worshipers offering God their lips but not their hearts. On the other side stands the precious cornerstone God lays in Zion, sure, tested, and able to bear the full weight of a life. The lesson asks every person to examine which they are building on: the false refuges of self-confidence and routine religion, or the Stone.

This lesson is doctrinally sensitive in a clarifying, encouraging way. Be sure the class sees that Isaiah 28:16 is not a vague hope but a specific prophecy of Christ, applied to Him three times in the New Testament (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6; Ephesians 2:20). Help them grasp that “whoever believes” makes the foundation accessible to all who come to Christ in obedient faith, and that 29:13, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 15:8–9, is one of the strongest warnings in Scripture against empty, man-made religion. The pastoral burden is to move the class from lip service to heart-worship, from false refuges to the sure Stone, without producing either pride or despair.

#### **Question 1**

##### **Student Question:**

*In Isaiah 28:1–8 God pronounces woe on the “proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,” and verse 7 shows even the priests and prophets staggering and reeling. Beyond literal drunkenness, what does this passage teach about the spiritual dangers of self-indulgence and intoxication for those who are supposed to lead and teach God’s people? Support your answer from the text.*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Chapter 28 opens with a “woe” over Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel, whose capital Samaria sat like a “proud crown” on a fertile hill. Isaiah pictures it as a fading flower on the head of drunkards, beautiful for a moment but already wilting. The prosperity that should have led to gratitude had led instead to indulgence and self-satisfaction.

The shocking turn comes in verse 7: “These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink.” The very men charged with keeping the nation clear-eyed before God are themselves drunk. They “err in vision” and “stumble in judgment.” When the watchmen are intoxicated, the whole city is in danger.

Verse 8 gives a deliberately repulsive image: “all tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left.” Isaiah will not let us romanticize self-indulgence. The end of unchecked appetite is not glamour but degradation. This is a sober warning to anyone who leads or teaches, that personal self-control is not optional but essential to the work.

We should not flatten this to a lesson about alcohol only. The deeper issue is leaders whose appetites have captured their judgment. Whatever dulls a teacher's spiritual senses, whether literal drink, the love of money, the craving for approval, or sheer comfort, endangers everyone who depends on that teacher's clear sight.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Prosperity unaccompanied by gratitude tends to curdle into self-indulgence (Isaiah 28:1).
- Spiritual leaders bear a special responsibility for self-control and clear judgment (Isaiah 28:7; 1 Timothy 3:2–3).
- Intoxication, literal or figurative, clouds spiritual vision and judgment.
- The text refuses to romanticize indulgence; its end is degradation (Isaiah 28:8).
- Anything that captures a teacher's appetites endangers those who depend on him.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is it especially dangerous when those who teach and lead lose their spiritual clear-sightedness?
- Beyond alcohol, what appetites can capture a leader's judgment today?
- How can a congregation lovingly hold its teachers and leaders accountable to sober, clear-eyed living?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*Isaiah 28:7–8 shows leaders whose judgment is clouded so they “err in vision” and “stumble in judgment.” What are the modern intoxications, not necessarily alcohol, that most cloud your own spiritual judgment and dull your sensitivity to God? Be specific.*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 28:7–8 invite each of us to ask what is clouding our own spiritual judgment. Isaiah names wine, but the principle reaches every intoxicant of the soul. We can be drunk on success, drunk on outrage, drunk on entertainment, drunk on busyness, drunk on the steady drip of our screens, until our sensitivity to God grows as dull as a literal drunkard's.

The mark of this kind of intoxication is the same as Isaiah names: we “err in vision” and “stumble in judgment.” We lose the ability to see clearly what matters, to discern good from evil, to feel the weight of eternal things. Decisions that should be obvious become foggy. Convictions that should be firm become negotiable.

