

## **Bypassing God**

### **Isaiah 28:1-17**

#### **Introduction:**

Along cross country highways, we often see signs that say, “Truck Bypass” or “Business Bypass.” The weary traveler anxious to miss congested downtown areas learns the importance of these signs.

Although advantageous for cross country traveling the same procedure can be disastrous in one's spiritual pilgrimage, for some tempting bypasses bring tragic results.

People are often tempted to bypass facing up to their relationship to the living God.

Occasionally we find a person who is well versed in the Bible but who has spent hour upon hour reading it not to find direction but to look for loopholes by which to justify himself and to provide grounds for argumentative activities.

The context of our scripture passage is the first years of king Hezekiah's reign, prior to the fall of Samaria.

While predicting the fall of Samaria as God's judgment on their sin, Isaiah at the same time addresses Judah, who is guilty of the same sin - that of bypassing the holy law of the Lord.

Dark is the future where one turns off the road of life at the sign that says, “Exit Here to Bypass God.”

**I. Bypassing a crown of glory for a crown of pride (Isaiah 28:1-5)**

It is impossible to travel in two directions at the same time. Every crossroad involves a decision.

To turn to the right means that one must give up that which lies to the left.

A. *A Crown of Glory*. God breathed into man the breath of life that he might someday wear a crown of glory.

Isaiah, in referring to the faithful remnant, promises, “*In that day the Lord almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people*” (v.5).

Nothing so crowns a life as the blessing and fellowship of God which shall, on that final day, be fully revealed for all eyes to behold.

Every person is traveling towards his day of coronation. He awaits a crown.

As the death of winter quietly touches the leaf and Bush on the mountain side, creating a radiant beauty, so the end of life can likewise be made into a beautiful praise to the Lord.

Even death can be a silent witness to the grace of God when faced in the quiet assurance of faith.

But multitudes are turning off the road of life and bypassing the crown of glory.

B. *A Crown of Pride.* Using “Ephraim” to denote the northern Kingdom of Israel, Isaiah sternly warns, “*woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty... That wreath, the pride of Ephraims drunkards, will be trampled under foot. That fading flower, his glorious beauty... Will be like figs ripe before harvest - as soon as people see them and take them in hand, they swallow them.*” (vv.1-4)

Sitting on a hill surrounded by rolling green slopes, the city of Samaria, the capital of the northern Kingdom, resembled a beautiful crown resting on a soft velvet head.

Though as radiant as a flower in full bloom, its beauty was doomed to fade.

To begin with, the people are drunken with pride and with the exhilaration of their own self-sufficiency.

No doubt this had given way to literal drunkenness as human appetites were given full sway.

In but a short time, Samaria would fall victim to the cruel assyrians... their luxurious way of life would soon be given over to slavery.

Not slavery to sin or slavery of the mind... but literal physical slavery.

Their families would be ravished, and their nation would forever be scattered and lost. Once the assyrians came in and scattered the northern Kingdom we would never see these tribes again.

Isaiah tells them ahead of time the reason for it all... he tells them why this was going to happen: they have bypassed God.

In other words, they gave up a crown of glory, for a crown of pride.

## **II. Bypassing scriptural instruction for worldly instruction (Isaiah 28:11-13).**

There is a sense in which scripture and the world both teach the same lessons... the difference is that scripture seeks to prepare people ahead of time that they may know how to live, while the world makes people aware of their mistakes after it is too late to make a difference.

The Bible affirms that life is always empty when God is left out. Yet people prefer to learn from the world that life without God is empty.

Once having lived life out, the knowledge that it has been empty is poor consolation when nothing but an eternity of emptiness lies ahead.

A. *The scripture as an instructor.* For some strange reason, people resist the teaching of God's word.

Although Isaiah is speaking specifically concerning the sins of Samaria, he is speaking to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and trying to make them aware of their similar sins.

Isaiah finds a very poor response when he does this.

Those who refuse to hear isaiah's message actually accuse him of treating them like babies, of lecturing them on petty morality: “*so then, the word of the Lord to them will become: do this, do that; a little here, a little there*” (v13).

Isaiah's listeners are broad minded people who have somehow managed to rise above the “simple” demands of holiness and have “seen” that these demands are rather unimportant.

