



• God is laying a foundation 'stone'

A new section^{☞1} deals with God as the Lord of history. At the centre of history is God's laying a 'Stone' as the foundation of something that he is building^{☞2}. God's kingdom is pictured as a building – perhaps (as elsewhere) a temple.

☞1 ch 28–35
☞2 28:16

Overview:

(1) 1-5 General introduction

We have been following three major sections. (1) Isaiah chapters 1–5 are a **general introduction** to the spiritual disaster that has come upon Israel. (2) Isaiah 7–12 points us to the **details of the unbelief** to be found in both northern Israel and Judah in the south. Unbelief will bring down upon them God's judgement, yet the promised Saviour is still to come. (3) Isaiah 13–27 points to **the remainder of the world**; they too are in need of a Saviour.

(2) 7-12 Unbelief in Israel and Judah

(3) 13-27 Rest of the world

But if this Saviour is to come it will mean (4) **that God must control the nations** in order to bring his plan to pass, and this is precisely the theme of Isaiah chapters 28–35. It has six sections beginning with the word 'Ah' or 'Ah, how terrible . . .'

(4) 28-35 God must control the nations

Ah! That crown of pride . . .^{☞1}

Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled!^{☞2}

Ah, how terrible for those who . . . hide their plans . . .^{☞3}

Ah, rebellious children . . .^{☞4}

Ah, how terrible for those who go down to Egypt . . .^{☞5}

Ah, you destroyer . . .^{☞6}

☞1 28:1
☞2 29:1
☞3 29:15
☞4 30:1
☞5 31:1
☞6 33:1

• God's plan is to send a 'stone' to Jerusalem

At the heart of everything is God's plan to send a 'Stone' to Jerusalem. Isaiah 28:16 has a prophecy of a coming Saviour (compare Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 11, 16; Ephesians 2:20–22; 1 Peter 2:4–8). God says: 'See, I am he who lays a stone in Zion, a stone of testing, a precious cornerstone for a well-founded foundation . . .'

• Why is the 'stone' needed?

Why is 'the Stone' needed? The chapter begins by telling us.

1. Judah is in as much spiritual need as Ephraim

1. Judah is in as much spiritual need as Ephraim. The first verses of the chapter come from a time before northern Israel was conquered by the Assyrians (in 722 BC). They refer to 'Ephraim' – north Israel, named after its most prestigious tribe. The nation had been like a drunken man. Samaria, the capital city, was like a coronet of flowers upon the drunken man's head.

¹Ah! That crown of pride belonging to Ephraim's drunkards!

And that fading flower, his glorious beauty, set at the head of a fertile valley.

The people laid low by wine!

• Ephraim will come under God's judgement

Ephraim is like a drunken man at a wild party and so will come under God's judgement. God will put down Ephraim's drunkenness, coming like a destructive hailstorm, and a flood which reminds us of the days of Noah.

²See, the Sovereign Lord has one who is powerful and strong.

Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground.

³That crown of pride belonging to Ephraim's drunkards will be trampled underfoot.

• Samaria will be destroyed

Samaria will be destroyed. It will be like a ripe fig that is gobbled up as soon as it is seen.

*⁴That 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 he takes it in his hand,
and swallows it.*

• Salvation will eventually come to 'Ephraim'

But salvation will come to 'Ephraim' eventually. A different kind of crown will be awarded to God himself.

*⁵In that day Yahweh Almighty
will be a glorious crown,
a garland of beauty
for the remnant of his people.
⁶He will be a spirit of justice
to him who rules with good judgement,
a source of strength
to those who turn back the battle at the gate.*

• God promises to be Israel's joy, integrity, good judgement and strength

Verses 5–6 come as a surprise. We might expect that there can be no salvation for northern Israel which ceased to exist as a distinct people. But God promises to be their joy¹, their integrity and good judgement², and their strength³. Where sin abounds, grace abounds in a manner that is quite astonishing.

1 28:5
2 28:6
3 28:6

• Judah is as bad as Ephraim

Isaiah 28:1–6 prepares the way for the rest of the chapter. The point is: Judah is just as bad as Ephraim! 'These **also** stagger from wine', says the prophet, referring to Judah in the south. Judah is also like a drunkard.