Scripture repeatedly calls believers to be “sober-minded” (1 Peter 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8), not because God is against joy, but because a clear mind is a defended mind. The devil prowls; the foggy soul is easy prey. Sobriety here means a watchful, alert, undistracted heart fixed on God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Many things besides alcohol can intoxicate and dull the soul (Isaiah 28:7).
- Self-application: identify what most clouds your own discernment.
- Scripture commands sober-mindedness as spiritual self-defense (1 Peter 5:8).
- A foggy, distracted soul is easy prey; an alert one is defended (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What in your life most dulls your sensitivity to God right now?
- What does practical “sober-mindedness” look like for you this week?
- How is a clear, alert mind a form of spiritual protection?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*In Isaiah 28:9–13 the scoffers mock Isaiah’s teaching as “precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” God then turns their mockery back on them. What does this passage teach about how people respond to patient, repeated instruction in God’s word, and the danger of treating it with contempt?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

In verses 28:9–10 the scoffers mock Isaiah. They sneer that his teaching is fit only for weaned infants, mimicking him with a sing-song taunt: “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” In the Hebrew it sounds like baby-talk or a drunkard’s slur. They despise the patient, repetitive way God teaches.

There is deep irony here. The very method they mock, line upon line, little by little, is precisely how God graciously teaches His people, accommodating Himself to our slowness. What they sneer at as childish is in fact divine patience. They have grown too sophisticated for the simple, steady word of God.

Verses 11–13 deliver the sobering reversal. Because they will not hear God’s plain word, they will hear it from foreigners, “by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue,” the language of the invading Assyrians. The word they mocked as baby-talk will return as the harsh speech of conquerors. The same word that could have been rest becomes a snare to those who reject it.

This is a profound warning about how we handle Scripture. The patient, repeated teaching of the word, line upon line, is a gift. To grow contemptuous of it, to crave novelty over faithfulness, is to put oneself on dangerous ground. God’s word will accomplish its purpose either as rest to the humble or as a stumbling to the proud.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God graciously teaches His people patiently, little by little, accommodating our slowness (Isaiah 28:10).
- Contempt for plain, repeated instruction in the word is spiritually dangerous (Isaiah 28:9).
- The word rejected as rest becomes a snare to the proud (Isaiah 28:12–13).

- Craving novelty over faithful, steady teaching is a warning sign.
- God's word always accomplishes its purpose, whether as rest or as stumbling (Isaiah 55:11).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why do people grow contemptuous of patient, repeated teaching of the same truths?
- How is "line upon line" actually a picture of God's patience with us?
- What is the danger when a believer starts craving novelty more than faithfulness in teaching?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Isaiah 28:9–10 mocks the slow, line-upon-line teaching of God's word as fit only for children. When have you been impatient with the "slow" work of learning Scripture little by little? How might God be calling you to value patient, steady growth in the word?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 28:9–10 also press a personal question: are we impatient with the slow work of learning Scripture? In a culture of instant everything, the steady, line-upon-line growth in God's word can feel tedious. We want the breakthrough, the mountaintop, the dramatic insight, not the daily, ordinary discipline of reading and re-reading.

But spiritual maturity is almost always built the way Isaiah describes, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. Few people are transformed in a single moment. Most are formed slowly, by years of faithful exposure to the word, like a tree planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:2–3) that grows imperceptibly but surely.

The danger the scoffers model is despising this process. The opportunity for us is to embrace it, to make peace with slow growth, to keep showing up to the word even when it feels repetitive, trusting that God is doing real work in the steady drip. The same water that seems to do nothing day by day carves canyons over time.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Self-application: impatience with slow, steady growth in the word is common in an instant culture.
- Spiritual maturity is usually formed gradually, not in a single moment (Psalm 1:2–3).
- Faithful, repeated exposure to Scripture is the ordinary path of transformation.
- Embracing slow growth is the opposite of the scoffers' contempt.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When have you been impatient with the slow work of growing in Scripture?
- What helps you keep showing up to the word even when it feels repetitive?
- How have you seen slow, steady time in the word change you over the years?

