

ISAIAH

Chapter 28

Woe to Ephraim

Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley— to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine! ² See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground. ³ That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. ⁴ That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, will be like a fig ripe before harvest— as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it. ⁵ In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people. ⁶ He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. ⁷ And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth. ⁹ “Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? ¹⁰ For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there.” ¹¹ Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, ¹² to whom he said, “This is the resting place, let the weary rest”; and, “This is the place of repose”— but they would not listen. ¹³ So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there— so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured. ¹⁴ Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. ¹⁵ You boast, “We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.” ¹⁶ So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. ¹⁷ I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place. ¹⁸ Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the grave will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. ¹⁹ As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through.” The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror. ²⁰ The bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you. ²¹ The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon— to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task. ²² Now stop your mocking, or your chains will become heavier; the Lord, the LORD Almighty,

has told me of the destruction decreed against the whole land. ²³ Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. ²⁴ When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? ²⁵ When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? ²⁶ His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. ²⁷ Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick. ²⁸ Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. ²⁹ All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.

28:1–35:10 A series of six woes (28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1), concluded with an announcement of judgment on the nations (ch. 34) and a song celebrating the joy of the redeemed (ch. 35). Cf. the six woes in ch. 5 (see note on 5:8–23). (CSB)

28:1 *wreath*. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was a beautiful city on a prominent hill. (CSB)

Samaria, which sat on the top of a hill like a crown sits on a head. (TLSB)

pride. See v. 3 and note on 16:6. (CSB)

Ephraim's. See note on 7:2. (CSB)

The Northern Kingdom, Israel. (TLSB)

drunkards.† Samaria was a city of luxury and indulgence. See 5:11–13 and note; Am 6:4–7. (CSB)

FADING FLOWER – That is, of its costly pomp. As above, he compares the kingdom of Israel to a glorious crown and perishable flowers and very costly pomp, all of which are perishable and frail. Yet they are so smug and presumptuous in their glories and righteousnesses that they seem to themselves to be in command and to flourish. However, they are flourishing like a fading flower. Thus it is with our pope, the proud crown, relying on himself. (Luther)

fertile valley. Cf. 5:1. (CSB)

The land surrounding Samaria. Modern archaeological work confirms that Samaria was a place of luxury (cf Am 4:1; 6:1–6). (TLSB)

Historians report that the land of Samaria was outstandingly fertile and was second to none in fruitfulness. (Luther)

LAIID LOW BY WINE – When one’s head aches after a drinking bout, as the Germans say, “He bumped into the beer and fell under the bench,” because they themselves are drunkards and live like beasts of the belly in a fat land. This is a picture of the kingdom of Judah, and by these images the prophet censures their presumption, confidence, and smugness in riches and resources and glories, in which they felt excessively smug and made their boast against the most godly admonitions and threats of all the prophets. (Luther)

The picture is that of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, situated on a beautiful hill, surrounded with rich, terraced valleys like wreaths, but with its leaders slaves of wine, overcome by the vice of drunkenness. The picture is purposely painted dark, as a warning to the inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom. (Kretzmann)

28:2 *one who is powerful.* The king of Assyria. (CSB)

A fearsome enemy (TLSB)

He is speaking about the king of the Assyrians, who will be made mighty and strong by the Lord and whose strength will be like the thrust of a hailstorm, etc. He compares his power by means of these illustrations and shows what it is like. For just as no one can repel hailstorm and tempest, so no one can withstand his power. By means of these three comparisons he describes his exceedingly powerful army and strength, as if to say: “This is the kingdom of Israel, confident and proud of its crown, its flower, and its boasting, all of which are transitory, especially, in the time of hailstorm and tempest, of lightning and flood.” In other words, “You Israelites are vainly confident against the Assyrians, like a flower against flood and hail.” (Luther)

hailstorm ... flooding downpour. See v. 17; 8:7–8 and note; 17:12 and note. Cf. 30:30; 32:19. (CSB)

God uses the Assyrians to bring His judgment. (TLSB)

28:3 TRAMPLED UNDERFOOT – Trodden underfoot, that is, the kingdom of Israel will be like a wreath that is trodden underfoot. (Luther)

The wreath which the drunkards of Ephraim, the rulers of the Northern Kingdom, wear with such arrogant haughtiness. (Kretzmann)

28:4 FIG RIPE BEFORE HARVEST – As one who finds the first fruit of the season eats it with gusto, so the conqueror will satisfy his appetite for conquest without delay. (TLSB)

Like the premature, that is, that kingdom is as stable as fields that want to blossom and bear fruit before the accustomed time. They will most certainly perish, because the fruit is devoured when it is still in the stem and branch, and it perishes before it is plucked off by the hand. So all premature fruits very quickly die away. Thus destruction comes

promptly to the ungodly. They will be “like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up” (Ps. 129:6). And the ungodly are like thorns on a branch, because the thorn dies when it is still in fresh sap. These comparisons show that the ungodly come to naught in the midst of a plan, when they are absorbed in their supreme and most eager endeavor, just like premature fruits that are very promising but dry up before the harvest comes. So you, Israel, will be oppressed by the kingdom of the Assyrians as by a storm. Therefore note well that the ungodly always boast of themselves, for they are the proud crowns, the flowers of *glorious beauty*, etc. In that boasting they persist, they put forth much effort, they plan diligently for the future, but they shall not live out half their days” (Ps. 55:23), that is, they will not accomplish half of what they boast with excessive certainty. On the contrary, they will perish in the midst of their effort. So you see our tyrants still self-confidently trying much but always fading out as they rely on their own ideas. For those, however, who hold fast to Christ and His Word every undertaking and plan will happily endure. (Luther)

