

ISAIAH

- VOLUME TWO -

A Mentor Commentary

Paul House

MENTOR

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Dedicated to:

Elizabeth Baker

Grant Taylor

Caleb Spence

Eleanor Spence

Veronica Spence

(ISAIAH 65:17-25)

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For these and other kindnesses I am very grateful.

Paul House

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Technical Abbreviations

c.	circa
cf. [Latin]	<i>confer</i> , compare
ch(s).	chapter(s)
ed(s).	editor(s); edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English translation
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> , and so forth, and the rest
f(f).	and the following one(s)
fn	footnote
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Version
KJV	King James Version
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament)

MT	Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
pt.	part
repr.	Reprinted
RSV	Revised Standard Version
v(v).	verse(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)
vs.	versus

Abbreviations for Secondary Sources

AB	Anchor Bible
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ARAB	<i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> . Edited by Daniel David Luckenbill. 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926-1927. Repr., New York: Greenwood, 1968
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . 1907. Repr., Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1962.
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	Biblica
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CC	Continental Commentaries

- ConBOT Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
- ConcC Concordia Commentary
- CTR *Criswell Theological Review*
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993-2014
- ECC Eerdmans Critical Commentary
- ExpTim *Expository Times*
- FAT Forschungen zum Alten Testament
- FOTL Forms of the Old Testament Literature
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Study Edition*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
- HCOT Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
- HTR *Harvard Theological Review*
- HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- ICC International Critical Commentary
- IBC Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
- JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
- LHBOTS The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
- NAC New American Commentary
- NCB New Century Bible
- NIBCOT New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UUA	Uppsala Universitetsårskrift
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Approximate Dates of Key Historical Events Related to the Book of Isaiah

745-740 (Isaiah 1-4)

- Last years of Uzziah-Jotham co-regency (750–740) in Judah
- Rise of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727) to Assyria's throne
- Assyrian incursion that Uzziah opposes (743–742)

740-729 (Isaiah 5-12)

- Uzziah dies, succeeded by Jotham (740–735)
- Ahaz's reign (735–715) begins
- Israel-Syria invasion of Judah (734–733)
- Assyria defeats Israel-Syria, takes exiles, places Hoshea on Israel's throne, and makes Israel an administrative district of Assyrian Empire (732)

729-706 (Isaiah 13-27)

- Tiglath-pileser III conquers Babylon, proclaims himself king of Assyria and Babylon (729)
- Tiglath-pileser III dies, succeeded by Shalmaneser II (727–722)
- Assyria conquers Samaria, ending Israel's monarchy, and takes exiles (722)
- Shalmaneser II dies, succeeded by Sargon V (722/721–709)

- Merodach-baladan II of Babylon (721–709, 703–702) recaptures city of Babylon (721)
- Assyria puts down Israel-Syria-Philistia rebellion (720)
- Shabako (716–702) takes throne in Egypt, ending years of division (716)
- Ahaz dies, succeeded by Hezekiah (715–687)
- Assyria puts down rebellion in Ashdod and sweeps through Moab (713–711)
- Sargon V recaptures Babylon (709), declares himself king of Assyria and Babylon
- Sargon V subdues enemies, begins building new capital (709–706)

705-702 (Isaiah 28-35)

- Sargon V dies, succeeded by Sennacherib (705–681)
- Hezekiah rebels against Assyria (705–704)
- Merodach-baladan II retakes control of Babylon (703–702)
- Shabako of Egypt dies, succeeded by Shebitku (702–690)
- Hezekiah's illness and healing (703–702; see 38:1–39:8)
- Assyria retakes Babylon (702)

701-689 (Isaiah 36:1-37:8; 38:1-56:8)

- Flashback: Hezekiah's illness, healing, and hosting of Babylonian envoys (703–702; see 38:1–39:8)
- Sennacherib campaigns successfully against Egypt, Philistia, and Judah; defeating all Judah's fortified cities except Jerusalem, taking exiles, and securing tribute from Hezekiah before leaving the area (701; see 36:1–37:8)
- Sennacherib crushes rebellion in Babylon, retaking the city (700)
- Sennacherib campaigns from mountains east of Assyria to northern Arabian Desert (699–695)
- Co-regency of Hezekiah and Manasseh begins (697)
- Sennacherib battles Babylon and Elam (694–689)
- Shebitku of Egypt dies, succeeded by Tirhakah (690–664)

- Sennacherib destroys city of Babylon (689)

689-681 (Isaiah 37:9-38; 56:9-62:12; 63:1-66:24)

- Sennacherib continues constant building in Nineveh (689)
- Sennacherib threatens Judah, perhaps due to support of Tirhakah, loses 185,000 soldiers, returns home (688; see 37:9-37)
- Hezekiah dies, succeeded by Manasseh (687-686), who rules until 642
- Sennacherib assassinated (681), succeeded by Esarhaddon (681-669; see 37:38)

SECTION FOUR
ISAIAH 28:1–35:10

1.

Woe for the Wicked, a Cornerstone and Wisdom for the Faithful: Isaiah 28

Introduction

Isaiah opens a new section of the book.¹ As before, he descends from the heights of future life in Zion to the nervous political times of the late eighth century B.C. A series of 'woes' link chapters 28–33 (28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1) and lead into the bright future chapters 34–35 describe. With Assyria threatening the region again, these 'woes' warn Israel and Judah to repent from sin. They also urge them to trust Yahweh, not Egypt, as times get harder.

This new section has clear links to previous ones. New 'woes' remind readers of old 'woes' announced in 5:8-23 during the latter days of Uzziah's reign (c. 745–740), before Assyria became dominant. They also remind readers of 'woe' declared in 10:4-19, when Tiglath-pileser III wreaked havoc in Israel and Judah c. 733–732. However, woe is never Isaiah's final word. In 28:16 and 32:1-20 he promises a righteous king will reign in Zion. Thus, as in chapters 5–12 (see 9:6-7 [MT 9:5-6]; 11:1-16), Yahweh's chosen ruler brings renewal. Furthermore, in Isaiah 34–35 the book warns the nations (34:1), and offers joy in Zion to those who trust Yahweh (35:1-10). Therefore, 35:1-10 echoes earlier messages about Zion in 4:2-6, 12:1-6, and 27:12-13.

