

**” In that Day God’s Truth and Wisdom Exposes those Destined to Perish ”**  
**Isaiah 28:18-29**

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(All Scripture quoted from the NIV Bible unless otherwise noted)

## **Historical Background and Biblical Context**

### ***‘Judah’s new policies under Hezekiah’***

Hezekiah reversed the idolatrous policies of his father Ahaz. He did this even with regards to Ahaz’s alliances. Whereas Ahaz sought help from Assyria to oppose Israel and Syria, Hezekiah sought help from Egypt to oppose Assyria. Isaiah opposed both policies alike; recognizing that faith in God, not reliance on foreign powers, as Judah’s only real and true hope for survival.

Although his rebukes are directed mainly against Judah, Isaiah opens the section with a short message he once preached against Israel. (The reason for this, as Isaiah will soon point out, is that the message is now equally relevant to Judah.)

The nation’s rulers are a lot of drunkards, who live only to enjoy themselves and do not care about the welfare of the people. Because they are heavy wine-drinkers, they are compared with a flourishing vineyard. A severe hailstorm (symbolic of the Assyrian invasion) will now destroy the vineyard, and enemy soldiers will trample the grapes underfoot (28:1-4). Nevertheless, the few who remain faithful to God will not be forsaken. God will give them his wisdom and strength, enabling them to come through the crisis successfully (5-6).

At this point Isaiah makes it plain that his prophecy against Israel applies also to Judah. Its leaders also are drunkards, even the religious leaders (7-8). They are annoyed at Isaiah for his persistent teaching, and indignantly ask him if he thinks he is teaching children. They are tired of hearing his same simple message over and over, telling them to turn from their evil ways and trust in God (9-10). Through Isaiah God has promised them true peace and perfect rest in exchange for their repentance. If they refuse to listen to these clear and simple words, God will speak to them in a different language, one that they will not understand. That is, they will hear the foreign language of the Assyrian armies whom God sends against them to punish them (11-13).

Judah has made an agreement with Egypt to rebel against Assyria, but God sees it as a rebellion against him. It is like an agreement with the world of the dead instead of with the living God. It is based on falsehood instead of on God’s truth (14-15). God is the only reliable foundation on whom Judah can build its hopes. If the Judeans trusted in him, they would not need to go running to Egypt for help (16). God will act with

justice and righteous judgment against his faithless people. Their alliance with Egypt will be as useless and powerless against Assyria as a temporary shelter is against raging flood waters (17).

Day and night the ferocious Assyrian attack will go on. The people of Judah will find that all their preparation has not been enough to give them the safety and comfort they hoped for; that dependence on anything or anyone other than God is a lie (19-20). Isaiah warns that God will now direct his discipline towards his own. In the same way that the Lord allowed David to punish his enemies, these people will be punished by their enemies because of their faithless disobedience. Although foreign to His desire to show love, mercy and grace, the Lord has declared this act of discipline over the earth will surely occur. And the more they ignore Isaiah's warnings, the harsher the punishment will be (21-22).

### **The Lesson: "God's Truth and Wisdom Exposes those Destined to Perish"**

***Vv. 23-29 Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is the wheel of a cart rolled over cumin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cumin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread; so, one does not go on threshing it forever. The wheels of a threshing cart may be rolled over it, but one does not use horses to grind grain. All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, whose plan is wonderful, whose wisdom is magnificent.***

Isaiah first prompts those to whom he is speaking to not only hear the words that he speaks, but implores them to pay close attention with the sole purpose of understanding this important message. This he does because the message he now gives is given in the form of a parable (like many of teachings that Christ gave). The message is given utilizing common farming practices; practices that his audience would be well aware of.

The parable itself is clear enough in that it tells of the great pains and careful management that the farmer takes to achieve a good harvest of crops. He does this utilizing simple principles of farming, as he observes specific methods and orders that are guided by his own judgement (taught by experience?).

1. Dependent upon bible translations read, the apparent answer to these might be different. But as we continue through these verses, we find ourselves to the same end. The King James version is more explicit with regards to time of

plowing and explanation for breaking up and working soil. It reads; **Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground?** A farmer plows specifically to prepare the soil for planting seed. The plowing process opens or loosens the soil to allow air and moisture into the ground and to prepare a light and fluffy seedbed. Does he plow all day? The answer is yes. Does he open and break the clods? Again, the answer is yes. He plows and breaks up the soil to prepare the land for seeding with the expectation and the hope of a bountiful harvest (v.24). When the plowing is completed and the soil is leveled, **does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin?** The seed sown is sown into soil that is best suited for the desired crop. The farmer knows what grain grows best in sandy soil and what grows best in soil with a high clay content, so he sows each in its place (v.25). *Look at God; in His infinite wisdom He has provided a multiplicity of soils, suited to bring about a harvest of produce of which they are best suited to produce!* It is by the observance of God's creation that the farmer comes to know all these things (v.26).

2. After the harvest then comes the threshing; the separation of the seed from the harvested plant by striking or beating. Caraway and cumin, both members of the carrot family are tender plants that this separation process is fairly easy only requiring minimal effort due to the fact that both are customarily used for seasoning of food. But grain (also a type of seed) is contained in a husk (most often referred to as chaff) and must be pound into fragments by a threshing tool and an additional process of grinding for its use in making bread. However, it is ground only enough to loosen the seed from the chaff to complete the separation.

With the knowledge of the farmer's actions and the reasons for each we can deduct that this parable depicts God's response and remedy to the sin and disobedience of the Judeans. If we are to understand the produce mentioned in the parable to be the people of God, and the threshing to be the discipline given by God, therein is exhibited the love, mercy and grace of God. However, in contrast those that do not remain faithful, who resist the discipline of the Lord, this threshing will come with an even greater force.

Jesus proclaimed this truth, **I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (John 15:1,2)**. The parable shows us that God as the gardener or farmer as stated in the parable, has all knowledge and wisdom regarding His produce. By His word and ordinances, He is continually cultivating His garden, the church. He knows when to till the soil for planting and when and where to scatter seed. He is meticulous in caring for His garden. God's desire is not to totally destroy His garden but to make it more fruitful. This often

requires that there be some pruning; some removal (separation) from or of unfruitful vines (objects, people, positions; etc., that cause the vine to be non-productive). Being a wise gardener/farmer, God knows just what has to be removed and He knows that its removal is for our good and to His glory.

However, the pruning or separation most often brings with it some pain and possible suffering (threshing). Proverbs 3:12 tells us **the Lord disciplines those He loves.** Here is where we see that God will not always be plowing (threatening), but will at His discretion exact deserved judgement upon sinners.

Just as the farmer in the parable has to pound on, or bruise or crush the caraway, cummin and grain to make it useful for its intended purpose, so God as a good and wise farmer, has to do the same to His people in order that they might be useful for that of which He has purposed them. The good news is, He does not continue in His threshing continually! That is a picture of God's grace and His mercy.