SWALLOWS IT – The ruin of Samaria took place in hardly more than four or five years, and there was as yet no intimation of its destruction when the prophet wrote these words. But the reference to the overthrow of the false glory of Samaria leads to the mention of the divine, the Messianic beauty. (Kretzmann)

28:5–6 A flash of light penetrates the impending gloom, giving Isaiah a view of a bright scene that was to emerge from the threatened destruction. God’s judgment is designed to preserve a “remnant of His people” who will not be drunk with self-trust but to whom “the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory.” (TLSB)

28:5 *In that day.* See 4:1–2; 10:20, 27 and note; 12:1, 4; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1–2, 12–13. (CSB)

As formerly they were insatiable drunks having a spirit of laziness and disorder, now having the Lord by faith, they learn the spirit of justice, they will speak and do justice, that which is just, and this they have been taught by the Lords chastening. Such men were Ezra, Zerubbabel, Haggai, Nehemiah, a very few so disciplined by it that they not only did justice but also taught it to others. (Luther)

glorious ... beautiful. See 4:2. (CSB)

In contrast to the people who thought their city was glorious and beautiful, their true glory and beauty will be the Lord. The widespread use of the crown in the NT (e.g., Jas 1:12; 1Pt 5:4; Rv 2:10) signifies for the baptized the crown of victory (TLSB)

remnant. See note on 1:9. (CSB)

That is, the residue that was restored from the Babylonian captivity for the purpose of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. He calls every disaster of Israel a war. *Gate* surely is peace, law, and the establishment of peace when the war was over. By allegory this

devastation inflicted on worldly boasting can be shifted to Christ, who has devastated all the glory of the world. (Luther)

28:6 *spirit of justice*. See 11:2–4 and notes. (CSB)

That is, the Lord will give them strength; they will have a spirit of justice to arrange and set up excellent laws, but they must also have power and authority, and the vigor and strength to execute the laws. (Luther)

gate. The most vulnerable part of a city. (CSB)

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Both in repelling an attack of the enemies and in directing the battle against the stronghold of the adversaries. The believers have power both to withstand the evil and to wage an offensive war against those who are its exponents. After this beautiful interlude the Lord turns to the people of Judah with a similar earnest warning. (Kretzmann)

28:7 *These also*. Even the remnant (Southern Kingdom of Judah in Jerusalem) who survive the Assyrian attack are not without fault. (TLSB)

wine ... beer. The religious leaders should have been filled with the Spirit, not with wine. See Lev 10:9; Nu 11:29; Eph. 5:18. (CSB)

There he makes a division, having made his speech. Now he speaks of the future under the reign of Christ. Here he describes the very strength of the hypocrites and ungodly, who in no wise come to their senses by the admonition of the prophets. It is as if he were saying: "Also our people, who are with us and stand with us, are in no respect better than those who in the past were ruined in the destruction of Israel, for they also stagger with drunkenness and presumption." The words "drunk" and "drunkenness" are used in Scripture particularly for those who presumptuously trust and boast in themselves. These reel and walk staggering in their own glow. Thus the princes and priests do not know how to govern and teach; they stagger in their own errors, they are called drunks and are worse than the drunk peasants, who do not exercise any reasonable control but draw everything to their own pleasure. Thus, then, by this most apt comparison he describes the wicked princes and bishops, who are not sober in the Word and wisdom of God but are drunk with their own schemes and ideas and stagger hither and yon, unsure, teaching nothing certain and being uncertain themselves. Thus they stagger back and forth like drunkards. They are not sure of their own ideas but always say: "Perhaps this will please God; perhaps, perhaps thus it is established and ordained by the church." (Luther)

PRIESTS AND PROPHETS STAGGER FROM BEER – Leaders, who should set an example, are here condemned for their own sin. (TLSB)

The prophet has nothing but rebuke. Here he thunders against the aristocrats, the prophets who were lawfully appointed and called to the seat and office of teachers—against these he inveighs so vehemently as drunkards and staggerers and “know-nothings.” No wonder that they could have torn him to pieces. (Luther)

This is directed to the priests to whom the use of intoxicating liquors was strictly forbidden. (Kretzmann)

reel in vision. Intoxication, not God’s Word, shapes their explanation of events. (TLSB)

STUMBLE WHEN RENDERING DECISIONS – They give faulty counsel, a symptom of faithlessness. (TLSB)

That is, they know nothing of prophesying. They do not know the Word of God, which they should be teaching. They do not know what they say, as Paul says, where they teach everything in reverse order. They teach faith where they should teach works, and works where they should teach faith. They are coarse asses who preach nothing certainly and distinguish neither Law nor Gospel. (Luther)

28:8 *vomit.* Cf. Jer 25:16, 27. (CSB)