1. The major segments of Isaiah are as follows: 1:1–4:6; 5:1–12:6; 13:1–27:13; 28:1–35:10; 36:1–56:8; 56:9–62:12; and 63:1–66:24. All begin with sin and its consequences and end with Yahweh and His people in Zion.

Thus, Isaiah again presents Israel, Judah, and the nations with the same clear choices. As in 7:1-9, Yahweh's people must trust Him or face utter collapse and defeat. They must take courageous steps of faith or they will endure horrible loss. They can choose wickedness over a strong and healthy relationship with Yahweh. If they choose such unbelief, however, they will suffer the sort of loss the Assyrians were famous for inflicting. They can choose unbelief and mark themselves as the wicked. Those who choose faith mark themselves as the righteous remnant of Yahweh. This remnant receives help only the creator and redeemer, the holy one of Israel, can provide.

The nations draw near and obey Yahweh or face punishment (34:1). Isaiah has already written that they may come to Yahweh and be His people, one with Israel (see 19:16-25). He has called them to serve Him and His chosen ruler, the Messiah; He does not just call Israelites (see 11:10-16). He rules them; He does not just rule Israelites (see 13:1-27:13). He forgives them; He does not just forgive Israelites. He will swallow up death for all who trust Him (see 25:6-8). But He will do away with all whose pride leads them to boast in themselves rather than in their maker (see 10:12-19; 17:7-8). Grace is available for all in these chapters, but, to borrow Bonhoeffer's phrase, it is costly grace.² It costs them all other gods. The nations cannot simply add Yahweh to the list of deities they serve.

To begin this new cycle, Isaiah 28 compares those in Israel (28:1) and Judah (28:14) who choose unbelief to drunkards (28:1-4, 7-10) and scoffers (28:14, 22), respectively. In contrast, he promises those who trust in Yahweh a cornerstone for their future (28:16) and wisdom for living in harsh times (28:23-29). Such persons will be Yahweh's remnant in Israel (28:5-6), and the wise in Judah (28:26).

Setting

As is true of most of Isaiah, experts offer more than one possible historical background for Isaiah 28. Those who think most or all this chapter comes from Isaiah often argue that he

2. See Bonhoeffer, 43. This book first appeared in German in 1937.

wrote 28:1-4 prior to Samaria's fall in 722 B.C.³ Some who think the chapter mainly dates from Isaiah's times believe an editor added 28:5-6, a hopeful passage about a faithful remnant from Ephraim.⁴ Dating the passage prior to 722 has considerable merit, yet may fail to take a few items into consideration. First, Isaiah 28 does not mention Samaria by name, nor does the passage mention kings or rulers, as 28:14-22 does when discussing Judah. Second, the passage treats Ephraim as continuing to fade, a situation that fits many historical contexts. Third, as the comments on Isaiah 7 and 17 have indicated, Israel did not simply disappear into exile after 722. People stayed in the land. Assyria's final deportation and resettlement of Israel did not occur until c. 671-670. Israel maintained its pride and hope for a new future long after Samaria fell (see 9:8-21).

Thus, I agree with G. V. Smith's assessment that Isaiah 28-35 fits the events leading up to the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701,⁵ a decision in keeping with prior ones. This commentary has treated 14:28, 20:1, and 21:1-17 as possible historical reference points for the beginning of Hezekiah's reign (c. 715), the fall of Ashdod in 713-711, and the fall of Babylon in 709, respectively. It has also interpreted chapters 24-27 as reflecting Sargon V's supremacy from 709-705. It will now treat chapters 28-35 as reflecting events after Sargon's death in 705, and as introducing the account of Sennacherib's 701 invasion of Judah in Isaiah 36-37. It is impossible to survey all the details associated with these years, but several observations are in order.

First, as was noted above, in c. 705-704 King Sargon V of Assyria died. He ruled as king of Assyria beginning in c. 722-721, and as king of Assyria *and* Babylon beginning in 709. Sennacherib, Sargon V's son, ascended to both thrones, and he ruled over Assyria until his death in c. 681-680. Within Assyria there was little resistance to this transfer of power.

Second, Babylon was, as usual, a different story. Babylon rebelled when Sargon V died. Nonetheless, Sennacherib gained

3. For example, Alexander, Brueggemann, Delitzsch, Hayes and Irvine, Harman, Skinner, and Wildberger take this approach.

4. Wildberger (*Isaiah 28-39*, 11-12) takes this position.

5. G. V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 473.

control of Babylon by 704–703. He then placed a subordinate, Marduk-zakir-sumi II, on the throne. But once again the redoubtable and determined Merodach-baladan II, king of Babylon from 721–709, attempted to reclaim his old throne. Once again, he looked for allies. He received help from his home base, the people of Bit-Jakin, and from his old allies the Elamites. Isaiah 39:1-8 indicates Judah also supported him. Merodach-baladan II overthrew Marduk-zakir-sumi II. He ruled on his old throne nine months, most likely during 703–702.

In response, Sennacherib invaded Babylon and took control by 702. Sennacherib drove Merodach-baladan II from Babylon, and put Bel-ibni in his place. This campaign was extensive. Brinkman observes, ‘Apparently Merodach-Baladan had such widespread support throughout Babylonia that Sennacherib felt that a thorough housecleaning was in order before he could reign peacefully.’⁶ As matters turned out, Merodach-baladan II was biding his time. He knew Sennacherib had other problems.