## Question 5

### Student Question:

*In Isaiah 28:14–18 the scoffing rulers boast that they have made “a covenant with death” and taken refuge in lies, believing the coming “overwhelming scourge” will pass them by. What does this teach about the false refuges people build, and why does God say their covenant with death will not stand?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 28:14–15 expose the false confidence of Jerusalem’s scoffing rulers in their own words: “We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement... for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter.” They likely meant political alliances and pagan rituals they believed would shield them from the coming Assyrian “overwhelming scourge.” In effect they had signed a peace treaty with death itself.

It is a staggering self-deception. They imagined they had outsmarted catastrophe, that the disaster sweeping through the region would somehow pass over them because of their clever arrangements. They had built a refuge, but its foundation was lies, and its insurance policy was a covenant with the grave.

God’s verdict in verses 17–18 is devastating: He will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line, “and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies.” The covenant with death “will be annulled.” Every refuge built on falsehood is exposed and swept away when God’s justice arrives. What felt secure proves to be no shelter at all.

The lesson is timeless. People still build elaborate refuges of lies, financial security imagined to be invincible, reputations carefully managed, denials repeated until they feel true, alliances with the very things that are destroying them. God’s plumb line still comes, and only what is true and built on Him will stand.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- People build false refuges of lies and self-deception against coming judgment (Isaiah 28:15).
- A “covenant with death” is a vivid picture of trusting the very thing that destroys us.
- God measures by justice and righteousness, and every refuge of lies is swept away (Isaiah 28:17).
- What feels secure but is built on falsehood proves to be no shelter at all.
- Only what is true and founded on God will stand His plumb line.

### Discussion Prompts

- Why do people convince themselves that disaster will pass them by? Where do we see this today?
- What does it mean that they made “a covenant with death”? How do people still do this?
- How does God’s “plumb line” of justice expose the refuges we build on lies?

## Question 6

### Student Question:

*Isaiah 28:15 describes people who have made “lies our refuge” and hidden themselves “in falsehood.” What false refuges, comforting untruths you tell yourself, have you been tempted to hide behind instead of facing reality before God? What would it take to come out of hiding?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 28:15 turns the searchlight inward. We may never sign a literal treaty, but all of us are tempted to take “refuge” in comforting untruths. We tell ourselves the lie that we have plenty of time to get right with God, that our secret sin is not really hurting anyone, that we are basically fine, that the consequences will never catch up with us. We hide in falsehood.

These refuges feel safe precisely because they let us avoid facing reality before God. As long as we stay inside the lie, we do not have to repent, change, or admit our need. But Isaiah warns that these shelters are made of paper. When God’s justice arrives, they offer no protection at all.

The gospel calls us out of hiding. From Adam and Eve sewing fig leaves and hiding among the trees, the human instinct in guilt is to hide. But God’s voice still calls, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9), not to destroy us but to bring us into the open where grace can reach us. Coming out of the refuge of lies is the first step toward the sure refuge of the Stone.

Coming out of hiding takes courage and honesty. It means naming the lie, telling the truth about ourselves, and trusting that God’s mercy is bigger than what we have been hiding. The very thing we feared would destroy us, exposure before God, becomes the doorway to real safety.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-application: we all take refuge in comforting untruths to avoid facing God (Isaiah 28:15).
- False refuges feel safe because they let us avoid repentance and change.
- The human instinct in guilt is to hide, going back to Eden (Genesis 3:9–10).
- God calls us out of hiding not to destroy but to reach us with grace.
- Coming into the open before God is the doorway to true safety.

### Discussion Prompts

- What comforting untruths have you been tempted to hide behind?
- Why does staying inside a lie feel safer than facing the truth before God?
- What would it take for you to come out of hiding this week?

## Question 7

### Student Question:

*In Isaiah 29:13–14 God says, “this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.”*

*Jesus quotes this very verse in Matthew 15:8–9 against the Pharisees. What does this teach about the difference between true heart-worship and empty, man-made religion, and why is God so displeased with lip service?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Chapter 29 turns to Jerusalem under the codename “Ariel,” likely meaning “altar hearth” or “lion of God.” God announces distress upon the city, yet also a sudden deliverance of her enemies, who will vanish “like fine dust” and “a dream, a vision of the night.” The chapter swings between judgment and surprising rescue.