That is, it is in all places. Wherever the Word is not taught, there is nothing but ignorance, drunkenness. And the more ignorant they are, the wiser they appear to themselves; they are in a frenzy with teaching so that they may fill every place with their vomit. For the one who can’t carry a tune always wants to sing. *All tables*, that is, all places where the Word is taught by which the conscience is fed, in those places they themselves want to be everywhere. Note, then, that human traditions are nothing else than the vomit of a drunken peasant, a food for which you need swine, not the consciences of the godly. For this reason the prophet here rails at them so much. Who in our time would dare thus to slander the pope and the bishops? Would they not be insane? And even if it is completely true, they would rave, because their traditions are the vomit of drunkards, and the monks are devouring sows. Thus you see the prophet vehemently attacking the drunken priests, and with extreme intensity he says that they do not speak but belch; thus we can properly call all human tradition and glittering hypocrisy vomit. If I should today call the pope a drunkard and a belcher, what hope have I of living? That is what this passage does. A drunkard adopts a thirsty man, a drunkard seeks a sober man. It seems clear that by antithesis he is contrasting drunkenness with zeal to hear. (Luther)

NOT A SPOT WITHOUT FILTH – The prophet paints the picture of their besottedness before the eyes of these leaders of the people, in order to hold the filth of

their vice up before them as in a mirror. He now introduces the drunken adversaries in person, with all their scoffing comment of his warnings. (Kretzmann)

28:9–10 The mocking response of Isaiah’s hearers (see NIV text note on v. 10). Cf. the mocking tones of 5:19. (CSB)

28:9 WHO IS HE TRYING TO TEACH – Since the remnant of Israel is not even worthy to be taught anymore, little babies are the only ones fit to be instructed by the Lord (cf Ps 8:2; Mt 11:25; 21:16; 1Co 3:1–2; Heb 5:12–14). This is meant to humble Isaiah’s listeners. (TLSB)

That is, where shall we teach, whom shall we teach, since these take up every place with their ideas? *Knowledge* in the Scriptures denotes the recognition of the truth and the ray of light. Wisdom indeed is faith itself, teaching us how to believe, trust, and fear God. For he who has knowledge of the truth is not hindered by empty traditions, by the observance of days, places, vestments, and appearances. From that knowledge and understanding comes wisdom, that is, true faith. (Luther)

TO WHOM IS HE EXPLAINING – The message and knowledge denote the Word and the report concerning God, as Paul writes in Rom. 10:16: “Who has believed what he has heard from us?” that is, the word and the report. Therefore what is heard is the Word, as far as it is strewn into the ears. That is to say, “We indeed preach the Word, but hardly any accept it.” He replies:

JUST TAKEN FROM THE BREAST – The Word of God is grasped particularly by the little ones and the simple. In Ps. 131:2 we read: “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother’s breast.” As a child that is weaned cries and wails and wants its mother, so, etc. And in summary: “The poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11:5), because the Word of the Gospel is appropriate to none but the afflicted, such as a weaned child, while the drunken and gluttons spurn it. Note, then, that the Word of God is proclaimed throughout the world, that it is received only by the poor and afflicted, and meanwhile it is met with hostility by others. For it is the Word of life, of hope, of strength, of joy, and of grace. Therefore it is accepted by none but the dying, the despairing, the weak sinners, and those weaned entirely from the flesh. (Luther)

They would have him know that they are no unweaned children, and that they are tired of his school mastery ways. They now try to heap ridicule and mockery upon him by stammering about his endless preaching and dinning in their ears. (Kretzmann)

28:10 Repetition used in vv 10, 13 with a play on sounds. While one may hear individual sounds and thus teachings, the hearer cannot make sense of the whole. Like the babble of a child, God’s teaching seems only to be chopped-up phrases with no coherency. They do not get the big picture. (TLSB)

RULE ON RULE – In Hebrew “precept upon precept” means, “command here, command there,” as if the Jews were saying: Wherever we turn, there is nothing but

precept upon precept, line upon line. By this name the prophet designates those who make sport of the Word.

A LITTLE HERE, A LITTLE THERE – That is, wait for it a little at a time, do not lose hope, our salvation will soon come. This is what is meant in the Scriptures by teaching and admonishing. But the prophet says these things against the ungodly in an imitative and mocking way, because the ungodly said that the prophets did nothing but issue commands and precepts, as if all our endeavors were futile. In these words the prophet rebukes such ungodly people, who neither obeyed the commands nor looked to the promises but always made fun of the prophets for promising so much, and who experienced no comfort. (Luther)

They argued that they were not little children who needed repetitive instruction. Their mockery included what appears to be a drunken sarcastic summary of Isaiah's ministry: "Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there." This phrase in Hebrew is striking and seems to imply a kind of drunken stammering. For them, all Isaiah's words were simply commands, the rules that infringed on their revelry. (PBC)

28:11–12† Quoted in part in 1Co 14:21. Unbelieving Israelites accused the prophet of treating them like children, repeating his message "rule on rule" (v. 10). They called it stammering. Isaiah now tells them that since they had scoffed at God's repeated admonitions through him, the Lord would soon teach them through what will seem like the stammerings of those who speak in a foreign language. (CSB)

28:11 *foreign lips.* The language of the Assyrians. (CSB)