Due to unrest in the western portions of his empire, Sennacherib undertook the campaign against Egypt, Cush, Philistia, and Judah described in Isaiah 36 and 2 Kings 18 in c. 701. Merodach-baladan II then used Sennacherib’s troubles elsewhere to mount one last campaign. The result was ultimately the same as in 703–702. Sennacherib returned to Babylon in 700. He focused on defeating Bit-Jakin, his opponent’s home area, and drove his foe out of the land for good in c. 700. The aging Merodach-baladan II fled to Elam, and he never held power again. Nonetheless, his spirit of revolt lived on, for Elam and Babylon continued to oppose Sennacherib for over a decade. Merodach-baladan II’s relatives participated in these efforts.⁷ Not until 689, when Sennacherib leveled Babylon, did he have rest from Babylonian-led rebellions.

Third, Egypt also faced a period of transition. Shabako, Egypt’s great unifier,⁸ died c. 702. His policy had been to

6. Brinkman, ‘Merodach-Baladan II’, pp. 25-26.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

8. See sections on historical setting in the comments on Isaiah 18 and 20.

encourage the nations between his land and Assyria's to exert their independence without requiring Egypt to commit its own troops to fight against Assyria (see the comments on Isaiah 20 above). As Kitchen writes, 'He was shrewd enough to avoid any armed confrontation with the might of Assur... Thus, Shabako's 14 or 15 years' rule meant external peace for Egypt.'⁹ However, his policies did not lead to peace for his allies that lived closer to Assyria.

Shebitku (c. 702–690) succeeded Shabako. The new leader soon sent for troops from the south and took a much more aggressive approach to dealing with Assyria.¹⁰ Perhaps seeds of a more overt opposition to Assyria were planted even before the older man's death. As will be discussed in the commentary on Isaiah 36, Shebitku opposed Sennacherib when Assyria invaded Palestine in 701. During the years associated with Isaiah 28–35, then, Egypt was not a great ally to Judah. They became a more forceful ally later, but even then, they remained a distraction from Judah's real hope, which was to trust in Yahweh.

Fourth, in Judah, the troubles Assyria faced with Babylon and others emboldened Hezekiah to expand Judah's regional power. Hezekiah no doubt hoped Assyria, his former ally, would lose its grip on his home area. He took territory from Philistia (see 2 Kings 18:8), and he tried to rally the old kingdom of Israel around his political and spiritual plans for the people (see 2 Chron. 30:1-12). He could not fulfil such plans for expansion at Assyria's expense on his own, so he began to look to Egypt (see 30:1-31:9; 36:6) and Babylon (see 39:1-8) as allies.

His activities and Babylon's problems probably gave the old Israelite kingdom hope that Assyrian oppression, which began in 732, might end. As was discussed in the comments on Isaiah 7:1-8, 9:8-21, and 17:4, Israel did not let Assyria's victories in 732 and 722 break their national spirit. Israel opposed Assyria in 722, 720, and (probably) 713–711. The people maintained the sort of determination that Babylon, Elam, and Philistia displayed, though with less power.

9. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 B.C.)*, p. 380.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 383-85.

In Isaiah 28, the prophet speaks in this setting as he has spoken to past ones. He continues to declare that political-military allies are not Israel and Judah's ultimate answer. Trusting in Yahweh and waiting for His deliverance are their only viable options. Choosing any other path amounts to stubborn pride on Israel's part (28:1-13) and trusting in lies on Judah's (28:14-29). Later events prove him right. For now, he remains faithful to sharing the word Yahweh has given him and awaiting its fulfillment.

Structure

Isaiah 28 unfolds in three segments. First, in 28:1-13 Isaiah laments proud Ephraim's continued sad decline. Israel's ongoing pride, poor spiritual leadership, and multiple moral failures make failure inevitable. Second, Isaiah 28:14-22 tells Judah that Yahweh will place a royal cornerstone in Zion. This cornerstone will be God's security for His people. They must trust in Yahweh and His promises, not in political plots and schemes. Their political strategies will fail, but God's plans cannot fail. Third, in Isaiah 28:23-29 the prophet uses a rather difficult agricultural parable to extend to Judah a call to be wise enough to listen to Yahweh's teaching about the present situation.

Proud Ephraim's Continued Decline (28:1-13)

Isaiah begins the woe oracle by asserting that Ephraim will keep on fading (28:1-4). He adds that judgement will reveal a remnant of faithful Israelites (28:5-6; see 2 Chron. 30:1-12) 'on that day'. The nation has little hope of renewal now because their priests and prophets are as useless as a drunken person babbling like a baby (28:7-10). Because the nations believe this babbling, God will send a foreign army whose speech will sound like babbling to the Ephraimites (28:11-13; see 1 Cor. 14:20-25). The mentioning of a remnant indicates that Yahweh still has plans for Israel, a theme Jeremiah takes up a century later (see Jer. 3:6-18).

[28:1] The positive messages that dominated Isaiah 24–27 now give way to a declaration of **Woe for the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim**. If there is woe for the drunkards'

crown, then there is also woe for the drunkards themselves. The proud crown is **on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine.**

The proud crown is most likely the land of Israel. An invader (28:2) will devastate (28:3) and tread it down (28:4). It is possible that this crown is Samaria, and those who think the passage precedes the fall of Samaria in 722–721 draw this conclusion. In this theory, the capital city is the choicest portion of the land and symbolizes the whole nation. But this crown is fading, a shadow of what it once was (28:4). It already seems to have declined rather than awaiting destruction, for only drunken people consider it a crown at all (28:1, 3).¹¹ Furthermore, the crown will fall easily to the invader according to 28:4, and it took Assyria three years to conquer Samaria. Finally, it seems unnecessary to limit the drunkards to Samaria when the city is not specified as Jerusalem is in 28:14. Therefore, it is reasonable to treat the reference as relating to the land of Israel after it has already suffered a series of defeats.

Ephraim's drunkards are either the people or the priests and prophets described in 28:7-10. Most likely, 28:1-4 refers to the people, and 28:7-10 indicates who led them down the wrong path. Drunken pride keeps the people believing they can overcome Assyria, but one can only look on such hopes with pity.

