

ISAIAH 25

Don't Do what Your Big Sister Does^a
(Isaiah 28:1-19)

Isaiah 28:1-29 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Judgment on Corrupt Rulers, Priests, and Prophets

28 Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of E'phraim,

and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty,
which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!^b

² Behold, the Lord^c has one who is mighty and strong;

like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest,
like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters,
he will cast down to the earth with violence.^d

³ The proud crown of the drunkards of E'phraim
will be trodden under foot;^e

⁴ and the fading flower of its glorious beauty,

which is on the head of the rich valley,
will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer:
when a man sees it, he eats it up
as soon as it is in his hand.^f

⁵ In that day the Lord of hosts^g will be a crown of glory,
and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people;^h

⁶ and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment,
and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.ⁱ

⁷ These also reel with wine

and stagger with strong drink;
the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink,
they are confused with wine,
they stagger with strong drink;

they err in vision,
they stumble in giving judgment.^j

⁸ For all tables are full of vomit,
no place is without filthiness.^k

⁹ "Whom will he teach knowledge,
and to whom will he explain the message?

Those who are weaned from the milk,
those taken from the breast?^l

¹⁰ For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
line upon line, line upon line,
here a little, there a little."^m

¹¹ Nay, but by men of strange lips
and with an alien tongue
the Lord will speak to this people,ⁿ

¹² to whom he has said,

"This is rest;

give rest to the weary;
 and this is repose";
 yet they would not hear.^o
¹³ Therefore the word of the Lord will be to them
 precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
 line upon line, line upon line,
 here a little, there a little;
 that they may go, and fall backward,
 and be broken, and snared, and taken.^p
¹⁴ Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers,
 who rule this people in Jerusalem!^q
¹⁵ Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death,
 and with Sheol we have an agreement;
 when the overwhelming scourge passes through
 it will not come to us;
 for we have made lies our refuge,
 and in falsehood we have taken shelter";^r
¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord God^s,
 "Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation
 a stone, a tested stone,
 a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
 'He who believes will not be in haste.'^t
¹⁷ And I will make justice the line,
 and righteousness the plummet;
 and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
 and waters will overwhelm the shelter."^u
¹⁸ Then your covenant with death will be annulled,
 and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
 when the overwhelming scourge passes through
 you will be beaten down by it.^v
¹⁹ As often as it passes through it will take you;
 for morning by morning it will pass through,
 by day and by night;
 and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.^w
²⁰ For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it,
 and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it.^x
²¹ For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Pera'zim,
 he will be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon;
 to do his deed—strange is his deed!
 and to work his work—alien is his work!^y
²² Now therefore do not scoff,
 lest your bonds be made strong;
 for I have heard a decree of destruction
 from the Lord God of hosts upon the whole land.^z
²³ Give ear, and hear my voice;
 hearken, and hear my speech.^{aa}
²⁴ Does he who plows for sowing plow continually?
 does he continually open and harrow his ground?^{bb}

²⁵ When he has leveled its surface,
 does he not scatter dill, sow cummin,
 and put in wheat in rows
 and barley in its proper place,
 and spelt^{cc} as the border?^{dd}
²⁶ For he is instructed aright;
 his God^{ee} teaches him.^{ff}
²⁷ Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
 nor is a cart wheel rolled over cummin;
 but dill is beaten out with a stick,
 and cummin with a rod.^{gg}
²⁸ Does one crush bread grain?
 No, he does not thresh it for ever;
 when he drives his cart wheel over it
 with his horses, he does not crush it.^{hh}
²⁹ This also comes from the Lord of hosts;
 he is wonderful in counsel,
 and excellent in wisdom.ⁱⁱ

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

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^a **Chapter 28** is the first chapter of a new section of Isaiah dealing directly with actual historical events during Isaiah’s lifetime. Chapters 28–31 alternate between threats of the danger of rebelling against Assyria (with implied trust in Egypt) with assurances of the power and protection of the Lord.