Because the Israelites rejected words of warning, spoken plainly in their own tongue, the Lord will speak judgment through the language of the foreign conqueror. Luther: "Summary: I will teach you My Gospel through My apostles; and when this is ridiculed, I will speak to you in another tongue and will deride you, reject your whole righteousness, reject you, and in your place I will receive the foolish Gentiles" (AE 16:225). (TLSB)

I will teach you My Gospel through My apostles; and when this is ridiculed, I will speak to you in another tongue and will deride you, reject your whole righteousness, reject you, and in your place I will receive the foolish Gentiles. That will be a serious joke for you." You see that the Jews know this from experience. (Luther)

28:12 *resting place.* The land given to them by the Lord, in whom they were to trust (see 26:3; 30:15; 40:31; Jos 1:13). (CSB)

That is, this people deserves derision. Why? Because it rejects the doctrine of peace and comfort, because to this people the Word of grace is preached day by day, and yet they spurn it. Then they will have many false teachers who make them restless with various labors and works. (Luther)

LET THE WEARY REST – Had they heeded God's proposal to give them repose and safety, they could have avoided catastrophe. (TLSB)

They have preachers who have the divine command to revive and comfort the afflicted with the Word of consolation, because God wants His preachers to be comforters, and they should always preach the forgiveness of sins to troubled consciences. (Luther)

would not listen. Cf. Jer 6:16. (CSB)

That is, “They have the Word of the prophets in which there is rest, quiet, and repose, yet because of their ungodliness they have refused to hear it. Therefore I will give them over to lies and speak to them in mockery and derision.” Here the prophet is speaking of the disposition and punishment of the ungodly, as those who have rejected the Word of true hope and trust and are therefore wrapped up in the word of false hope and lying. They are given over to a base mind (Rom. 1:28). (Luther)

28:13 *will become.* They say the prophet is speaking nonsense, so the word of the Lord that he speaks will remain nonsense to them (see 6:9–10 and notes). (CSB)

SNARED AND CAPTURED – snared and captured by the enemy. Thus many a person, who in our days is sneering at the Word of God as an endless repetition of a jumble of rules and orders of life, will find himself judged and condemned to an eternity of damnation by that very Word; for “he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Kretzmann)

28:1–13 A remnant—those who trust in the Lord—will find rest and repose in Him. When Ephraim stumbled in its own glory, it ignored the knowledge of the Lord and the beauty of His precepts. We, too, must be careful not to become drunk with love of self, but always to seek the Lord in the beauty of His Word. By Jesus’ sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, He offers rest for every weary soul. All who believe will receive His unfading crown of glory. • “Crown Him the Lord of life, Who triumphed o’er the grave And rose victorious in the strife For those He came to save. His glories now we sing, Who died and rose on high, Who died eternal life to bring And lives that death may die.” Amen. (LSB 525:4) (TLSB)

28:14 THEREFORE HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD – Here follows a most vehement admonition of the prophet to hear the Word diligently. A *scoffer* is most accurately one who not only is himself evil but also ridicules all the things of God, His Word, wisdom, and righteousness and also has his sport with the prophets and their word and relies on his own righteousness and uprightness, as we see in the Pharisees and scribes in Christ’s day. (Luther)

scoffers. People who despise God and His Word (cf Ps 1:1; Pr 21:24). Referring to the people of Judah as “this people” signals that they are no longer the Lord’s covenant people, to whom He always refers as “My people” (e.g., Is 40:1). (TLSB)

WHO RULE – Such ungodly and scoffers rule and tyrannize over the consciences of the people. It is as if He were saying: “You scoffers are not ungodly for yourselves

alone, but with your traditions you also oppress and tyrannize this most wretched people, who should be made subject to My Word.” (Luther)

28:15 WE HAVE ENTERED INTO A COVENANT – In the plainest terms he pictures the nature and whole body of the ungodly, who are so exceedingly uncertain, and yet most secure in their own presumption, that they can be diverted from their ungodliness neither by promises nor by threats nor by admonitions. (Luther)

WITH THE GRAVE WE HAVE MADE AN AGREEMENT – Isaiah is not quoting the people; he is mocking their covenant with Egypt (30:1–7) and their proclamation of peace (cf 48:22). In the face of imminent danger, these people believe that they are potentially immortal; in reality, they have made a covenant with death. (TLSB)

The word *הַרְוּ* in Hebrew means vision, prophecy, and agreement. This is what Paul says to the Colossians. It is always peace, peace for you, because the ungodly construe all their worst deeds, passions, and persecutions as obedience to God, and this is their peace and covenant with death. They say: “Why should God punish us who serve Him with works, affections, and even with murder? How God ought to cater to us obedient ones!” (Luther)

In Jerusalem, the leaders had made an alliance with Egypt for protection against the Assyrian invasion. Their hope was in Egypt – a hope that would never be realized. (PBC)

WHEN AN OVERWHELMING SCOURAGE SWEEPS – that is, “we are free not only from death and hell, but from every scourge and evil.” At all events, they do come to the ungodly, and yet they live in such smugness. (Luther)

The coming Assyrian attack. (TLSB)