[28:2-3] The drunkards need to get sober, for **Behold, one who is mighty and strong from [or, to] Yahweh, like a hailstorm, a storm of destruction, like a storm of many waters overflowing, will force down to the earth and trample underfoot the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim.** Since at least 7:17-27, Assyria has been Yahweh's instrument of punishment. Assyria continues to be the most dangerous opponent Israel and Judah face throughout the book. Thus, it is most likely that Yahweh mentions Assyria here. Assyria's army will strike the land like a hailstorm, and will tread down the land like one treads grapes. Pride will not keep the Assyrians away. Drunkenness will not dull the pain. Reality will hit hard.

11. G. V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 475-76.

[28:4] Assyria will overcome Israel with startling ease. They will gobble up what remains of Israel (**the fading flower of the beauty of its glory**) like a man gobbles up the **first-ripe fig before summer**. No sooner is it in his hand than he eats it. Isaiah dismisses any notion that Israel can stand a future Assyrian show of force. Assyria can defeat Israel any time they please.

[28:5-6] As in 17:1-11, **on that day** judgement will lead some Israelites, **the remnant of his people**, to trust in Yahweh. At that time, after the Assyrians come, **Yahweh of hosts will be a crown of glory, a beautiful wreath** to them. They will no longer consider their land their crown. They will realize that Yahweh alone saves, protects, and endures. They will find that He is the one who gives a **spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgement, and might to those who return battle at the gate**. All other sources are delusions. They are the sorts of phantoms drunkards see.

It is important to note that Yahweh continues to reach out to Israel long after the ten northern tribes lose their political status as a nation. Hezekiah sends envoys to Israel to get them to come to Passover (2 Chron. 30:10-12). Josiah makes similar overtures during his reign (2 Chron. 35:16-19). A band of faithful persons respond positively, even though they are in the minority in 2 Chronicles 32:10-12. Jeremiah 3:6-18 and 23:5-6 envision Judah and Israel together again under the leadership of the Davidic heir. In short, the Old Testament indicates that Yahweh preserved a remnant of people faithful to Him in Israel. It also keeps alive the promise of all twelve tribes united in faith in Him, even if not until the Messiah comes.

[28:7-8] Isaiah returns to the present in 28:7-10. Several commentators conclude that 28:7 shifts emphasis from Israel to Judah due to the phrase **and also these** that begins the verse and the subsequent listing of **priest and prophet**.¹² It seems most logical to them that the priests and prophets are in Jerusalem, where temple worship continued.

12. See for example, Harman, 190-91; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 17-18; and Motyer, pp. 230-31.

While certainly a viable option, this view does not take into consideration the link between the drunkards in 28:7-10 and 28:1-4 sufficiently, nor does it recognize fully that prophets and priests continued to operate in Israel after 722. On the first matter, Oswalt correctly points out that the phrase 'and also these' may 'indicate an additional group rather than a different one.'¹³ The additional group of Israelites in this instance includes priests and prophets. Without clear evidence of a switch to Judah at this point (see 28:14), it is necessary to rely on the assumption that the prophet describes priests and prophets in Jerusalem because rituals continued there when they were unlikely to do so in Israel. In response, it is hard to imagine that all religious functionaries ceased to function in Israel after 722. Indeed, 2 Kings 17:24-41 indicates that priests of various sorts worked in northern Israel when foreigners settled there after 671. If northern priests and prophets continued to believe and teach what they did before 722, then Isaiah would have little use for their visions and instruction in 705-701.

If Israel remains the focus, Isaiah states that there are drunkards in Ephraim chasing false dreams (28:1-4) because **the priest and prophet err with strong drink**, which makes these leaders **err in vision** and when **rendering a decision** on matters related to Yahweh's law. Through their failures, the land has become, morally speaking, like **tables...full of [covered with] vomit, with no space left**. This is a harsh image. It is also a sad one. The very people who should help the community harm it. They do not seem to care about the trouble they have caused; they do not repent. Oswalt writes:

The atmosphere of the segment is grimly realistic. There is no more hardened or cynical person in the world than a religious leader who has seared his conscience. For them, tender appeals that would move anyone else are sources of amusement. They have learned how to debunk everything and to believe nothing (Heb. 10:26-31), all the while speaking loftily of matters of the spirit (James 3:13-18).¹⁴

13. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 509.

14. *Ibid.*

Isaiah's denunciations of Israel's religious leaders parallel those in Hosea 4:1-9. Hosea notes that there is no covenantal knowledge of or faithfulness to Yahweh in the land (4:1). Instead, the leaders have breached God's commandments governing treatment of neighbours (compare 4:2 and Exod. 20:13-16), so violence fills the land. Thus, the land mourns, filled with the consequences of covenantal disobedience (compare 4:3 and Lev. 26:21-26; Deut. 28:20-24). Priests and prophets who reject Yahweh's word are the heart of the problem (4:4-6). The people are responsible for their own actions, yet the religious leaders are doubly responsible. They neglect Yahweh's word for personal gain; they tell the people what they want to hear (4:8). Both people and priest will suffer judgement together (4:9).

[28:9-10] Isaiah continues his accusation against Israel's religious leaders in 28:9-10 before detailing the results of their sins in 28:11-13. Some experts think this passage relates what Isaiah's enemies say about him, but G. V. Smith correctly concludes that having compared their visions and decisions to vomit, Isaiah now compares their messages to babbling baby talk.¹⁵ The prophet asks: **Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain a spoken message? Ones being weaned from milk – those taken from breasts?** Apparently only babies and toddlers are appropriate hearers for these teachers. This is so because the drunken priests and prophets repeat similar sounding syllables over and over. Their messages are as uniform as they are inane. In Hebrew, the words they say sounds like *sav lesav sav lesav, kie lekie kie lekie, zir sham zir sham*. One can translate the words, as the standard translations do quite well, but that is secondary to the force of the repeated sounds. These priests and prophets prattle on like a child learning to make words out of noises. Only infantile people could possibly think they could hope to learn anything from them.

