

Isaiah 28:9-22

Harvest Truth Versus Babylon (A Prophecy)

INTRODUCTION

Most brethren have had some contact with Isaiah 28. It is usually because it contains helpful verses or difficult verses which need explaining. However, a recent encounter with it during a 5th Volume study resulted in its context opening up like a blossom. It is that context which is to be shared here.

We will not examine the entire chapter, although that is profitable and will yield additional blessings. But verses 9-22 tell a whole story, and once that story is seen and appreciated, the surrounding verses will also bloom.

CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT! Bro. Russell stressed the importance of context, but he was frequently in the midst of making points about a SUBJECT (exhaustive topical study) so that he could not then “wander” into the surrounding material which might have not been directly related to the point he was making. But he left that TO US. (As Bro. Russell said in Revelation 22:10, “Do not seal up the words...of this book!”) Too often we fail to connect texts to their surrounding material and, as a result, we both miss immense blessings, and, sometimes, we fail to see the real meaning in a verse we are considering.

Our 5th Volume study was on the topic of “hell.” The Isaiah 28 text was in the midst of a consideration of all uses of “sheol” in the Old Testament. To have stopped to examine and to explain all of Isaiah 28’s context would have been, as we can all see, disruptive to the points the Pastor was making. But WE can now stop and do that!

First, we might want to note the verses which many of us cite from time to time. —

28:10 — (KJV) “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.” (This gets repeated in verse 13 — with a little ominous tone connected to it.)

We have traditionally used this verse to suggest the way we build our understanding. That is correct. But later we will see how the idea is used contextually.

Momentarily, however, please note that in New Testament prophecy, a double statement indicates INCOMPLETION. (For instance, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” is a reference to her fall from favor, NOT her complete demise; thus the incompleteness of her fall is telegraphed to us by this double statement peculiarity in prophecy. A triple statement like, “woe, woe, woe” or “holy, holy, holy” is a symbol that the item or event is TOTAL.) Whether or not that is consistent in the Old Testament has yet to be determined. But it MAY help us appreciate 28:10 and 13.

For SOME reason, this repetition (which is almost irritating to read!) is placed in this chapter. On the surface, it may simply indicate the on-going labor (never complete) which saints must invest in order to learn the Harvest truths. Thus, if the repetitive nature of the verse has any connection to such New Testament repetition, it may be shouting at us: “You’ll NEVER be done. This is not a one-time study! You must keep searching as long as you walk this earth.” Then, when the final phrase occurs, it doesn’t repeat! It contrasts. “Here a little” contrasted with “There a little.” Why?

Perhaps this last phrase tells us that it is ALL not a “continual grind!” But, instead, the continual study has solid results. The results are not things which must be searched further (not things which are incomplete), but which CONNECT to give us doctrine. So we could say we have “here a little” from Isaiah, and “there a little” from Revelation, and, **behold!** We put them together and we have discovered an interpretational principle — or some such thing. We find something which now becomes a tool instead of a puzzle piece. It becomes a Scripturally-established doctrine, not a study endeavor — a crown of jewels rather than a handful of loose diamonds!

28:15 — “Covenant with Death” and “With hell...at agreement” are the two phrases which need interpretive explanation. (These items recur in verse 18.) Bro. Russell explains them adequately. We will shortly look at how they fit into and enhance the context.

28:16 — (The New Testament quotes this verse.) We, as students, have frequently connected it to Great Pyramid studies. We will see its contextual richness soon.

Those are the three texts “we all know.” What we likely don’t know yet is how beautiful they become a unit in the prophecy of this chapter of Isaiah.

VERSE-BY-VERSE CONSIDERATIONS

As a prelude to our detailed look at each verse, it might be wise to summarize what we think this whole Isaiah 28 passage is about. It seems to be a simple overview of how the Lord addresses Babylon as the Harvest begins. It attempts to inform those who will be abandoned by the Lord (1878) as to WHY they will be abandoned. It lets them know that things of the Lord don’t really interest them, and that their self-deceptions are far more attractive in their eyes. It also explains how the Lord WILL, as the Harvest begins, deal with those who truly love him and respect his teachings. It explains clearly the foundation truth as well as the foundation error. And finally, it gives evidence as to how the erroneous system will be devoured.

We will use the NAS as our working text.