MADE A LIE OUR REFUGE...FALSEHOOD ...HIDING PLACE – Not that they themselves call their plans lies and falsehood; they rather call them righteousness and truth. But the prophet calls them that. For the ungodly claim to call a spade a spade so here they call a lie righteousness and falsehood truth. A lie and falsehood are nothing else than the appearance and pretense of godliness, something that Paul assails. (Luther)

Isaiah mocks their plans and shows their foolishness. (TLSB)

28:15, 18 *covenant with death*. Possibly an allusion to necromancy and worship of idols (see 8:19). By using a vivid figure of speech, Isaiah mocks their sense of assurance against national calamity, placing on their lips a claim to have a covenant with death that it will not harm them (see Hos 2:18). (CSB)

28:16 *foundation*. Faith in God, not in human resources, provides the only solid basis for hope. He will carry out His threat to destroy Jerusalem. But He will not give up His plan to build an

indestructible Zion, made up of living stones and founded on a precious cornerstone. The NT proclaims the fulfillment in Jesus Christ and His Church (Eph 2:20). Hus: “Behold how these two Roman apostles and bishops, Peter and Paul, prove from Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ is himself the stone and the Rock of foundation” (*The Church*, pp 76–77). (TLSB)

stone. The Lord (see 8:14; 17:10 and notes). (CSB)

This passage is treated more fully by the two apostles Peter (1 Peter 2:6) and Paul (Rom. 10:11). I understand this chapter as referring to all Israel and Ephraim. By metonymy I take it to mean “all Israel.” Before the prophet threatens them with destruction, he first sets forth promises to strengthen the believers, as if to say, “You ungodly people do not come to your senses. Know this: I will delay punishing you, I will first pick out the chosen men from your midst.” (Luther)

The text must be carefully considered on the basis of its explanation by the apostles, namely, that Christ is the stone, not sand, so that we may be most solidly built on Christ. *Foundation*: not something thrown down, not easily overthrown, but firmly established through the preaching of the apostles, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:10 and Heb. 2:2. This stone, thus established, is built upon by one who has confidence in the true Word of God. This stone will render its superstructure sure and strong, because it is excellently established against every attack. (Luther)

TESTED STONE – The Hebrew word יָסַד means a tester, so that Christ is a tested stone, that is, distressed and afflicted, or He is a testing stone, that is, a stone by whose shape all other stones are tested, so that we may be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29). As Christ was polished, hewn, and squared by the promise, by death and the cross, so we, in His image, should become well polished by such suffering and such a cross. (Luther)

Not necessarily a stone laid on or below ground, but a stone chosen to strengthen a corner and keep the wall in alignment. Luther: “Christ is a tested stone, that is, distressed and afflicted, or He is a testing stone, that is, a stone by whose shape all other stones are tested, so that we may be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29). As Christ was polished, hewn, and squared by the promise, by death and the cross, so we, in His image, should become well polished by such suffering and such a cross. Therefore it behooves all the godly to be thoroughly tested by cross and persecution. For this reason the flesh which shrinks from the cross remains unpolished in its desires and unsuited to this stone” (AE 16:229–30). “Confidence is to be placed in Christ’s intercession, because this alone has God’s promise. We know that Christ’s merits alone atone for us. Because of His merits we are regarded righteous when we believe in Him” (Ap XXI 31). (TLSB)

sure foundation. See 1Co 3:11; cf. 1Pe 2:4–7. (CSB)

In Hebrew יָסַד יָסַד, “grounded in the foundation,” as if to say: “Let all the storms of the tyrants and of the heavenly spirits and all dangers rush in, I will construct a sure foundation against their violence. I will see to it that this stone and building will remain

firm.” This is our comfort for those who believe in Christ: By no power, either of tyrants on earth, or in the nether regions, or in the air, can you be jarred loose. This is our defense in Christ against them. (Luther)

ONE WHO TRUSTS – The promise follows the description of the stone. Paul explains this passage thus: “He will not be put to shame” (Rom. 10:11). Therefore let us inscribe this passage in golden letters, as if to say: “All other works, rites, kinds of righteousness and piety are put to shame and are in a hurry. Only *he who believes will not be in haste* and will not be put to shame. Hence, apart from faith there is nothing but confusion. *To be in haste* and to put to shame mean the same thing. For to be in haste and to flee are the precise characteristics of a terrified conscience that hastily flees the rustling of a leaf (Lev. 26:36). Most aptly therefore he attributes “being in haste” to an alarmed conscience. *He will not be in haste is* for the godly, who do not flee but have Christ as their stone and mediator. It follows, then, that a Christian must not believe that we are justified by another righteousness. Let all works by which we aim to gain righteousness and all our own merits depart, because we are built upon the foundation not by doing works but by believing. Therefore let every godly man, terrified by sin, run to Christ as the Mediator and Propitiator, and let him leave all his own works behind. (Luther)

not be in haste. Those who have faith will not flee in terror because they know they are safe with God. (TLSB)

28:17 measuring line ... plumb line. The standards and tests the Lord will apply are his justice and righteousness. (CSB)

A line helps level the top of a wall. A long string with a weight at its end (plumb line) was hung from the top of a corner of a building to determine whether the walls were straight. The tools guide construction of a new building (Ezk 47:3), but also judge whether an old building is fit for demolition (cf Is 34:11; Am 7:7–9). (TLSB)