^b **(1) Ephraim** refers to Israel, the Northern Kingdom by the name of its most important tribe. After the death of Solomon, the united kingdom of Israel was split in two, with Judah and Benjamin, including Jerusalem, becoming the Kingdom of Judah, and the other tribes, in rebellion against Solomon’s son Rehoboam who ruled in Jerusalem (1Ki 12), becoming Israel. The Kings of the Northern Kingdom were uniformly bad or evil Kings, encouraging their people in idolatry. This was partly political in that the Kings did not want their subjects looking to a foreign City, Jerusalem, as the center of worship (1Ki 12:25-33; see also Jn 4:19-26). **Samaria**, the capital of Israel, was built upon a hill, perhaps causing Isaiah to describe it as a fading garland set upon a head at the side of the valley. It was, before its fall, a place of wealth and luxury. The leadership of Ephraim was drunken (Hos 7:5, Am 4:1) and inattentive to justice and good government (Is 5:11-13; Am 6:1–6). This was certainly true in the times in which Isaiah wrote, but also could be a reference to the history in which the Kings of Israel led the people astray from the beginning. Verses 1-6 likely derived from a pre-existing prophecy predicting Israel’s destruction (Is 9:9; Am 3:9, 3:15) dating from the time between its conquest by Assyria in 732 and its final destruction in 721. Here Isaiah has combined it with his prophecy, vs. 7-22, warning Judah’s leaders against the same evils as Israel’s leadership. The Septuagint reads, “Woe to the crown of pride, the hirelings of Ephraim, the flower that has fallen from the glory of the top of the fertile mountain, they that are drunken without wine.”

^c **Lord** (יְהוָה, *Adonai*) here and in verses 16 and 22.

^d **(2)** The Lord is bringing **One who is Mighty and Strong**, likened to a flood, to punish Israel (Is 8:6-8, 40:10, 30:27-30, 32:19; Ezk 13:11; Nah 1:8). This is likely Assyria in the historical context of the fall of Israel. The Lord can be a shelter from the kind of storm that overwhelmed Israel (Is 25:4-5). The Septuagint reads, “Behold, the anger of the Lord is strong and severe, as

descending hail where there is no shelter, violently descending; as a great body of water sweeping away the soil, He shall make rest for the land.”

^e (3) The Crown of Samaria mentioned in vs. 1 is now trampled underfoot (Is 26:6). The Septuagint reads, “The crown of pride, the hirelings of Ephraim, shall be beaten down with the hands and with the feet.”

^f (4) The garland on the head of the valley, Samaria, will be like the first ripe fruit on the tree that is eaten quickly (Hos 9:10; Mic 7:1; Nah 3:12; Mk 11:13) as an easy target for Assyrians hungry for conquest. Yet, in vs. 5-6 the Lord will leave some of the fruit, the remnant, who will survive (Is 17:6). The Septuagint reads, “And the fading flower of the glorious hope on the top of the high mountain shall be as the early fig; he that sees it, before he takes it into his hand, will desire to swallow it down.”

^g **Lord** (יהוה, *Yahovah* though usually unpronounced by Jews) here and in verses 13, 14, 21 and 29. It is joined in this verse and verse 29 to Sabaoth (צבא, *tsaba'*) and translated as **Lord of Hosts**. The Hebrew for **Hosts** (צבא, *tsaba'*) sounds like the Hebrew for **Glory** (צבי, *tsebee*).

^h (5) For the remnant who are left (Is 4:3, 17:6, 41:16), the Lord will be the crown (Is 2:11, 45:25, 60:1, 60:19, 62:3; Hos 3:5; Jas 1:2; 1Pt 5:4; Rv 2:10) and will replace the injustice and weakness of Israel’s leaders with justice and strength (Is 11:2-4). The Septuagint reads, “In that day the Lord of hosts shall be the crown of hope, the woven *crown* of glory, to the remnant of the people.”

