

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 11: Woe to Drunkards and Scoffers; the Sure Stone -- Isaiah 28:1–29:24

Picture a banquet that has gone badly wrong. The tables are still set, the leaders of the northern kingdom of Israel are still reclining, but the wine has done its work. “All tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left,” Isaiah says, and he is not exaggerating for effect. The priests and prophets, the men who were supposed to keep the nation sober before God, stagger and stumble in their own decisions. When Isaiah comes with God’s word, they mock him like drunks mimicking a teacher: “precept upon precept, line upon line.” Chapter 28 opens in a scene of staggering, mocking, spiritual collapse.

It would be easy to read this and feel safely distant. We are not falling-down drunk at a banquet. But Isaiah’s diagnosis goes far deeper than alcohol. The real intoxication is self-deception: leaders who have made “a covenant with death” and think they are safe, worshipers who honor God with their lips while their hearts are far away, people who treat the living God as something they can manage with the right religious motions. That intoxication is alive and well in any age, including ours.

And yet, right in the middle of the mockery and the misplaced confidence, God lays down something solid. “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 build their refuge of lies on a covenant with death, God quietly sets a stone that will never shift. The New Testament will tell us plainly that this stone is Christ. Everything in these two chapters finally comes down to one question: are you building on the lies, or on the Stone?

Chapter 29 then turns to Jerusalem, called “Ariel,” and exposes a religion that has become all surface. The people draw near with their mouths and honor God with their lips, “while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.” Jesus would one day quote those exact words to the Pharisees. This is a lesson, then, about two dangers that look very different but spring from the same root: the loud self-confidence of the scoffer and the hollow lip-service of the religious. Both are cured only by coming, in humble faith, to the Stone God has laid.

Group Discussion: Isaiah confronts worship that honors God with the lips while the heart is far away (29:13), the very verse Jesus applied to the religious leaders of His day (Matthew 15:8–9). What are some of the ways well-meaning church people can drift into going through the motions? How can a congregation guard against hollow, routine worship without becoming cold or critical?

Personal Reflection: Search your own heart honestly: is there any part of your relationship with God that has become mere routine, lip service, or man-made habit rather than genuine love and

trust? Name one specific area, and one concrete step to bring your heart back into your worship this week.

Read Isaiah 28:1–29:24

Study Questions

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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 23:1–9 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Peter 2:4–8, Christ as the living stone, the precious cornerstone laid in Zion, and the stone that the disobedient stumble over, quoting Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:30–33, the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense, and that whoever believes will not be put to shame; Matthew 15:1–9, Jesus quoting Isaiah 29:13 against worship that is mere lip service and man-made commandment; Ephesians 2:19–22, Christ the cornerstone of a household and temple being built together; Matthew 7:24–27, the wise builder who builds his house on the rock.

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com