A threat to the ungodly follows upon the promise of the godly to the godly, as if to say: “I will weigh out justice with a balance, that is, I will make a distinction between the good and the bad. I will not be so rash that I will destroy the good with the bad, nor so good that I will not punish the bad for the sake of the good, but I will first separate the good from the bad. As a carpenter, who marks off with the plummet what must be cut off, so I will put the measure and rule around this stone to determine who is to be saved and who is to be cast off.” The measuring line is: “He who believes and is baptized” (Mark 16:16). This faith is the norm of saving with reference to this stone. The believers will remain with the carpenter’s wood. The unbelievers must be chopped off like kindling. (Luther)

hail. See v. 2; 30:30; 32:19. (CSB)

WATER WILL OVERFLOW – That is, the flood. “As the blades of straw cannot stand the hail and the flood, so they will not endure My wrath, because they put their

hope and confidence not in Me but in a lie, and for that reason they will very easily be crushed.” For all kinds of self-righteousness, even if practiced for a thousand years, have made all toil futile, and are therefore carried away by the water and the hail and the wrath of God. (Luther)

28:18 COVENANT WITH DEATH WILL BE ANNULLED – The ungodly man completely rejects this admonition until he has learned by experience. (Luther)

OVERWHELMING SCOURGE – A mixed metaphor referring to the armies of Assyria and Babylonia. “Overwhelming” pictures an army as a flooding river (see 8:7); a “scourge” is a whip, used figuratively of a punitive calamity (10:26). These are threats to the ungodly, who do not escape the wrath of God. Thus you see that the ungodly are elated and exalted in good times but despair in bad times. Christians, on the other hand, fear God and are safe both in good times and in bad times. (Luther)

28:19-20 Alludes to the angel of death from the plagues (Ex 12:1–30) by using the language of death (“passes through”) and bed/covering (the angel of death came at night, while all were sleeping). (TLSB)

28:19 AS OFTEN AS IT COMES – By this amplified description he wants to impress upon them that the prophet, too, is concerned about depriving them of every bit of courage, so that they might put their hope in one hour of deliverance. But disaster has its doors open to them every hour, because they do not have the Foundation and Rock, Christ, and therefore they are very quickly flung down by every wind, as the parable in Matt. 7:27 shows. (Luther)

MORNING AFTER MORNING – If *in the morning*, namely, the flood comes, it will take you in the morning; if *by day*, it will take you by day, and likewise *by night*; that is, always you are exposed to disasters unprepared. *In the morning* can also mean “quickly,” as it is understood frequently in the Scriptures. So here *in the morning* is “very quickly,” when you have not expected it, in the midst of peace. (Luther)

BRING SHEER TERROR – Fools must be deloused with clubs. For fools who are without the Word are influenced by no admonitions and always sing their stale old songs, “Lamb, lamb.” And as Solomon says (Prov. 27:22): “Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.” They never give up, and therefore the prophet says, *It will be sheer terror to understand the message*. They do not want to be instructed, therefore they must be driven with whips. For this reason the fools need to have a club on the shoulders; thus in distress and terror they depart from their presumption, and it makes them understand the message of the Word. So, then, the message of the Word is not received in peace and presumption; but when affliction and trouble come, then the power of the Word exerts itself both with the godly and with the ungodly. For you see that in the most important matters and in good times even the godly do not give heed to the Word but do receive it in affliction. How much more in the case of the ungodly. (Luther)

the message. God is giving a powerful message through the Assyrian army. (TLSB)

28:20 *too short ... too narrow.* Israel was unprepared both militarily and spiritually. (CSB)

May be a proverbial saying that Isaiah quotes to illustrate his point: all human efforts to defy God will prove ineffective. (TLSB)

Two proverbial comparisons are used: The bed is short, the cover is narrow; and so one has to adjust to the situation. Therefore also by affliction we are driven to the Word away from our presumption. Jerome applies this to marriage, where the husband says to his wife: The bed is narrow, it cannot hold both me, your husband, and an adulterer. Either I or the adulterer has to fall out of it.” Thus Christ, our Husband, cannot be there at the same time with our presumption. One has to fall. But this thought of Jerome’s is allegorical. Let us understand it literally concerning distress. For just as the shortness of the bed keeps us from stretching our limbs but makes us pull them up so that we do not fall out and get cold, so distress holds us together so that we do not fall away from the Word of God, neither in good times or in affliction, but by faith abide in it. The cross teaches us how to snuggle up, since in good times we sometimes stroll and stray, inwardly by presumption and outwardly by our endeavors, our lusts and luxuries, and other evils. (Luther)

28:21 *rise up.* God is moving to act. (TLSB)

Mount Perazim. Where God “broke out” against the Philistines (2Sa 5:20). (CSB)

At these places, God once intervened to give Israel victory over foes. (TLSB)