The heart of the chapter, and one of its most quoted verses, comes in 29:13: “this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.” This is God’s diagnosis of a religion that has become all external. The words are correct; the heart is absent. The motions continue; the love is gone.

The phrase “their fear of me is a commandment taught by men” is crucial. Their reverence had degenerated into mere human tradition, rules learned by rote rather than devotion flowing from a living relationship. Worship had become a performance of inherited habits rather than the response of a loving heart.

Jesus reaches back and quotes this exact verse against the Pharisees in Matthew 15:8–9, adding, “in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” That tells us how seriously God takes this. Lip-service worship and man-made religious rules are not minor flaws; they are the kind of thing that draws the Lord’s strongest rebuke.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God sees past correct words to the condition of the heart (Isaiah 29:13).
- Worship can become all external: right motions, absent heart.
- Reverence degenerates into mere human tradition when it loses living relationship.
- Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 against the Pharisees, calling such worship vain (Matthew 15:8–9).
- Man-made religious rules taught as doctrine draw God’s strongest rebuke.
- True worship is the response of a loving heart, not a performance of habits.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between honoring God with the lips and honoring Him with the heart?
- Why does Jesus take lip-service worship and man-made commandments so seriously (Matthew 15:8–9)?
- How can a faithful congregation keep its worship from drifting into hollow routine?

### **Question 8**

**Student Question:**

*Isaiah 29:13 condemns worship reduced to “a commandment taught by men.” Examine your own worship and service: how much of it flows from love for God, and how much from habit, expectation of others, or fear of how you might look? How can you move more of it from the lips to the heart?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 29:13 will not let any of us off the hook, because the drift from heart-worship to lip-service is so quiet and so gradual. We do not decide one day to worship coldly. We simply keep doing the right things while our affection slowly leaks away, until one day we realize we are singing the words, attending the assembly, and saying the prayers with a heart that is somewhere else entirely.

The danger is especially real for those who have been faithful a long time. Familiarity can dull wonder. The very routines that once carried our love can become substitutes for it. We can find ourselves worshiping out of habit, out of expectation, out of fear of how we would look if we stopped, rather than out of love for God.

The remedy is not to abandon the routines but to bring the heart back into them. The forms of worship are good and commanded; the problem is offering the form without the heart. The question to ask is not “should I keep worshiping?” but “is my heart in this, or have I left it at the door?”

This is deeply personal work. It means examining why we do what we do, confessing where love has cooled, and asking God to rekindle genuine affection. A heart far from God can be brought near again, but only by honest acknowledgment that it has wandered.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Self-application: the drift from heart-worship to lip-service is quiet and gradual (Isaiah 29:13).
- Long-time faithfulness can dull wonder and let routine replace love.
- We can worship from habit, expectation, or fear of appearances rather than love.
- The remedy is bringing the heart back into the right forms, not abandoning them.
- Rekindling genuine worship requires honest self-examination and confession.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where has familiarity dulled the wonder in your own worship?
- How much of your service to God flows from love, and how much from habit or appearances?
- What is one concrete way to bring your heart back into your worship this week?

### **Question 9**

**Student Question:**

*Isaiah 28:16 declares, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be in haste." The New Testament identifies this stone as Christ (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6; Ephesians 2:20). Explain how Christ is the sure cornerstone, what it means that "whoever believes will not be in haste," and how this stone is meant to replace every false refuge in our lives. Why is the foundation a person and not a program, feeling, or human tradition?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson. In the middle of all the false refuges and hollow religion, God says, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be in haste" (28:16). While the scoffers trusted a covenant with death, God was laying a Stone that could never be moved.

Notice the words. It is "tested," proven reliable. It is "precious," of the highest value. It is a "cornerstone," the foundational stone that determines the alignment of the whole building. And it is a "sure foundation," able to bear the full weight of everything built upon it. The contrast with the refuge of lies could not be greater: one is paper, the other is rock.