The taunts thrown at Isaiah can be rendered in terms of a mother's instruction to a young child: “Yes, yes; no, no.”

They feel themselves to be beyond commandments, to have come of age so that they are quite capable of doing what they want to do without having any religious instruction.

They reason that a man's life is his own business and, after all, he has a right to do what he wants with it.

B. *The world as instructor*. To refuse God's teaching is to learn at the hands of the world....Of course, God is behind that lesson also.

But when God uses the world as an instructor, he is present in wrath, not in mercy.

This is not God's choice for a lesson, but a lesson that must be taught. Since people will not listen to God, they must suffer the consequences and learn from bitter experience.

When people, drunken with pride, reject the teachings of scripture, they then can expect severer instruction.

Samaria, proud and self-sufficient, we'll learn her lesson from lips that speak foreign languages: “*very well then, with foreign lips and strained tongues God will speak to this people*” (v11).

Isaiah refers to the wicked and cruel Assyrians here. Though their speech is foreign, they will teach Samaria a very sobering lesson about their pride.

Samaria may well take lightly the message of God's prophet, but when the fierce invaders stand within the city walls and their language controls life in the streets, the people of Samaria will then have learned the hard way the lessons God sought to teach them gracefully.

The Bible reminds readers that *“good judgment wins favor, but the way of the unfaithful leads to their destruction.”* (Prov. 13:15)

### **III. Bypassing Christ for human alliances (Isaiah 28:16-17)**

Isaiah turns from the discussion of the sin of Samaria to the problem near at hand - the sin of the men of Jerusalem.

*“Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem.”* (v14)

They too are guilty of bypassing God

A. Christ the foundation. Isaiah, more than any other Old Testament prophet, looked ahead to God's promised redemption. We see in his words the promised Christ: *“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation”* (v16).

This is not only a foundation stone for life that has withstood every test, but he is also a stone that in turn tests every character.

Isaiah's hearers knew much about cornerstones.

Those in solomon's temple were as much as 38 feet long and weighed over 100 tons each.

A life, like a temple, must have a firm foundation.

People cannot refuse the gospel and be at peace... they cannot reject God and stand on firm ground.

Christ is the only safe guide.

The Lord warns, "*I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the Plumb line*" (v17).

What God is saying is that his rule of measurement will be divine justice and that the Plumb line by which he will judge every person will be that of his righteousness.

People build their lives much like a brick mansion builds a wall.

The foundation, the method of building, and the Plumb line are all important.

When life is built apart from the law of God, it resembles a wall laid by an inexperienced Craftsman. The bulge gets larger and larger until at long last, life comes tumbling down.

B. *Self the foundation*. People don't deny the presence and certainty of death, yet they seem to feel as though they have, by some prior arrangement, made everything alright without having to become involved with god.

This is what Isaiah was talking about in verse 15.

So what is Jerusalem's secret weapon to their notion of self-sufficiency?

The people of Jerusalem have quietly made an alliance with Egypt and therefore feel no need of prayerful supplication of God's deliverance. We see this in Isaiah 30:1-2 *“Woe to the obstinate children declares the Lord, to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaohs protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge.”*

Evil people always suppose they have an ace up their sleeve. An old proverb reminds us that we must live with the results of poor bargains: “you've made your bed; now you must lie in it.”

Isaiah warned, “the bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you.” (v20)

When a man chooses to live without God, he is condemning himself to a future as cramped as a coffin.

The bed he is making will provide neither rest nor protection from winter's night.

The Jewish people as a whole, by rejecting Christ, made for themselves a bed in which they have never found rest.

We have a choice to find rest or not.

## **Conclusion**

God has many signposts in this world.



The church stands as a visible testimony to God. The Bible points people to Jesus Christ.

History proclaims day by day that sin brings judgment. Wise people read the road signs, but the foolish rush madly on, bypassing God.

Will you read the road signs, will you seek the crown of glory or will you seek the crown of pride?

Will you take instruction from scripture or will you use the world as your instructor?

And will you allow Christ to be your foundation or will you rely on your own self-sufficiency which only leads to destruction.

We are all heading towards a coronation day. Our race will one day be run... What do we want our prize to be? Don't bypass God.