It is as if he were saying: “Because you scoff at the Word, the Lord is forced to do a strange work, namely, to judge and to destroy.” For the proper work and nature of God is to save. But when our flesh is so evil that it cannot be saved by God’s proper work, it is necessary for it to be saved by His alien work. Because in good times we stroll and stray from the Word, our covers have to be made narrow, and we must be disciplined by various afflictions so that we may be saved by God’s alien work; the ungodly are altogether driven by God’s proper and foreign work because they do not want to get under these narrow covers but want to stretch out in their own. Meanwhile God keeps His own by means of the cross and narrow covers and thus separates them from the ungodly. This is God’s alien work, by which He condemns the ungodly, so that we may be saved. So you see that our flesh is outwardly indulgent when it is without the cross, and therefore various afflictions are necessary to control that flesh. I Chronicles 14 reports the stow of Perazim, where the king did not want to do battle unless he had signs of the winds. In Hebrew פָּרַץ means robber, or one who breaks through, one who separates and divides, one who does not walk on the king’s highway but like robbers goes on untrodden roads through hedges and bushes. So the heretic forsakes the true way and walks in his own ways. Here he stands on Mount Perazim, because he is separated from the true way, from the righteousness of God and the Word, and goes his own way. He will be a divider who stands on Mount Perazim. This is what Christ did: He

divided the ungodly from the godly by His Word in order to save His own. And so he does with our flesh, in order to preserve us through various afflictions. There God, too, stands on Mount Perazim. (Luther)

Valley of Gibeon. Where God sent hail to demolish the Amorites (Jos 10:10–12). (CSB)

Read this story in Joshua 9, where God freed his own from the enemies by means of a hail storm. So Christ defends His own by His Word, which to the ungodly is nothing but hail and hailstones, while to the godly it is rain. To the ungodly the Word is scandal, pestilence, and death; but to the godly it is righteousness, refreshment, life, and sweet aroma. This is not the fault of the Gospel but of the ungodly, who by their unfaithfulness turn all good things into evil for themselves. Therefore this work is called God's alien work, to cast down the ungodly, who are themselves to blame, and to save His own godly people, who accept the Word and all the things of God. "These, then, I keep and defend by means of My proper work." But by their ungodliness the ungodly turn God into Satan, light into darkness, and righteousness into offense, and these are, therefore, lost by their own fault through God's alien work. (Luther)

strange work ... alien task. This time God would fight against Israel. (CSB)

Now He will be on the side of the enemy and thus inflict punishment for the breaking of His Law, no matter how strange it may appear in light of His original gracious intentions. "He calls it the 'strange' work of the Lord when He terrifies, because to make alive and comfort is God's own proper work. But He terrifies, Isaiah says, for this reason—that there may be a place for comfort and making alive. For hearts that are secure and do not feel God's wrath hate consolation. In this manner Scripture is accustomed to join these two, the terrors and the consolation.... Into these two works all Scripture has been distributed. The one part is the *Law*, which shows, reproves, and condemns sins. The other part is the *Gospel*, that is, the promise of grace bestowed in Christ" (Ap XIIA 52–53). (tIsb)

"Strange is His cultivation to produce a strange culture," that is, God must act by means of an alien work. For if He wants to sow the seed, He must get rid of the weeds. Thus this is done by God's own proper work, in which He plants and raises His own, and uproots, drives out, and casts away the ungodly; and this same work becomes a strange work for the ungodly. We may very easily experience this in the rose, which is of one and the same nature, but the bees and spiders have different matter in it. This is pertinent, because the righteousness of the Gospel had to be established, and for that reason it was necessary to condemn man's own righteousness and works. So it was necessary for God to do a strange deed and to conclude all under sin in order finally to justify them. He condemns and expels righteousness and the people clinging to their righteousness in order to raise up His own righteousness. He kills the flesh in order to make the spirit alive. This is, therefore, a most joyful thought which shows that every flower and splendor of the flesh must fall away so that the spiritual flower may bloom. (Luther)

28:22 NOW STOP YOUR MOCKING – He is addressing those who laugh at the words of God, saying: “You will not cause damage to the Word, but rather you will bring harm upon yourselves.” (Luther)

CHAINS WILL BECOME HEAVIER – If they don’t listen to God, their punishment will increase. (tlsb)

That is, you are falling into a greater error. This is an excellent illustration, touching the power of the Law and of consciences, because the conscience is held captive by the Law. These are the bonds, namely, the Law, as we read in the Gospel: “Bind him hand and foot” (Matt. 22:13). Thus bound, they are unfit for anything. Such are those who live in the Law without faith. (Luther)

destruction decreed. See 10:22–23 and note on 10:22. (CSB)

God is causing their defeat through the Assyrians. (TLSB)

This passage is treated above in chapter 10:23. The prophet is saying: “I have heard a shortened decree from the Lord, which will come upon the whole earth and which admonishes them to come to their senses.” (Luther)

whole land. Entire nation would be affected. (TLSB)

28:23–29 A wisdom poem (a poetic parable) in two stanzas, each ending in a verse that praises the wisdom of God. In the context, and since “threshing” is emphasized (vv. 27–28), the point may be that though God must punish Israel, his actions will be as measured and as well-timed as a farmer’s. See 27:12 and note. (CSB)

28:23 LISTEN AND HEAR MY VOICE – It is surprising that the prophet calls the people to repentance with so many words. He says: “Give ear, hear, hearken. Listen to me, I have something to say to you.” (Luther)

