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With Foreign Lips and Strange Tongues God Will Speak to This People

28: 1-13

With foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people **DIG**: Isaiah singles out Ephraim and Samaria as an example of God's judgment. What will happen to the wreath in which the Israelites have taken such pride? What are the reasons for God's judgment upon Isra'el (1:12-17, 10:1-4)? What light does Second Kings 17:1-6 shed on the fulfillment of this prophecy against Samaria? What will be different when God is truly the crown of His people? What is Isaiah saying about the visions and decisions of the religious leadership of Isra'el by the severe way he describes them? What is the effect of their drunken excesses on Isra'el? To what spiritual reality does this vivid imagery point? How do these leaders receive Isaiah's message? Why would they mock him and his warnings, much like a rebel teenager does his parents? How were their very words turned around against them? What is God's basic message to Isra'el, which they are ignoring, to their detriment? What kind of rest was Isaiah talking about here?

REFLECT: Isra'el's kings often lacked the strength to oppose evil. Where do you need, like Israel did, the word of the LORD to strengthen you to turn back the battle at the gate of your life? Have you ever responded to the LORD's message as the leaders of the northern kingdom of Isra'el did? How long did that rebellious phase last? What was the result? How did God break through your cynicism?

This section is **a warning to Judah**; however, **God** uses **Ephraim (28:1-6)**, the largest tribe in the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**, to provide a negative example of what could happen to her if **she** didn't change **her** ways (**28:7-13**). After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided; **Isra'el** to the north and **Judah** to the south. Ten tribes made up the nation of **Isra'el**, and two tribes, (**Benjamin** and **Judah**) made up the nation of **Judah**. **Ephraim** was the largest tribe in the northern

Kingdom. That is why **the Ruach** used that name to represent the entire nation of **Isra'el**. **Benjamin** was the smallest tribe, dwarfed by **Judah**, hence the name **Judah**.

Unfortunately, the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** was founded upon idolatry. Jeroboam corrupted the worship of **God (1 Kings 12: 25-33)**. As **Isra'el** continued to corrupt **His** worship, and as **God** brought the Assyrians closer and closer to punish **Ephraim** for her sins, more and more of this faithful **remnant** moved south to the nation of **Judah**, and back to the true worship at Jerusalem. So by the time the Assyrians destroyed **Isra'el**, a believing **remnant** of all twelve tribes lived in **Judah**. Therefore, no tribes were lost. Today, some **Jews** refer to themselves as M.O.T. or *members of the tribe*. To which tribe do **they** belong? Only **God** knows (see the commentary on **Revelation, to see link click [Cd](#) - And There Before Me was a Throne in Heaven**).

This is the first woe in the Book of Woes. **Isaiah** declares that **Ephraim** was characterized by drunkenness: **Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards (28:1a)**. **She** was throwing away the blessings of **God** like a drunk throws away money on **wine**. As a result, **ADONAI** directed **His** message **to the fading flower, His glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley - to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine (28:1b)**. There is a word play with the word **head**. The capital **city** of the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** was Samaria. And **Isaiah**, the master of the Hebrew language, said it was both the **head of a fertile valley** and the **head of those laid low by wine**. King Omri had built it on the hill of Shemer (**First Kings 16:24**). It rose about 300 feet above the surrounding **fertile** valleys and seemed to be impregnable. But both the **drunkards** and the **fertile valley**, as it were, wore faded wreaths.

Because of Samaria's **beauty** it was called a **wreath**. It became the center of **Ephraim's pride**. In **their** own eyes, **they** were **strong** and beautiful. The possibility of material prosperity was great. But as far as **Isaiah** was concerned, Samaria was in the process of dying like a **fading flower**. The party was over. At the time of **Isaiah's** writing, the Assyrians had not yet conquered the northern Kingdom. But all of it was about to be destroyed.

See, ADONAI has one, the king of Assyria, who is powerful and strong (28:2a). **Two illustrations from nature** depict the total destruction of the city of Samaria. **First, is the hailstorm. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, He will throw it forcefully to**

the ground (28:2b). One of the characteristics of **the Jewish people** seems to have been **their** ability to ignore the signs of the times (see [E1 - An Oracle Concerning Jerusalem](#)). **Isaiah** tried to alert **his people** to **their** danger. But **they** would not listen. So, **Isaiah** predicted that Assyria would be the coming storm of invasion. **They** would be incredibly violent, unrelenting and would burst upon **Isra'el** like a **hailstorm**, stripping the plants of their leaves and washing away the devastated stalks. Everything would be flattened under the tyrant's hand. This is the reason for the first **woe**. The pride of **Ephraim**, or Samaria, would **be trampled underfoot**.

Isaiah is concerned with the root cause of the problem, not the symptoms. **That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot (28:3).** Consequently, whenever pride leads people into moral decay, **the LORD** has the authority to deal with it. After the **hailstorm** had swept through, nothing would be left but a few broken-down wreaths trampled in the mud. Again, double imagery is present (**28:1**) because Samaria was also included, as the next verse makes clear.