[28:11-12] The priests and prophets have rejected Yahweh's words for useless and unhelpful words. Nonetheless, Yahweh

15. For a summary of opinions and his response to them, see G. V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 480-82.

will speak to them again. But they will not like what they will hear. Isaiah asserts, **Indeed, with babbling lips and with other tongues [or, other languages] he will speak to this people, to whom he has said, 'This is rest. Give rest to the weary.' And, 'This is quiet.' Yet they would not listen.** The concept of 'rest' has a long history in the Old Testament. It is associated with Yahweh's desire to give Israel a home, where they will no longer be harassed as they were in Egypt (see Deut. 12:9; 28:65; Ps. 95:11).¹⁶ Prophets such as Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, and Amos offered Israel this rest after the division from Judah. Hezekiah's efforts did as well (2 Chron. 30:1-12). The drunken priests and prophets (28:7-10) gave the people no rest because they did not lead them to Yahweh. The people do not seem to mind. They are like their religious leaders (28:1-4).

Because they reject the promise of rest in Yahweh, the people will hear words from new babbling lips. They will hear the speech of foreigners. To them these words are no more intelligible than what infants and drunken religious leaders offer. Perhaps they seem no more important or troubling.

[28:13] In fact, these words are extremely dangerous. They indicate that a foreign army has entered the land. Once the people have rejected Yahweh's rest, His words become like nonsense to them: **And the word of Yahweh will be to them *sav lesav sav lesav, kie lekie kie lekie, zir sham zir sham* so that they will and fall backwards and be shattered and be ensnared and be captured.** The people's hearts will become hard, just as Yahweh warned Isaiah in 6:8-13. They will not accept the truth now any more than they did prior to the devastations of 732 or 722. Instead of rest they will experience invasion by 'a nation whose language you do not understand', just as Moses warned in Deuteronomy 28:49.¹⁷ When Israel hears these foreigners speak they will know that Yahweh has judged.

Paul cites this passage in 1 Corinthians 14:20-25. His point is that speaking in tongues is a sign to unbelievers, just as the

16. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33 (rev. ed.)*, p. 431.

17. Harman, p. 191.

foreign languages heard in 28:13 are a sign to unbelievers. When unbelieving Israel heard the speech of the foreign army, they should have understood that they were under another nation's control. When unbelievers hear foreign languages spoken and interpreted in the church at Corinth, they should understand that God has invaded their territory and taken it over. Unbelievers in Israel and Corinth ought to turn to God when they hear foreign languages spoken in their homeland. Believers in both settings should respond to God's spoken word delivered by His prophets, His messengers. God's use of the foreign talk is therefore a warning for others, not for believers.

Though Isaiah does not give up on Israel, he does not have high hopes for them now. Determined to face judgement rather than repent, they can only expect to be shattered, snared, and captured. However, 28:5-6 states that a remnant of faithful ones will emerge. The fact that they will be a small minority should not lead interpreters to neglect them altogether. Still, one wishes for more; Isaiah certainly wishes for more. Yet the reality of the situation calls for a somber acceptance of facts. The drunken priests and prophets will lead their followers into defeat. The faithful remnant will emerge from the debacle, yet they will do so bloody and bowed from the time of judgement.

A Cornerstone in Zion: God's Security for His People (28:14-22)

Isaiah warns that Assyria is about to punish Judah for political scheming, which Isaiah calls 'a covenant with death' (28:14-15). He claims Judah must believe that faith in God's word and in God's cornerstone, the Messiah, is the way to salvation (28:16; Ps. 118:22; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6). They must grasp the fact that righteousness results only from faith, and it, not their political planning, is the way forward in a time of trouble (28:17-21). They must trust that faith, not scoffing, is the right response when God does 'his strange work' (28:21), which is to judge.

[28:14-15] Given what will happen to Israel, Isaiah urges the leaders in Jerusalem not to make the same mistakes as

their northern counterparts. He writes, **Therefore, hear the word of Yahweh, you scoffing men ruling this people in Jerusalem, because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overflowing calamity passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter.'**

The ones called to hear Yahweh's words are Jerusalem's rulers,¹⁸ in other words people able to do great good or great harm. Currently they are scoffing men when they should be trusting men. Motyer notes that the word translated 'scoffing' here is a 'Wisdom Literature term for someone far gone in spiritual cynicism, self-assured (Pr. 1:22), beyond correction (Pr. 13:1), arrogant (Pr. 21:24) and scorning spiritual realities (Ps. 1:1; Pr. 14:9).'¹⁹ Oswalt writes that '*scoffers* is the strongest negative term which the OT uses to describe the wicked. It is the diametric opposite of "faithful" (cf. Ps. 1:1, 20. Not only does this person choose the wrong way, but he mocks the right way.'²⁰ These people are as corrupt in their own way as the drunken leaders in 28:7-10.

The quoted speech is almost certainly Isaiah's assessment of what they have planned, not their own. This quotation indicates that they think they have done the right and good thing for their nation. Isaiah's quotation indicates they are aware that 'overflowing calamity' (see 28:18) is possible. An invasion of their region could come because of political activities they monitor. They are confident their policies will keep them from experiencing the Assyrians' wrath.

Unfortunately, no decision based on lies and death can succeed. It is not clear what strategy Isaiah references. It may be the strategy of trusting in Egypt to help deliver Judah and

18. Wildberger (*Isaiah 28-39*, p. 37), Watts (*Isaiah 1-33 [rev. ed.]*, pp. 434, 436), and others suggest that the Wisdom Literature reference to 'scoffers' indicates that the word translated 'ruling' here is best rendered 'speakers of parables'. This option is certainly tenable (the three-letter root is the same, see *HALOT*, 1:646-48), but I believe the context includes people able to make treaties, not just advise one on how to make them.

19. Motyer, p. 233.

20. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 516.

Israel from the Assyrians, and thus give the twelve tribes the chance to re-unite. This is the strategy in 30:1-5. It may be the strategy of continuing to act like Assyria's ally without really supporting their causes, which chapters 20–22 indicate has been part of Judah's foreign policy since at least 713–711 B.C.²¹ Either way the leaders have failed to accept Yahweh's words given through Isaiah in 7:1-25, 8:7-8, and 10:5-34. Trust in Yahweh remains the way to stand (7:9). Perhaps the leaders scoff because Isaiah's words about Assyria entering Judah have not come true over a thirty-year time span. One can understand their skepticism, but unfortunately, they are wrong. Regardless of their beliefs about Isaiah's accuracy, they should know that lying to Assyria and trying to use Egypt is dangerous.