28:24–25, 27–28 Isaiah’s message for the remnant is a farming parable. Though the farmer must “plow for sowing,” this destructive work will eventually come to an end. Further, though the farmer must beat the dill out with a stick and cumin with a rod and drive his cart and horses over the grain, the end product will be that the farmer saves the dill, cumin, and grain for bread. In other words, though there is much wrath to be endured, in the end, the remnant who trust in the Lord will be saved. This is why the Lord is “wonderful in counsel” (cf 9:6) and “excellent in wisdom” (cf 11:2). (TLSB)

28:24 DOES HE PLOW CONTINUALLY – This Whole text to the end is comfort for the godly who see this destruction. Paul uses this argument in Romans 9–11, where he takes issue with the arguments of the Jews, who boasted that a truthful God will certainly perform what He has promised them, that they are God’s people and have many promises. Paul sweated much over these boasts of the Jews, lashing out at their empty boasting and showing that they have been rejected. So here the prophet says

that the Gentiles are to be accepted and the Jews forsaken, and yet God remains truthful, even though it may seem otherwise. (Luther)

HARROWING THE SOIL – It is as if he were saying: “Does the plowman always set out to plow and always to cut a furrow, and does he do it day after day? Is not such a plowman irritated by the hard work that accomplishes nothing?” But he does his work in its order much more for the purpose of sowing the seed. So it is necessary that our trust and righteousness be plowed and broken up, that the green sod be turned over, that we clearly despair of it and prepare ourselves for a better seed. (Luther)

28:25 *cummin*. An herb for seasoning. (CSB)

Small seeds used as spices. (TLSB)

Thus *when he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, or coriander, or vetches?* He says: “Thus the plowman must not be viewed in his plowing and breaking, where he first destroys and lays waste the earth; for this is his alien work and it looks like a destruction of the earth, yet a fruitful harvest follows this.” By this comparison he points also to God’s reproof, which is to condemn the ungodly as by an alien work, but to receive the godly, who will put God’s varied gifts to use in the field. The different kinds of seed designate the variety of God’s gifts, as in 1 Cor. 14:1 ff. This parable of the plowman is, then, an indication of the work of God. When He appears to be destroying everything with devastation, destruction, and killing, then at last He lifts up His own, who have been well disciplined by these dangers and miseries. Thus this plowing on the part of God will apply itself to the seeds. The application follows. (Luther)

spelt. A kind of wheat (see note on Ex 9:32). (CSB)

emmer ... the border? A hardy grain, planted to give shelter to more fragile plants. (TLSB)

28:26 **INSTRUCTS...TEACHES... THE RIGHT WAY** – That is, the ending turns out this way, that “God will teach His own.” Note. In the end the plowman tears up the soft for the purpose of seeding it, for it would be futile to sow the seed in untilled ground. So Christ plows His church and His own with extreme persecution and affliction, namely, so that He may sow a body to our flesh and that an imperishable body may sprout and rise up. *Aright*, God will make everything turn out right. (Luther)

28:27 *rod*. See 10:5 and note. (CSB)

We do not know the customs of these people, and therefore we cannot properly explain the comparison. But note this: So it is in threshing, that it has different kinds of operation, and each fruit has its own threshing implement. And fruits and grasses are not threshed and beaten in order to discard them altogether but to separate the grain from the husks and make it available for man’s use. So also God threshes His people with condemnation, killing, and various dangers in this way, that it looks like total

destruction to us, as it looks in threshing; but then it is finally prepared for use. So the Christian is consumed and afflicted, not to despair altogether, but to be killed. Therefore every plowman, sower, and thresher is a picture of God; the earth and the seed are pictures of the people, so that we are thus plowed and threshed by God to get rid of the coarse husks. As He does not always thresh just to be constantly threshing, but to look for bread; so we are not always afflicted, but only for a time, so that we may come to eternal life. (Luther)

28:28 *thresh*. To break up stalks of grain so that the seed can be separated from the chaff. (TLSB)

cart wheel. Sometimes used as a means of threshing. (TLSB)

28:29 *wonderful in counsel*. See 9:6 and note. (CSB)

Two things are required for a good undertaking: excellent counsel and a thoroughly happy ending. So here God in His excellent counsel plows and threshes us so that the plowman might have grain and bread, so that He Himself might have His own people. Therefore God's counsel is wonderful: He condemns our own endeavors in order to bring us to the goal; and though to our reason and flesh the situation in that condemnation appears to be completely hopeless, yet it will finally come out at a happy ending. He begins in wisdom and wisely sees it through. (Luther)

That is, this parable teaches the wisdom of God in the higher plane, the manner in which He deals with His harvest on earth. The Lord punishes, but only in order to bless; He threshes, but not with crushing blows, not with the purpose of destroying. His object in sending tribulation is to separate the moral chaff from the wheat and to obtain the fullness of the harvest. (Kretzmann)

28:14–29 Jerusalem faces destruction because her inhabitants sought shelter in lies and falsehood instead of in the Word of the Lord. Yet the Lord will preserve a remnant founded on a precious cornerstone. Like the people of Jerusalem, we are often tempted to take refuge in pleasant-sounding lies. Instead, we should gladly learn the wonderful counsel of God's Word. Jesus is God's promised and precious cornerstone. Whoever believes and builds on this foundation will find the power of sin and death annulled. • Heavenly Father, open our ears always to give attention to Your Word, that we may find refuge in Your wonderful counsel. Amen. (TLSB)