FOUR IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Verse 9

The verses before this are a castigation of the teachers in Babylon. Verse 8 ends with the disgusting statement about the filth upon their tables. But we might think about the extra hidden implications of “vomit.” The picture is sufficiently disgusting; but vomit is the same old thing, re-digested (or maybe undigested), presented all over again. This is what Babylon’s teachers were doing as the Harvest began — serving up the old pre-presented slop.

So the question becomes, WHO, then, can learn? WHERE can someone turn for truth? HOW can he find it? Philadelphia was ending, and its admirable spirit of reform was all but disappeared. The Miller Movement was a sort of “Last Hurrah!” This is the launching point for the entrance of the “faithful and wise servant” who would be appointed to serve “meat in due season.” But to WHOM will it be served? This is the opening of the Harvest and the casting off of Babylon. But things will not be the same any more. The Lord will not endure the attitude of smug satisfaction with unquestioned creeds. So this question seems best interpreted as “Who wants to learn?”

The second question is not just about being taught information, but it is about understanding it deep down inside. “To WHOM would He interpret the message?” — NOT just give it. Interpretation is enlightenment, not facts. The Lord wants to give it to someone who will absorb its benefits, not just memorize its details. He’s not interested in new creeds!

The next two questions seem fundamentally alike. They are, in essence, rhetorical. They have an implied answer of “no.” In essence, the Lord is saying, “Shall I serve it up to those who have no taste yet for meat? Shall I serve to those who have no experience in chewing?”

We must not interpret this to mean that the Lord isn’t interested in new babes in Christ. Contextually it is not about that. It is (between-the-lines) suggestive that, “If you didn’t want to chew in the past, there’s no reason I should serve you something to chew on now.” It is more a rebuke of those

who had no interest in digging deeply, no interest in learning something new. It is parallel to Paul's rebuke of the Hebrews when he told them that "by now" you should be eating something substantial.

THE NEW STANDARD IS ANNOUNCED

Verses 10 & 11

The Lord virtually announces: "This is now how it's going to be. You will NEED to pray and study. You will need to dig — nay, you will need to WANT to dig."

Enter Bro. Russell —

It is announced through the 7th Angel that the Lord's Word is so sacred that we must value, and search, and compare, and believe IT ALL. The time is past to generalize "our own" Gospel! We must now find the Lord's Gospel. And we will do this a concept (precept) at a time (topical study), and then ANOTHER concept at a time (another topical study). We will do this a line at a time (a chronological line, dispensational study) — and then ANOTHER chronological line at a time. We will be contextual ("here a little"); we will be observational ("there a little") about symbolisms and types. In the end, we will have gotten a little here, and a little there from the entire Bible. We will be those whom the Lord WANTS to teach! The Lord wants us to do it this way! Jesus set the standard in Luke 24:25, 27.

In verse 11 we are informed that God has given up on the old spokesmen. He will incorporate new ones — but, from the world's standpoint, very strange ones! He will not have the seminary-educated D.D.s. He will not have the pompous clerics. He will speak via those who KNOW, but who stammer! They will proclaim via new ways of expression which will only baffle the minds of those who claim to be educated in the matters! To the old spokesmen, this will all be a foreign tongue!

YOU WOULDN'T LISTEN; AND YOU WON'T!

Verses 12 & 13

The Lord reminds the old nominal church that he HAD offered good things to them. He HAD offered “rest for the weary.” He HAD offered “repose” — a place to stretch out and feel comfortable. The Lord wants it abundantly known that it is not HIS doing that they haven't received or don't receive these things! It is their own fault. “They would not listen.”

Consequently (verse 13), the Lord lets them know clearly that the NEW approach to His Word in the hands of others will be the digging out patiently and methodically of truth — BECAUSE He knows they (the old spokesmen) won't do it. He also knows that those who WILL DO it will cause those who don't to “stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive (by their own blindness).” This verse is all about the effects of truth from the Harvest saints upon the decrepit positions of Christendom. (We have seen it happen!)

NEW TRUTH WILL DROWN OLD LIES!

Verses 14 & 15

God directly addresses the scoffers — the rulers of nominal Jerusalem —

“I know what you've done! I can get right to the kernel of the problem. You have set up, as the very basic doctrine of your apostasy, the original lie told by Satan. And you have covenanted within yourselves and among your fellowship that everything you have will be based on that one lie. YOU teach that death isn't death. You are all agreed!

