

Lesson 17
Isaiah 28-29
STORM CLOUDS OVER JERUSALEM (part 1)

Memory verse: ‘Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”’ (Mark 4:9 NIV)

The name “Jerusalem” means “city of peace,” but throughout its history it has been associated more with conflict than with peace. Even today, Jerusalem is a focal point for concern in the Middle East. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem,” admonished the psalmist (Ps. 122:6). Why pray for Jerusalem? Why not pray for London or Moscow or Rome? Because when there is true peace in Jerusalem, there will be peace in the whole world (Isa. 52:7; 66:12); so we had better take the psalmist’s words to heart.

Chapters 28 to 35 are somewhat similar to chapters 13 to 27 in content and form. The same general pattern of argument unfolds, but the historical context is somewhat later. The historical context of chapters 13 to 27 was mainly Ahaz’s reign, in which Judah faced temptation to trust in Assyria for her safety rather than in the Lord. As mentioned, however, these chapters evidently contain a mosaic of prophecies that Isaiah delivered at various times during his ministry and then arranged in their canonical order for literary purposes. This theological arrangement of material marks the whole Book of Isaiah. Yet a general advance chronologically is also observable.

The historical context of chapters 28 to 35 was mainly Hezekiah’s reign, in which Judah faced the temptation to trust in Egypt. The Judeans began looking more to Egypt for help while Assyria declined as a hope for Judah’s salvation - as Ahaz had considered her - and instead became an increasing threat to the Southern Kingdom’s security. Interest in alliance with Egypt was especially strong between the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and Sennacherib’s unsuccessful attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Also different is the emphasis in chapters 13 to 27 on Yahweh’s sovereignty over the nations compared with the emphasis in chapters 28 to 35 on Judah’s choice to trust Him or not. This is a matter of emphasis, however, since both sections deal with both issues.

Chapters 28 to 31 record a series of five “woes” (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1) that focus primarily on Jerusalem. A sixth “woe” is found in 33:1, and interspersed with these “woes” of judgment are promises of restoration and glory. Isaiah is attempting to get the rulers of Judah to stop trusting “power politics” and international treaties and start trusting the Lord.

Chapters 28 to 29 paint the picture of Judah’s foolish leaders concluding that something must be done at once, other than trusting God, to save the people from their enemy. Here the principles involved in Judah’s situation emerge clearly. Isaiah pointed out that the situations in the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms were quite similar. Both nations faced threats to their security from a strong foreign enemy, and unworthy leaders who urged trust in man rather than in God ruled both nations. Judah was in a more dangerous position, however, because her leaders were cynical; they believed nothing and trusted no one. They had become spiritually dull, hypocritical in their worship and believed that they can do better without God.

Like all devout Jews, Isaiah loved Jerusalem, the Holy City, the City of David, the place of God’s dwelling (Ps. 122; 137). But Isaiah saw storm clouds gathering over the city and announced that trouble was coming. It was time for the nation to turn to God in repentance. In our study, we will take this section into two parts – chapters 28 to 29 and 30 to 31.

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter 28:22-29; 29:13-16

Things to learn: 1) Spiritual Sensitivity 2) Religious hypocrisy 3) Indulgence and God’s Word

Discussion Questions:

1) What warnings came from the Lord to Judah in chapter 28 and how should they respond?

2) Why and how will the leaders and the people of Judah be humbled by the Lord and then be restored as prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 29?

3) What lessons can we learn from these chapters in relation to alcoholism, nicotine, illegal drugs and the attitude towards God’s Word in our society?