The second illustration from nature is that of **a fig tree**. Samaria would become **like a ripened fig** that was eaten by a stranger before it could be harvested. **That fading flower, His glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley will be like a fig ripe before harvest - as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it (28:4).** The first **ripe fig** comes out in June, while the main crop is not until September or October. The first fig crop is unusually tender and is quickly eaten (**Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1; Nahum 3:12; Jer 24:2**). **Isaiah** said Samaria would be like that. Although the siege took three years, it was but an instant in the big picture of things. **Isaiah** was using this illustration to emphasize the suddenness of the coming destruction. **The pride of Ephraim** would collapse

very quickly unless the **drunkards**, who were **her** leaders, would soon come to **their** senses.

Another reason some people say the ten tribes of the northern Kingdom were lost was because of **their** assimilation by the Assyrians. The Assyrians, who captured the Northern Kingdom, and the Babylonians, who captured the Southern Kingdom, treated their captives differently. They had different philosophies of how to eliminate their foes. They assimilated their captives. They moved some Assyrians into the captured land and eliminated the culture of the captured people. And they brought some of the people to Assyria to assimilate them. They intermarried with them, so that the captured people became Assyrian also (**Second Kings 15:29**). The Babylonians, on the other hand, destroyed the lands of their captives, killed most of them, and brought “the best and the brightest” back to Babylon to help elevate the Babylonian culture. **Dani’el** is an example of this. But the Assyrians intermarried with them. This is why **the Jews** of **Judah** hated the “half-breeds” from the north. **They** called **them** Samaritans and no respectable **Jew** would even travel through **their** territory, let alone talk to one (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**).

Nevertheless, despite the present failure, there would always be a believing **remnant**. Even in the drunken nation of **Isra’el** there was such a **remnant**. **In that day, the LORD of heaven’s angelic armies (CJB) will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of His people (28:5)**. Here **Isaiah** describes what the effect will be on them. The coming destruction of Samaria will be a comfort to the believing **remnant** because it would mean that **God’s** prophecies were being fulfilled and **He** would punish sin accordingly. For the **remnant**, **God** is always a **glorious crown** and a **beautiful wreath**. **He**, not the beautiful **city**, should be honored. **In that day**, when **the LORD** establishes the Messianic Kingdom **He** will honor **the remnant**.

In the context of that day, or the far eschatological future, ADONAI will be a spirit of justice to Him who sits in judgment (28:6a). All judgment has been given to **Jesus Christ**. **Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22)**. During the Messianic Kingdom there will be a **spirit of justice** rather than the spirit of evil in the present day (**Ephesians 2:2**). Where **the Messiah** is lifted up, there is a whole new spirit about whatever we undertake (**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 (**Deuteronomy 17:8-12; Second Chronicles 19:5-8**); we may fight with courage because we know that ultimately, in this life or

in the next, **Yeshua** will overcome (**Revelation 2:7, 17, 26** and **3:21**). There is a divine empowerment. **He will be a source of strength to those who** stand up for righteousness and **turn back the battle at the gate (28:6b)**.

Isaiah has been dealing with the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. But now **he** gives application to **Judah (28:7-13)**. As **he** turns to **her**, **he** finds *the very same* spiritual adultery that brought about the destruction of the Northern Kingdom! Not only are **the rulers** drunken and foolish, but also the religious leaders, **the priests** and scribes, upon whom the nation depends for divine guidance, are in the same condition. **And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer**. These verses read as if **Isaiah** was actually watching the despicable scene firsthand. **Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when they see visions, they stumble when rendering decisions (28:7)**.

Here **Isaiah** describes the decadence in the strongest terms. **They** were so drunk that all their **tables** were **covered with vomit**. **They** were drunk even **when** supposedly **seeing visions (the false prophets)** or **when rendering decisions (the false priests)**. There was no attempt to hide **their** self-indulgence. As **Isaiah** looks over the place where the leaders were drinking and vomiting, **there was not a spot without filth (28:8)**. No wonder the nation was ripe for judgment!

Having spelled out these words of judgment, in particular against the leaders of **Judah** who were pushing for a covenant with Egypt, those drunken leaders turned on **Isaiah** and mocked **him**, saying: **Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast (28:9)?** **They** mock **Isaiah's** apparent simplicity, but **he** turned **their** words right back on **them** to give **them** a picture of **their** own fate. The atmosphere was grim, but realistic. There is not a more hardened or cynical person in the world, than a religious leader whose conscience is seared (**Second Timothy 4:2**). For **them**, **Isaiah's** tender appeals were only a source of amusement. **They** had learned to rationalize everything and to believe nothing (see the commentary on **Hebrews 11 - If We Deliberately Keep On Sinning, No Sacrifice For Sins is Left: The Danger of Apostasy: Apostate Jews**), and were really only hypocritical liars (**James 3:13-18**).