“And you have agreed (you have made a pact on it) with each other to teach, therefore, that some must go to a burning ‘hell.’ You have perpetuated it just to keep people ‘under your thumbs!’”

“And, in addition, you so strongly believe in the power of your position that that you believe that the flood (margin) of truth from *genuine Bible study* will not have the power to drown your errors! You think it will just pass you by!”

“I can just hear your saying it among yourselves: ‘We have made the most powerful of lies something that will hide us! We’ve protected ourselves with our own deceptions! There is nothing so powerful as a good lie which is repeated a million times!’”

HERE IS THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING REMEDY

Verse 16

Well! God has something different to say! **INSTEAD** of the “great lie” that Satan told, there is **THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH** — the ransom. That is now the known basis of the entire Divine Plan. **IT** is the offset for the great lie. **IT** is the basic foundation for the presentation of Harvest Truth.

At the very moment the Harvest begins, a tried and tested stone (Jesus and his sacrifice) is placed in the heavenly Zion as its new king.

It is **TRUE** that this verse belongs in a study of the Pyramid. But the Pyramid is only a representation of the Divine Plan. (Job 38:6, 7) And Jesus, with his ransom as the foundation against all lies and counterfeits, **IS** the costly (it cost him his life) **CORNERSTONE**. The foundation (in this case) is on the top! That foundation is “Jesus Christ and him crucified (the ransom).” The foundation is not that death isn’t death, and, therefore, some have to go to “hell.” What a disturbingly treacherous and miserable foundation!

It is comforting that this verse has a dual application. The Pyramid is **ALSO** now being exposed as a revelation of the Divine Plan. And when the disciples (us) can no longer shout out, then the very stones will shout out! Not only will Babylon be drowned by the flood of “line-upon-line” truths from Scripture, but it will be “stoned to death” by the world’s most notable altar!

He that believes in THIS foundation will not be shaken. THIS will be the truth that will eternally destroy Babylon's lies.

HOW AND WHY YOU WILL FAIL

Verses 17 & 18

These two verses document how the eroding flood of general truth will eat away at the false foundations of Christendom. We now live in a time when, already, justice is becoming a measuring line. Even now, before the Kingdom, people everywhere are demonstrating for justice and demanding justice — and disrupting the whole system of things until, as they see it, they get it! They will be pleased when the true “measuring line” is applied. They will find justice beyond their wildest imaginations!

Righteousness will soon replace evil. And while it is not yet accomplished, its spirit is “in the air.” People WANT it! We should be careful to note that this justice and righteousness in this context ARE applied PRIOR TO the Peaceable Kingdom. These, in this context, are things DESIGNED to help sweep Babylon away — before it is gone.

The very truths that have come to us first, are spreading — NOT as rational and reasoned Biblical truths, but as “hail” (HARD TRUTHS — truths which hurt rather than enlighten). These societal truths, rather than Biblical doctrines, ARE sweeping away the hiding places of lies — one at a time.

The “secret place” which the waters overflow is likely a reference to verse 15 where Babylon's teachers say, “we have concealed ourselves.” While there are yet stubborn remains of things like “hell fire,” most of Christianity now avoids such embarrassing doctrines in favor of social good works. Their foolish doctrines (their “secret place”) is drowning in a flood of good water!

Thus, even to some extent now, their covenant with death is shaky, and their pact with hell-fire is severely threatened. These two errors, according to this verse, will progress to cancellation and lack of ability to stand — all because “the overwhelming flood is passing through.” Babylon is promised to become its “trampling place.” How reminiscent this is of Revelation 14

and its accompanying hymn — “He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored!”

Verses 19 & 20

The wording suggests WAVES OF TRUTH as the Harvest progresses. It is not so much that MORE (different) truth is coming along, it is that it keeps hitting them over and over again!

The testimony is that it “seizes” them. It is just like Jesus who seizes the great dragon when he returns (Revelation 20:1). It keeps coming: “Morning after morning it will pass through, anytime during the day or the night. And it will be a sheer terror to understand what it means.”