ⁱ (6) The ruler that God will bring to His people will be both just (1Ki 3:28; Is 11:2, 32:15-16; Jn 5:30) and strong (2Ch 32:6-8; Is 25:4; Is 38:6), recalling Solomon and David, and reminding them that the House of David was chosen to lead them (1Ch 17:11-14; Ps 89:2-5, 89:35-36; Is 9:5-7, 11:1-4, 11:10; Jr 33:14-26; Jn 7:42; Mt 22:41-16; Lk 1:31-33, 1:68-71; Ac 2:30-31; Rm 5:12; 2Tm 2:8; Rv 5:5, 22:16). The Septuagint reads, “They shall be left in the spirit of judgment for judgment, and for the strength of them that hinder slaying.”

^j (7) Isaiah now likens Judah’s leaders (Is 9:15), and its people (Is 24:2), with those of Israel in their drunkenness (Is 5:22, 22:13, 56:12; Hos 4:11), poor judgment (Is 3:12, 56:10-12) and blindness (Is 29:11; Mi 2:11) and warns the same thing that happened to Israel will happen to them (Is 5:11-13; Hab 2:15). The Septuagint reads, “For these have trespassed through wine; they have erred through strong drink; the priest and the prophet are mad through strong drink, they are swallowed up by reason of wine, they have staggered through drunkenness; they have erred; this is *their* vision.”

^k (8) This is an extremely graphic image of a banquet among Judah’s leadership with its tables covered in the vomit (Jr 48:26) of those who overindulge in wine and food. But it also points metaphorically to the filth of their leadership of Judah. The double meaning is lost in the Septuagint, “A curse shall devour this counsel, for this *is their* counsel for the sake of covetousness.”

^l (9) Verses 9-10 are perhaps the words of those in Judah’s leadership who rejected Isaiah’s warning (Jr 6:10) and ridiculed Isaiah as sounding like a stammering child or who lectured them as if they were children. The Hebrew of v. 10 “Kiy tzaw lätzäw tzaw lätzäw qaw läqäw qaw läqäw z’ëyr shäm z’ëyr shäm” (שם זעיר שם זעיר לקו קו לקו קו לצו צו לצו צו כי), though carrying meaning, sounds like baby-talk. God will repeat these exact words in verse 13, perhaps putting them in the mouth of the conquering Assyrian army whose words they would find no easier to understand. At times, God’s people are incapable of being taught with in an adult manner (1Co 3:1-2; Heb 5:12-14), but even baby talk can include God’s wisdom (Mt 11:25, 21:16). The nations will, in that Day, come to Jerusalem to learn from the Lord (Is 2:3, 48:17, 54:13). The Septuagint reads, “To whom have we reported evils? And to whom have we reported a message? *Even to those* that are weaned from the milk, who are drawn from the breast.”

^m (10) This verse includes an exact duplication of the words in verse 9. The Septuagint reads, “Except affliction on affliction, hope upon hope; yet a little, *and* yet a little . . .”

ⁿ (11) God will defend Isaiah from those who ridicule him. The **strange language** is probably the various languages spoken by the invading Assyrian army. Is 5:26-29; 2Ch 36:15; Neh 9:30; Jer 5:15; 1 Cor 14:21; Dt 28:49; Bar 4:15 The Septuagint reads, “. . . by reason of the contemptuous *words* of the lips, by means of another language; for they shall speak to this people, saying to them . . .”

^o (12) Had the leaders of Judah heeded God’s offer of repose and safety, they could have avoided disaster. Isaiah knew, however, from the very beginning of his ministry that they would not listen (Is 6:8-13). Is 11:10, 30:9, 30:15, 32:17-18; Jr 6:16; Mt 11:28-29 The Septuagint reads, “. . . This is the rest to him that is hungry, and this is the calamity; but they would not hear.”

^p (13) Is 8:15; Mt 21:44. The Septuagint reads, “Therefore the oracle of God shall be to them affliction on affliction, hope on hope, yet a little, *and* yet a little, that they may go and fall backward; and they shall be crushed and shall be in danger, and shall be taken.”

^q (14) The scoffers are those who despise God and His word (Ps 1:1; Pr 21:24) who He no longer calls “His people” (Is 40:1). Is 1:10, 3:1–4, 5:18–21, 29:20. The Septuagint reads, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you afflicted men, and you princes of this people that is in Jerusalem.”