[28:16-17] Now Yahweh speaks directly concerning their plans (**Therefore, thus says Lord Yahweh**).²² In 28:16-17 He states what and who will endure in the future. He also reveals the conditions under which they will endure. In 26:18-22 He declares what will not endure. His declarations override all the leaders' plans. The future holds the opposite of what the scoffing ones (28:14-15) expect.

Yahweh asserts that He has already begun taking action that will sustain the faithful ones in the future (28:16) and change Jerusalem into Zion, the city it should be (28:17). He says, **Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of testing, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation. Whoever believes will not be in haste. He then adds, And I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the level; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overflow secrecy.**

The translation 'I am laying' follows the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, the oldest known manuscript of Isaiah, which has the participle form of the word. The Masoretic Text has a third-person singular perfect (past) tense of the word ('he has laid'). The participle makes more sense given that a third-person

21. See the comments on Isaiah 20–22.

22. The name for God here is *Adonai Yahweh*. These names also appear together in 3:15; 22:5; 56:8; and 61:1.

verb does not agree with the first-person suffix in 'Behold, I...'. Several scholars believe that the past tense would indicate that whatever the stone is must have existed when Isaiah 28:16 was written. Some who believe the participle is the best reading render the word as a future promise ('I will lay'). They are flexible in what they think has been promised in the future. A participle here indicates that the past and the future could be in view. That is, Yahweh was laying a foundation in Isaiah's time that would have impact on the future. Whatever this foundation is must be the focus of faith.

This stone is a 'stone of testing', in other words one that shows something about others. As in 8:14, how one treats Yahweh's promise determines whether the stone is one of stumbling and defeat, or protection and refuge. Those who believe, as Isaiah does in 8:14, find sanctuary and help in this stone. Those who do not believe stumble over it. Like any good cornerstone, this one sustains strong and pure stones that rest on and around it. But it breaks weak stones that come up against it. Those who put their trust in this stone will find it secure. Those who do not trust will break when pressed against it.

The Septuagint reads the words translated above as 'whoever believes' near the end of 28:16 as 'whoever believes in him', which indicates a messianic interpretation of the foundation stone. The Targum treats the stone as a great king, as does the ancient Jewish interpreter Qimhi,²³ so both treat the stone as the Messiah. Romans 9:33 and 10:11 quote 28:16 as evidence of the Messiah's work and the necessity of faith in Him. First Peter 2:6 quotes 28:16 as part of three 'stone' texts (Isa. 8:14, 28:16; Ps. 118:22) that express how God builds the church on the foundation of faith in Christ.

Nonetheless, scholars have long debated the meaning of 28:16. In his 1846 commentary Alexander describes the scope of opinions already extant when he writes:

This foundation is neither the temple (Ewald), nor the law (Umbreit), nor Zion itself (Hitzig), nor Hezekiah (Gesenius), but the Messiah, to whom it is repeatedly and explicitly applied in the New Testament (Rom. 9:33, 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6)...

23. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, p. 41.

The objection, that the stone here mentioned was already laid, has no weight, as the whole theocracy existed with a view to the coming Messiah.²⁴

Alexander was also aware of the Targum that treated the passage as messianic.²⁵

In his 1974 commentary Kaiser divided his survey of opinions into two parts: scholars who believe the promise is based on something already set up when the text was written, and scholars who believe the passage relates a future promise. Those who hold to the former think the foundation may be the law [Eichhorn], the temple [Ewald], 'the archetypal monarchy set up in the person of David [Delitzsch], the city of Jerusalem on its hill [Knobel-Diestel], the saving work begun by Yahweh on Zion [Feldmann], Yahweh's relationship to his people [Duhm], and...the true community of believers already founded by God [Eichrodt].²⁶ Those who hold to the latter 'have interpreted the statement as referring to Zion as the righteous foundation by Yahweh [Childs], to the Messiah as the foundation stone of a temple not built with hands [Procksch and Scott], faith [Marti, Fohrer, Kissane], the remnant of believers [Donner], or very precisely to the statement that "He who believes will not waver", as Yahweh's promise [Konig].²⁷ Kaiser concludes that 'the cornerstone is formally speaking the promise, but in practice the faith which gives a refuge as safe as the foundation stones which neither hail nor floods can damage.'²⁸ Perhaps other options could be added, but these suffice to demonstrate the diversity of options offered on this verse's meaning.

It is impossible in this commentary to discuss every one of these possibilities. However, Geoffrey Grogan and Brevard Childs provide a way forward that incorporates Kaiser's emphasis on promise and faith and that validates Alexander's belief that the New Testament accurately identifies the Messiah

24. Alexander, 1:454.

25. Ibid.

26. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 253. See also Young, *Isaiah 19-39*, pp. 301-03.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 254.

as the foundation stone. Grogan observes that the context and wording of 28:16 is like that of 8:11-15. In the setting of the crisis of 734–733 B.C., Yahweh promised Ahaz the Davidic dynasty would not be overthrown at that time, Israel would be desolate in sixty-five years, and a virgin-born Messiah would come sometime after the 65-year-period ended.²⁹ Isaiah urged Ahaz to stand firm in faith (7:9), but the king rejected the promises (7:12). Thus, God threatened that the Assyrians would come and devastate the land (7:17-25).

For his part, Isaiah must not fear what the people fear (8:11-12). He and his disciples (see 8:16) must instead fear Yahweh (8:13), for he is ‘a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel’ (8:14). In both 8:14 and 28:16, then, the book highlights the need to believe in Yahweh and His provision in harsh circumstances. In 8:14 the stone is Yahweh Himself, while in 28:16 Yahweh mentions a stone He is laying in Zion. In 8:14 those who do not believe will stumble on the stone, and in 28:16 the stone tests, proves, and protects. Grogan argues that the Messiah is both God and distinct from Him, citing 9:6 as evidence.³⁰ Thus, he concludes that the messianic promise is both Yahweh and from Yahweh and is the basis for faith in 28:16.