*⁷And these also stagger from wine
and reel from beer:
Priests and prophets stagger from beer
and are swallowed up by wine;
they reel from beer,
they stagger when seeing visions, they
stumble when rendering decisions. ⁸All
the tables are covered with vomit and
there is not a spot without filth.*

• Judah's leaders despised God's word

In one way the sin of Judah is even worse than that of Ephraim. Judah in the south (where Jerusalem was to be found and where the promises of salvation were to be fulfilled) were despising God's word. The leaders and the people actually think Isaiah is too simple, too clear in his preaching!

*⁹Whom is he teaching knowledge?
To whom is he explaining his message?
To children weaned from their milk,
to those just taken from the breast?
¹⁰For it is:
Rule upon rule, rule upon rule,
line upon line, line upon line,
a little here, a little there.'*

• If God's people will not listen to His word they will hear it from the Assyrians

But if the people will not hear God's word, little by little, from the mouth of Isaiah, they will have to be made to hear God's word in another way. God's message will be brought to his people somehow. If they will not have Isaiah they will have the Assyrians! If they want something complicated let them hear Assyrians speaking the Assyrian language.

*¹¹Very well then, with babbling lips and
with a strange tongue
God will speak to this people,
¹²to whom he said,
'This is the resting place, let the weary
rest'; and, 'This is the place of repose.'
But they were not willing to listen.
¹³So then, the word of Yahweh to them will become:*

*Rule upon rule, rule upon rule,
line upon line, line upon line,
a little here, a little there.
The result will be that they will go and fall backward;
they will be injured and snared and captured.*

2. God has placed his Stone to be the foundation of the building he plans to build

2. God has placed his Stone to be the foundation of the building he plans to build. The people of Judah have become 'scoffers'¹⁴. They have as a nation fallen away from faith. They scorn Isaiah's clear word from God. So a message must come to them more forcefully. The foreign language of the Assyrian invaders will be God's judgement upon them, and God's message to them. Isaiah proceeds to spell out in detail what they need to know.

28:14

¹⁴Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem.

¹⁵For you say, 'We have entered into a covenant with death, with Sheol we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and with falsehood we have protected ourselves.'

• Judah's treaty with Egypt was meant to give protection, but brought spiritual death

The background is the alliance that Judah has made with Egypt. In order to protect themselves against the Assyrians, the Judeans wanted a treaty with Egypt in which Egypt would guarantee the protection of Judah. But their covenant with Egypt was a covenant which would bring them spiritual death. They were going back to the very people from whom they had been redeemed! Isaiah puts into their mouths what they were **in effect** saying. Their alliance with Egypt was in effect a treaty with death itself. Egyptian idolaters could give them no protection. They felt confident that there would be safety for them because of their evasions and pretences.

• Modern Christians who ally themselves to worldliness make the same mistake

Modern Christians make the same mistake when they ally themselves to worldly covetousness, worldly philosophy, worldly morality. Any alliance with the idolatries of the world will bring ruination and nothing more.

• True security is with God's Stone to be laid in Zion

There is another kind of kingdom altogether and another kind of security. Through the prophet God points to a kingly power that is altogether different. The true source of security is God's Stone to be laid in Zion.

¹⁶So this is what the Sovereign Lord Yahweh says: 'See, I am the One who lays a stone in Zion, a stone of testing, a precious cornerstone for a well-founded foundation; the one who trusts will never be agitated.'

• The Stone - the righteous Davidic king

The Stone must be identical to the child of 7:14 and 9:6, the righteous Davidic King of 11:1–10. Isaiah stresses (i) the sovereignty of God, (ii) the character of the Stone as a 'stone of testing'. He tests others. Others test him by their faith and find him to be faithful to his claims. (iii) His being a cornerstone implies that an entire building goes up around him. The 'building' is the kingdom of God with its citizens. Isaiah mentions also (iv) the privilege of attachment to such a valuable stone, (v) the need of faith in a foundation that has been laid already and is awaiting super-structure, and the calmness that comes when life is built upon him (note the reference to haste here and in 5:19; 52:12; 55:5). (vi) The Stone is placed in Zion. Jerusalem will be the place where salvation is achieved. We see the fulfilment of all of this in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our chief cornerstone, and all of the people of God are built into him and what he did in Jerusalem.

(i) God's sovereignty

(ii) Stone of Testing

(iii) Cornerstone

(iv) Privilege

(v) Faith

(vi) Jerusalem

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