The speakers were probably the drunken false **priests** and **prophets** pictured in **28:7-8**. **They** responded and said **they** didn't need to be taught because **they** are not **children** in need of a tutor. Then **they** begin to mimic **Isaiah's** message as if

he were speaking baby talk, words that could not be understood. **Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule** is a series of one syllable words in Hebrew. **They** acted as an adult lecturing a **child**. **A little here, a little there** was a method used in teaching **children**, indicating **a little** at a time (**28:10**). **They** said **Isaiah** was the one who was talking like a baby, using words that could not be understood. But in truth, it was **their** words that were slurred and stammering. **They** wanted nothing to do with **Isaiah's** message or **his** ministry. Ironically, however, **they** had just passed judgment on **themselves**.

Isaiah had been accused of using words that could not be understood. So **he** turned it around and said to the drunks: **Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people (28:11)**. The **foreign lips and strange tongues** **he** was referring to were the Assyrians. Because the **Jewish** religious leaders did not believe the prophet's message that **they** shouldn't enter a covenant with **Egypt** (in **30:1-17** we will see that **they** go ahead with the covenant against **Isaiah's** warning), the Assyrian army would invade **Isra'el**. And when **they** heard those **strange tongues**, the Assyrian language that **they did not understand**, it would sound like **their** own mocking words. **The hearing of the Assyrian tongue would be a sign of their own unbelief.**

This passage is referred to in the B'rit Chadashah where **Paul** quotes from **Isaiah** and says: **Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers, specifically unbelieving Jews, the unbelievers of this people** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Do - Tongues are a Sign**). The purpose of **tongues, or languages** in a church or synagogue is not to bring unbelievers to faith. It has the same purpose it had in **Isaiah 28**. **It is a sign of Jewish unbelief.** It is not to bring them to **Messiah**, because **Paul**, quoting from this verse says, that even then **they will not listen. Therefore, tongues are a sign of cursing** because of **Jewish** unbelief, **a sign of blessing** because the Church Age had begun, **and a sign of authority** (from apostles, prophets, or a nation, authenticating that it was **God** who was speaking). **Peter**, for example, had **the keys to the Kingdom** and would be responsible for ushering in the three major ethnic groups to the faith in the first century, **Jews, Samaritans, and the Gentiles** (see the commentary on **Acts Bg - Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius**).

Moses said that if **the Israelites** did not serve **God** joyfully and gladly then they would serve the enemies of **the LORD**. **Isra'el's** enemies would put an iron yoke around **their** necks until **they** were destroyed (**Deuteronomy 28:32**). **He** continued to say: **Yes, ADONAI will bring a nation against you from far away,**

from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand (Deuteronomy 28:49). If Isra'el had believed **Isaiah's** message and not aligned with Egypt there would not have been any invasion. **So just as Isra'el's disobedience in Deuteronomy led to the use of tongues as a sign of Jewish disobedience in the Land, so Isra'el's disobedience in the rejection of Messiah led to the use of tongues as a sign of Jewish disobedience in the Church Age.**

To whom He said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest," and, "This is the place of repose - but they would not listen (28:12). The reason for this coming judgment was **their** failure to enter into **rest**. The kind of **rest** that **Isaiah** is speaking of is that of obedience to **the word of the LORD**. **They** had rejected the message of **rest**. Therefore, they would have **no rest**, only judgment. **The word of the LORD** would indeed seem like an endless series of trivial commandments and sufferings to **them**, just like **Moses** said it would (Deuteronomy 28:32-49). **So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there (28:13a). The way the rabbis teach this verse is this: Do and do, line upon line of retribution, for every rule upon rule they have broken. Here a little, retribution will come in a very short time, there a little, you will survive the captivity.** You can reject **the word of God**, but you cannot escape it. You can compromise with a lie, but you can't argue with the truth.

When **Isaiah** came to the nation of Judah **they would not listen. God** sent the Assyrians against Judah, but she was spared by **His** grace. But about a hundred years later **God** would once again send **His** prophet, this time being **Jeremiah**, who would say: **O House of Isra'el** (meaning both the northern and southern kingdoms), **declares the LORD, "I am bringing a distant nation against you - an ancient people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand" (Jeremiah 5:15).** But that time **ADONAI's** patience had run out. The spiritual adultery became too repulsive to **Him** and **He** allowed King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to destroy the nation of Judah, the Temple and take all the best and the brightest with them back to Babylon for seventy years.

So that they go and fall backward, be injured, snared and captured (28:13b). Therefore, in stead of living free, in stead of living in a place of **rest**, **Isra'el** would **fall backward** and **be injured** (as against a rock), **they** would be **snared** (as in a net). The tragic end result was that **they** would be **captured** by the Assyrians (as in a trap); **the people** whose **language they did not understand.**