In these words we find that the old order will continue thinking to itself that it has conquered a problem — that they’re starting a new day. But not so! Each “new day” will have its increasing terrors. And it won’t even wait for the next “morning.” It will come day or night — or whenever the Lord chooses to send a new wave. Our current day is making the meaning of this clearer! And, as Isaiah says, they cannot “understand what it means.” As it is written, “The wisdom of their wise men shall fail.”

In verse 20, the Lord scoffs at them! — “What’s the matter? Can’t you stretch out comfortably any more? What’s the matter? Can’t you cover your vulnerabilities?”

PERAZIM & GIBEON

Verse 21

Isaiah informs us that an Old Testament occurrence will help us to understand the prophetic events.

This verse begins with “For...” It seems to be explaining that the flooding waves will come, and no creed-beds or excuses (coverings) will hide them because the Lord will take an approach which He took during the leadership of David. (David, of course, symbolizes the glorified Jesus before the Peaceable Kingdom. Thus, David, in this narrative, seems to

show Jesus' handling of his adversaries [Babylon] to bring them to defeat during the Harvest.)

This account occurs both in II Samuel 5:17-25 and in I Chronicles 14:8-17.

The components of the story are this —

(1) The enemies heard that David was now king. (Bro. Russell announced this to the religious leaders early in the Harvest.)

(2) The enemies can't put up with such nonsense! (The ministers totally rejected the concept without consideration — too much mind-changing needed!) So they go out to challenge the King. (Christendom has been doing all it can to negate the prophetic truths which the Lord has spread in the Harvest time.)

(3) The enemies spread themselves in the "Valley of the Rephaim." This is an important detail. Isaiah 14:9 informs us that the destruction of Satan (and his Babylonish cohorts) is associated with "sheol" — the oblivion of Satan's hosts. But note: While the translation is unclear, the margin informs us that "Sheol...is excited... to meet you when you come...It arouses for you the spirits (margin: shades) of the dead — all the leaders of the earth." The margin for "spirits" or "shades" is Rephaim. Thus we have the suggestion that Christendom (leaders of the earth included) are ready for the "shades" — the Valley of the Rephaim, their doom.

(4) There are manifestly TWO attacks by David. Both are upon the enemies in this valley. In the first attack, God tells David to take them "head on." It is not inconceivable that this is the 1914 attack. David is victorious. But the enemy is not yet conquered.

The place where the victory occurred was named Baal-Perazim — Master of the Breakthrough. (Perazim means breakthrough. David said this "breakthrough" was "like the breakthrough of waters." Isaiah 28 had spoken of the flood of waters being the primary destructive agent against Babylon.)

(5) But 1914 did not convince the false church to give up — even though its idols were significantly eliminated. They come up once again to defeat David. But the Lord tells him NOT to hit them "head on" this time. David

was to circle in behind, obscured by some bushes. Apparently THIS victory will be by stealth. God indicates that He will have done some preparatory work: “The Lord will have gone out before you to strike the army.” (II Samuel 5:24)

(6) Whatever God did and David heeded, it worked. The enemy was struck down from Gibeon “as far as Gezer.”

Gibeon was a Levitical City of Benjamin. (The name is from a root meaning “convex, projecting, high, swelled, hump-backed, or hill.”)

Gezer was also a Levitical City. (The name comes from a root meaning “to cut or divide.”)

With the etymologies of these names, we come up with something like, “from height to cut down.” How appropriate!

(7) The final verse in the Chronicles account is so gratifying:

“Then the fame of David went out into all the lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him on all the nations.”

So shall it be!

Verse 21 concludes by saying that this thing which the Lord will do, is (margin) “His strange task” and “His alien work.” In the light of the fact that Christianity was “a golden cup in the hand of the Lord” — and that it was so considered by its adherents — there can be little that is stranger or more alien than its total destruction. If we were to tell people that the Christian religion, as it has been known, will soon no longer exist, they would, indeed, think our reasoning both “strange” and “alien!” Their reply would be something like, “And in what universe do YOU live?”

TARES ARE BEING BOUND!

Verse 22

This entire episode of Isaiah 28 is about the bundling and eventual burning of the “tares” of Matthew 13. This verse makes reference to this — as a warning to the old leaders. It in simplicity states, “Give up or find yourselves bound.”

Then the final assurance: “The message is certain — from God’s own mouth. The decisive (complete) destruction of the old order WILL happen on all the earth. (Do you want to keep fighting?)”