Grogan’s position has five main points to commend it. First, it keeps the book’s overall context in mind. Second, it pays close attention to the development of the messianic promise in Isaiah. Third, it offers a possibility that keeps faith with the book of Isaiah and with New Testament readings of the passage. Fourth, it shows how the stone in 8:14 and 28:16 are related. Fifth, the description of justice and righteousness in 28:17 sounds a great deal like the descriptions of the Messiah’s kingdom in 9:6-7 and 11:1-9.

Childs begins by noting that 1:26, which states that Jerusalem will once again become a righteous place, fits well with 28:17, which also indicates Jerusalem will once again be marked by righteousness. Next, he notes that Isaiah 7–8 focuses on faith and Yahweh as foundation stone for the remnant. Then, he observes that in Isaiah the remnant will

29. See the discussion of 7:1-25.

30. For his full discussion, see Grogan, pp. 180-82.

ultimately reside in Zion by means of the Messiah's work (see 11:1-12:6). He concludes by stating that 28:16 therefore 'encompasses the reality of the new community, a faithful remnant, which is a foretaste of the coming righteous reign of God and which is ushered in by the promised messianic rule of Zion.'³¹ This viewpoint rightly brings together the elements Alexander, Kaiser, and Grogan highlight without losing the messianic emphasis the New Testament writers understandably and ably stress.

In Isaiah, only Yahweh and His chosen Messiah merit belief. No place but Zion is ultimately a permanent home of righteousness, justice, and peace. Only the believing remnant will reside in Zion. Only Yahweh and the prophets who faithfully relate His word can interpret how to live in troubling times. Yahweh's word and the messianic promise are the stone that tests all people and all ideas.

Thus, it makes a great deal of sense to interpret 28:16 as Yahweh's statement about how faith in His word and in the Messiah sustain the remnant as they live in their current political situation and prepare for life in Zion. This setting does not just fit Isaiah's in 705-701 B.C. It also fits Paul's when he writes Romans 9:33 and 10:11. His readers needed to embrace Jesus as the Christ and stand for this truth in their setting. It also makes a great deal of sense to read 28:17 as offering benefits only Yahweh can give Zion, and to read 28:17 as presenting the results that accrue when the Messiah's kingdom comes. Finally, it makes a great deal of sense for readers facing a difficult situation, such as the readers of 1 Peter 2:6 did, to trust in God's promise of the Messiah as the way forward during trials and persecution. In short, the traditional reading indicated by the Septuagint, the Targum, and the New Testament that several commentators affirm is a contextually viable and pastorally helpful interpretation.

Those who believe 'will not be in haste'. They will not hurry away or give way in the time of crisis.³² In context this means

31. Childs, pp. 209-10. For his full discussion, see pp. 207-10.

32. See *BDB*, 301; *HALOT*, 1:301. For other instances of this root word, see Isaiah 5:19; 60:22.

they will not make hasty and ill-conceived plans. It is possible to translate the word as 'dismayed' (NIV) or 'disturbed' (NASB) if one understands that the hurrying indicates their state of mind. Persons who place their trust in Yahweh need not be dismayed or disturbed and thus hurry about as if they must make their own plans. This promise coincides with the assurances in 8:11-15 and 28:22. Terrible times do not have to be uncertain times as far as one's relationship with Yahweh is concerned.

[28:18-20] Not only has Yahweh placed a cornerstone for faith in place, He has also determined what will occur soon. Verse 18 begins with a simple connective conjunction. Thus, the contents of 28:18 are in direct continuity with those of 28:17. Yahweh has decided to make righteousness the standard in Jerusalem and has determined to sweep away lies (28:17). Lies they have told the Assyrians will be exposed. The 'overflowing calamity' that 28:14-15 introduced will indeed come on Judah, not just their neighbours. Verse 22 reveals there will be a great destruction in the land, which from 10:5-34 onwards has been portrayed as an Assyrian invasion.

This invasion will have the following effects and pattern: **and your covenant with death will be dissolved, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand. When the overflowing calamity passes through you will be trampled by it. As often as it passes through it will take you. Morning by morning it will pass through – by day and by night. And it will be sheer terror to understand the reports** (28:18-19). All their policies will fail. Death and lies are not good allies. The Assyrians are not stupid, and Yahweh will not protect unbelieving Judah. The invasion will be persistent and effective. It will be frightening even to hear about, much less experience.

Isaiah offers two explanatory clauses to explain why the 'overflowing' calamity will be so terrifying. First, they have chosen a **bed...too short to stretch oneself on, a covering too narrow to wrap oneself in** (28:20). They have no room to manoeuvre. They have left themselves no options. They can either trust in Yahweh or face the Assyrians. The longer they delay the worse the situation will become. As Isaiah 30-32

and 36–39 indicate, they trust in alliances so long that the Assyrians come to Jerusalem's gates. Threats found in Isaiah 7:17-25 and 10:5-34 will come to pass. They should be afraid because of the lack of possibilities they have left open.

[28:21] Second, they should be afraid particularly because **Yahweh will rise up as at Mount Perazim; he will tremble with anger as in the valley of Gibeon, to do his deed – strange is his deed – to do his task – foreign is his task.** They must fear because God has become their enemy. He will fight against them as He once fought against their enemies. The reference to Perazim is probably from 2 Samuel 5:17-21, when God gave David victory over Philistia. The passage clearly reveals that Yahweh gave David explicit assurance that Israel would prevail (2 Sam. 5:19). Yahweh promises the opposite here: Judah will not win this time. The reference to Gibeon probably comes from Joshua 10:6-14, where Yahweh gives Israel victory over their enemies by casting down hailstones and making the sun stand still. Just as Yahweh once used extraordinary means to help them, so He will use unusual means to defeat them. These two old battle scenes took place near Judah, so they speak clearly to the recipients of 28:14-29.