The New Testament tells us plainly who this Stone is. Peter writes, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame," and applies it directly to Christ (1 Peter 2:6). Paul quotes the same prophecy of Christ in Romans 9:33, and calls Jesus the cornerstone in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple (Ephesians 2:20–22). The foundation God laid in Zion is a Person, not a program.

"Whoever believes will not be in haste" (or "will not be put to shame," as the New Testament renders it) means the one who rests his whole weight on Christ will not panic, will not be swept away, will not be disgraced when judgment comes. While others scramble in haste to shore up their crumbling refuges, the one built on the Stone stands calm and unshaken. Faith in Christ produces a settled steadiness that nothing else can give.

This is why the foundation must be a person and not a program, a feeling, or a human tradition. Programs change, feelings fade, traditions can become the very man-made commandments God rebukes. Only a living, tested, precious, sure Person can bear the weight of a human life and an eternal hope. Christ is that Stone, and coming to Him in obedient faith, hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Him (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27), is how we are built upon Him. Every false refuge in our lives is meant to be torn down and replaced by this one sure foundation.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Isaiah 28:16 is a specific prophecy of Christ, applied to Him three times in the New Testament (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6; Ephesians 2:20).

- Christ is the tested, precious, sure cornerstone that determines the alignment of the whole building.
- “Whoever believes will not be in haste” means the one resting on Christ stands unshaken and unashamed.
- The foundation is a Person, not a program, feeling, or human tradition; only Christ can bear the weight of a life.
- We are built on the Stone by coming to Christ in obedient faith and baptism into Him (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).
- Every false refuge is meant to be replaced by this one sure foundation (Matthew 7:24–27).
- This stone is precious to believers but a stone of stumbling to the disobedient (1 Peter 2:7–8).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean that the foundation God laid is a Person, Christ, and not a program or feeling?
- How does resting on the Stone produce the calm steadiness of “will not be in haste” when others panic?
- What false refuge is God asking you to tear down and replace with Christ the cornerstone?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Isaiah 29:18–19 promises a day when “the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see,” and the meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD. In light of Christ the cornerstone, name one specific way you will let Jesus open your own ears and eyes this week, moving you from lip service to whole-hearted trust.*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The lesson ends on a note of hope and reversal. Isaiah 29:18–19 promises that “in that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.” The spiritual deafness and blindness that ran through chapter 29 will be reversed.

This points forward to the ministry of Christ, who literally opened the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind, and who pointed to those very miracles as the sign of the Messiah (Matthew 11:4–5; Luke 7:22). But the deeper fulfillment is spiritual: in Christ, those once deaf to God’s word now hear it, and those once blind to His glory now see. The gospel opens what sin had closed.

Verse 29:24 adds, “those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction.” The very scoffers and grumblers of the earlier chapters are

pictured being turned, healed, brought to understanding. God's purpose is not merely to judge the proud but to heal and restore the humble.

And so the capstone is an invitation. In light of Christ the cornerstone, every one of us is called to let Him open our own ears and eyes, to move from lip service to whole-hearted trust, from hiding in false refuges to resting on the sure Stone. The deaf can hear, the blind can see, and the heart that has drifted can be brought home.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God promises to reverse spiritual deafness and blindness in the coming day (Isaiah 29:18).
- This is fulfilled in Christ, who opened ears and eyes as the sign of the Messiah (Matthew 11:4-5).
- The deeper fulfillment is spiritual: the gospel opens what sin had closed.
- Even the scoffers and grumblers can be brought to understanding and healed (Isaiah 29:24).
- The capstone is personal: let Christ open your ears and eyes and move you to whole-hearted trust.

#### **Discussion Prompts**

- How did Jesus literally fulfill the promise that the deaf would hear and the blind would see (Matthew 11:4-5)?
- Where do you sense spiritual deafness or blindness in your own life that you need Christ to open?
- Name one specific way you will move from lip service to whole-hearted trust this week.