^r (15) Isaiah mocks Judah’s alliance with Egypt (Is 30:1-7) and their proclamation of a peace where there will be no peace (Is 48:22) because the leaders of Judah believe this alliance will save them, but that reliance is a lie. A **covenant with death**, or Sheol (שְׁאוֹל, *sheol*) the place of the dead was, in the historical context, Judah’s alliances with Egypt, likely Hezekiah’s alliance with Pharaoh Tirhakah, 2Ki 19:9; Is 37:9, and Babylon against Assyria against which Isaiah has warned many times. Reliance upon human alliances rather than trusting in God alone is likened to taking refuge in a lie. The **overwhelming scourge** (literally flooding lash) is likely the Assyrian invasion (Is 8:7–8). Is 28:18, 8:7-8, 28:2, 29:15, 30:28; Dn 11:22; Is 9:15, 30:9, 44:20, 59:3-4, 59:13; Ezk 13:22; Wis 1:16; Sir 14:12; Am 9:10; Jer 5:12, 7:10; Rm 1:25. The Septuagint reads, “Because you have said, We have made a covenant with Hades, and agreements with death; if the rushing storm should pass, it shall not come upon us; we have made falsehood our hope, and by falsehood shall we be protected.”

^s **Lord God** (אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, *Adonai Yāhwè*).

^t (16) The **Cornerstone** is the first stone set in the foundation of a masonry building. It thus determines the location and orientation of the entire structure since all future stones will be laid in reference to this stone. It must be laid straight and level or the edifice itself will be crooked, just as the leadership of corrupt rulers had made Jerusalem crooked. In this verse the cornerstone refers to the Lord as the only true and sure foundation for Jerusalem, who had, in the past, selected the Jews as His people (Gn 12:1-3), chosen Jerusalem (Zion) as His city (Ps 78:68–69; Is 14:32) and picked David and his descendants to rule over His people (Ps 78:70–72, see also Ps 118:22). Although Judah has rejected Isaiah’s call to trust in Him which is the only true hope of salvation, and although Judah will eventually be conquered and go into exile, God will still rebuild Jerusalem on the precious cornerstone. In a sense, the Lord now promises to lay the foundation again since things had gotten so off track. The Messianic Writings refer to the Messiah as the cornerstone (Mt 21:42; Lk 20:17; Ac 4:11; Rm 9:33; 1Pt 2:7), the only true foundation of our salvation and our faith. To “make **haste**” or “be in **haste**” is a literal translation of the end of the verse (חָזַח, *chuwsh*, to hurry), though it is sometimes translated as to “stand firm” or “not panic”, which makes sense in the context. Perhaps in the context of a building it may refer to the firmness of the foundation that will not tremble. Or perhaps not making haste should be translated as not fleeing, since the City is a strong city, not vulnerable to enemies. In any event, the strong, tested cornerstone makes the City strong, plumb and straight. Is 1:26, 8:14-15, 14:32; Ps 118:22-23; Mt 16:18, 21:42; Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom 8:29, 9:32-33, 10:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pt 2:6-8; 1Co 3:11 The Septuagint reads, “Therefore thus says the Lord, *even* the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Zion a costly stone, a choice cornerstone *and* precious, for its foundations; and he that believes *on Him* shall by no means be ashamed.” [emphasis added]

^u (17) **Line** and **plumbet** are instruments used then, and still used today, in surveying and constructing a building, to keep it true, plumb and level (Ezk 47:3; Is 34:11; Am 7:7-9). They continue the metaphor of the last verse and refer to the qualities that Jerusalem will manifest, judgment and justice, not bloodshed (Mi 3:10), deceit or violence. The failure to follow God’s law as a plumb line will result in a bulging unstable wall doomed to destruction (Is 30:12–14). Cf. 1 Cor 3:10–17. Is 5:16, 28:2, 30:18, 61:8; 2Ki 21:13; The Septuagint reads, “And I will cause judgment *to be* for hope, and My compassion shall be for *just* measures, and you that trust vainly in falsehood *shall fall*; for the storm shall by no means pass by you . . .”