This verse offers one of the Bible's most important comments about God's character. Yahweh's normal pattern of behaviour is to be merciful and gracious (see Exod. 34:6-7; Joel 2:12-13; etc). He offers blessing before threatening consequences (see Lev. 26:1-45; Deut. 28:1-68). Judging is not His first impulse. As Lamentations 3:33 states, Yahweh does not afflict 'from his heart'. Nonetheless, Yahweh is willing to judge. He will not 'clear the guilty' (Exod. 34:7; Nah. 1:2-3). Pushed to do so, He corrects severely. Yet it is incorrect to assume that Yahweh has a quick temper or loves to rebuke. The opposite is the case.

[28:22] Isaiah concludes the section. He starts with the emphatic **And now**, then urges the people, **Do not scoff, lest your chains be made stronger, for I have heard from Yahweh of hosts a decree of destruction on the whole land.** The word translated 'scoff' is from the same root as the word rendered 'scoffers' in 28:14. Scoffing will only make a terrible situation worse. Fighting Yahweh now will only make their

bonds tighter. Turning to Yahweh now will allow the people to have a cornerstone of hope amid the coming devastation, as 28:16 has promised. As events unfold, 36:1–37:36 reveals that Yahweh sends the Assyrian army into Judah. Because Hezekiah turns to Yahweh, though, Yahweh turns back the Assyrians before they can destroy Jerusalem. Hope continues. Tighter bonds do not have to lead to death. The people do not have to hurry and live in panic (28:16). They do not have to have tighter and tighter chains.

The language employed in 28:22 is very much like 10:22–23. Using nearly identical terms, both texts refer to a fixed decision Yahweh has made, and both refer to a devastation that will fall on Israel and Judah. Isaiah wrote the earlier message after Israel and Syria threatened Ahaz in 733 B.C. and before the Assyrian incursion into Palestine in 713–711 (see 7:1–8; 14:28; 20:1–6). Part of Isaiah's prediction is that Assyria will sweep into Judah, devastate the land, and then fall short of conquering Jerusalem (10:5–34). It has been many years since Isaiah first predicted these events. The audience may scoff because he has made these claims before and they have not yet come to pass. Whatever they may think about Isaiah, these words from Yahweh remain true. Their fulfillment is certain. The scoffing should end and repentance should begin.

A Call to be Wise and Receive Grace (28:23–29)

This first woe oracle of Isaiah 28–33 ends with a call to hear (28:23), followed by a parable about farming (28:24–28), and concluded by a statement that what has been shared comes from Yahweh and should thus be heeded (28:29). This segment is not easy to interpret. Scholars differ widely on what they believe the passage means and why it is included.³³ The passage basically means that wise persons, in contrast to scoffers (see 28:14, 22), live the way God directs. It may also indicate that Yahweh knows how to order the world. He knows when it is best to do one thing and then another. Therefore, He understands quite well when to judge and

33. For a summary of various ideas, see G. V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, p. 491.

when to forgive.³⁴ Clearly, those who heed His words will be wise. They will accept His grace and live in faith and peace (28:16, 22).

[28:23] Isaiah calls the people to listen in a manner common in Wisdom Literature (Ps. 78:1; Prov. 4:20; 5:1).³⁵ As in 28:14, he makes it clear that his message is important and must be obeyed. The time for ignoring Yahweh and scoffing at His word has passed.

[28:24-25] Isaiah asks two questions that expect a negative answer in 28:24, followed by a question that expects a positive answer in 28:25. Farmers do not plow and plant all the time (28:24). Farmers also care for the plants once they have been planted (28:25). These verses share a common interest in the sowing and cultivating portion of the farmer's life.

[28:26] This short verse is in many ways the key to understanding the whole section. The reason the farmer knows what to do is that **He is rightly disciplined [literally, according to justice]. His God instructs him.** This verse uses heightened language. In 28:6 Isaiah states that eventually Yahweh will restore 'a spirit of justice' among Israel's remnant. Here he states that the faithful farmer plows his field 'according to justice', in short, in the right way. How to plow a field hardly requires a courtroom decision. It is also heightened language to state that 'His God instructs him.' Farmers have been sowing and harvesting for generations. They do not need individual instruction in each season. Yet Isaiah makes his point quite strong by his choice of words. As G. V. Smith writes, the implication is that the 'wise farmer hears God's instructions and is successful because he follows God's wise counsel. Should not the spiritual and political leaders of Judah do the same?'³⁶

[28:27-28] Now Isaiah turns to matters related to the harvesting portion of farming life. He asserts that the proper way to thresh some grains is with sticks, and the proper way

34. For a good example of this type of interpretation, see Sweeney, pp. 371-72.

35. See Harman, p. 195.

36. G. V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 491.

to thresh other grains is with a sledge or a cartwheel.³⁷ One must do what is proper in each case. Again, the wise farmer, the one instructed by Yahweh, knows what to do. Do the leaders of Judah have the same wisdom?

[28:29] The conclusion is that Yahweh's wisdom is **wonderful** and **excellent**. It is correct in all settings. Thus, His teaching should always be followed. He always knows what He is doing, and He teaches those who will listen how to live. The question now is whether the leaders, the ones who have been scoffing, will listen at last.

Conclusion

The book has entered a new phase that describes a new era in Judah and Israel's history. Three decades or more have passed since the first phase of the prophet's ministry. Old promises are coming to pass. Old threats are finally coming into view. Old political solutions have not worked. Israel seems to have little hope except for a small remnant in the unspecified future. Judah has more hope for now, but they must learn to accept Yahweh's wisdom if they are to have a brighter future. Without faith in Yahweh, which is still possible (28:16), only woe awaits. The veteran prophet remains faithful to Yahweh's message despite the people's lack of interest. The day is coming when they will have more interest (see 37:1-35), but that time remains a few years distant.

37. Harman, 196; Motyer, p. 236.