^v (18) Is 7:7, 8:10, 28:15, 28:3; Dn 8:13. The Septuagint reads, “. . . except it also take away your covenant of death, and your trust in Hades shall by no means stand; if the rushing storm should come upon you, you shall be beaten down by it.”

^w (19) There may be an allusion to the angel of death from plagues in Egypt (Ex 12:1-30). 2Ki 24:2; Is 50:4; Jb 6:4, 18:11, 24:17; 2Ch 32:18; Ps 55:4, 88:15; Lam 2:22. The Septuagint reads, “Whenever it shall pass by, it shall overtake you; morning by morning it shall pass by in the day, and in the night there shall be an evil hope.”

^x (20) Isaiah may be quoting from a common proverb of the day. Is 59:6. The Septuagint reads, “Learn to hear, you that are distressed; we cannot fight, but we are ourselves too weak for you to be gathered.”

^y (21) **Mount Perazim** (near Jerusalem to the Northwest) and the **Valley of Gibeon** (also Northwest of Jerusalem, though somewhat further away) are the sites of David’s famous victories over the Philistines, 2Sm 5:17-25; 1Ch 14:11-16. The Valley of Gibeon is also the location of one of Joshua’s great victories, Jsh 9:3, 10:1-14. God’s new work will be strange because he will be fighting against the men of Judah rather than for them (Is 29:1–4). Is 10:12, 29:14, 65:7; Lam 2:15, 3:33; Lk 19:41:44. The Septuagint reads, “The Lord shall rise up as *against* a mountain of ungodly *men*, and shall be in the valley of Gibeon; He shall

perform His works with wrath, *even* a work of bitterness, and His wrath shall deal strangely, and His destruction shall be strange.”

^z (22) Is 5:18–19; 10:22-23, 28:14. The Septuagint reads, “Therefore do not rejoice, neither let your bands be made strong; for I have heard of works finished and cut short by the Lord of hosts, which He will execute upon all the earth.”

^{aa} (23) The farmer has specific activities for specific times, and specific tools for specific task for specific crops, and knows when to do each, and use each, showing wisdom, just as God will, in His wisdom, know when we need to be chastened, and when we need support, to bring us to Him. We should use this example whenever we deal with others, particularly in working to bring them to the Lord. Is 30:20.

^{bb} (24) The Septuagint reads, “Will the plowman plow all the day? Or will he prepare the seed beforehand, before he tills the ground?”

^{cc} **Spelt**, also known as dinkel wheat, or hulled wheat, is a species of wheat cultivated since approximately 5000 BC. There is recent scientific evidence (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1570-7458.2012.01243.x/abstract>) that sowing spelt (as distinguished from most other grains) as a border for other crops, reduces insect damage to those crops. Translations vary as to the specific identities of the crops referred to in this verse, but they are probably, in order, fennel, cumin, wheat, barley and spelt.

^{dd} (25) Verses 25-29 may be a defense of God’s punishment of Israel, that man cannot questions God’s wisdom (Rm 9:14-29). Is 55:10-11; Mt 23:23; Ex 9:32. The Septuagint reads, “Does he not, when he has leveled the surface, then sow the small black poppy, or cumin, and afterward sow wheat, barley, millet, and grain in your borders?”

^{ee} **God** or Elohim (אֱלֹהִים *'elohiym*), literally the plural form of *el*, god.

^{ff} (26) Is 21:10. The Septuagint reads, “So you shall be chastened by the judgment of your God, and shall rejoice.”

^{gg} (27) Am 1:3. The Septuagint reads, “For the black poppy is not cleansed with harsh treatment, nor will a wagon wheel pass over the cumin; but the black poppy is threshed with a rod, and the cumin shall be eaten with bread . . .”

^{hh} (28) The Septuagint reads, “. . . for I will not be angry with you forever, neither shall the voice of My anger crush you.”

ⁱⁱ (29) Is 9:6, 31:2; Rom 11:33; Jr 32:19. The Septuagint reads, “And these signs came forth from the Lord of hosts. Take counsel, exalt vain comfort.”