

SGB Pastor-Teacher Seminar 2017

Session 5.1

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Precept Upon Precept

Isaiah 28:10

Introduction

1. At first blush, v. 10 seems prescriptive for word ministry
 - a. We often hear it used that way—You must preach precept upon precept
 - i. It is assumed as a formula for systematic teaching of doctrine
 - b. If we just turn to that verse and read it, it's easy to see why we would take it that way
 - i. It seems like some kind of formula
 1. Almost like a rhyme to make it easy to remember
 - ii. Even in English it comes across lyrical
 1. The Hebrew is even more so, because it is monosyllabic
 - c. But, the immediate context with v. 13 gives us a clue that something is not right about that
 - i. The end of the verse reveals that speaking precept upon precept results in going, falling backward, being broken, snared, and taken
2. What does it mean?
 - a. Obviously, if we are going to properly interpret this verse, we must do so in context

The Broader Context

1. The northern kingdom of Israel had made an alliance with the kingdom of Syria
 - a. They sought Judah to join their alliance to oppose the kingdom of Assyria
 - b. King Ahaz and Judah refused this alliance and Israel and Syria responded by attacking Judah in an effort to depose Ahaz and replace him with the son of Tabeal, a king they could control (2 Ki 15, 16; 2 Ch 28)
2. Out of fear and desperation, Ahaz sought an alliance with Tiglath-Pileser and Assyria to deliver them from Israel and Syria
 - a. God sent the prophet Isaiah specifically to Ahaz to warn him not to make this alliance and rather to hear and trust in the word of God (Is 7)
 - i. He is told specifically that the plot of Israel and Syria would not succeed (Is 7:7)
 - ii. And that the northern kingdom will be judged for their sin (Is 7:8-9)
 1. Ephraim will be broken within 65 years (735 BC to 670 BC)
 - a. 722 BC captivity (2 Ki 17:6)
 - b. 670 BC dissolving among foreigners (2 Ki 17:24; 2 Ch 33:11; Ez 4:2)
3. Ahaz refuses God's word and pays tribute to Tiglath-Pileser, plundering the temple to do so (2 Ch 28)
 - a. Assyria will go to take Samaria and carry Israel away captive in 13 years from this time
 - b. But Judah ends up under tribute

The Immediate Context

1. Is 28 is about 10 years after chapter 7 and about 3 years before the initial carrying away of the northern kingdom by Assyria
2. Chapters 28-35 form a large section in Isaiah's prophecy

- a. The section contains 6 woes, or pronouncements of judgment
 - i. 5 to Israel and Judah in some form
 - 1. Woes denounce pride and the despising of God and His Word, which is seen in their resort to foreign nations for aid
 - ii. 1 to Assyria
 - 1. Woe to Assyria comes as they are an instrument of judgment, which shall be judged
 - a. God is using Assyria to bring judgment on Israel and Judah and here rebukes their desire to turn to Egypt for deliverance from Assyria
- 3. 28:1-13 are about Ephraim, or the northern kingdom
 - a. Though v. 14 reveals that this is addressed to Judah
 - i. It is a prophecy of the taking away of the northern kingdom that will begin in 3 years from this time
 - 1. But, it is spoken to Judah as a warning because they are guilty of the same sins and the implication is that judgment on Ephraim will also be judgment on Judah, which will happen in a little over 100 years
 - a. If they don't repent and obey the word of the Lord

Exposition of Isaiah 28:1-13

- 1. Verses 1-4 depict the coming doom of Samaria, the capitol city of the northern kingdom of Israel
 - a. Given in two images
 - i. The fierce and destructive force of a flood (2)
 - 1. Harkens back to (8:7-8) and the flood imagery depicting Assyria
 - ii. The suddenness of the eating of an early-ripe fruit (4)
- 2. Verses 5-6 promises the preservation of a remnant
 - a. So common in the depictions of judgment throughout Isaiah
- 3. Verses 7-10 give a picture of the religious leadership of the kingdom in light of the warnings of God to them
 - a. 7-8 describe a drunken condition and moral defilement
 - i. Not just the sin of drunkenness, but the drunkenness represents their stupor and senselessness to understand the word of God "err in vision, they stumble in judgment"
 - ii. Hosea also describes Israel's condition as senseless of what their foreign alliance was doing to them
 - 1. Ho 7:8-9 gives two pictures
 - a. A cake that is not watched and turned will be burned on one side and not done on the other
 - b. They were being devoured and did not know it like a man who has grown old and feeble without noticing
 - b. 9-10 are the words the priests and the prophets used to mock God's true messengers sent to warn them
 - i. They saw themselves of superior knowledge and were insulted by the preaching of Isaiah
 - 1. Who will he teach? Preschool children?
 - ii. 10 is a mocking rhyme spoken in monosyllable in the Hebrew to sound almost like babbling

1. Maybe it would be like an adult walking into a college English class and trying to get the class to recite spelling rules: "i before e, except after c, ..."
4. Verses 11-12 describe the consequences to Israel because they would not hear God's word
 - a. 11 God's judgment on them would be captivity
 - i. They would not live in the land God had given them and listen to His Word which they could understand, so He would carry them away and put them under a foreign power whose language they could not understand
 - b. 12 Judgment on them because they refused the word they could understand
 - i. Which word called them to rest through repentance and faith in God
 - c. 13 God's response to the mocking priests and prophets
 - i. God spoke to them simply and clearly, but they rejected as juvenile or despised it
 - ii. Therefore, they are broken and carried away
 1. Captivity to Assyria but pointing to their scattering among the nations

Precept Upon Precept

1. Speaking precept upon precept was a sign of judgment and fulfilling of prophetic ministry
 - a. Isaiah's call (Is 6:9-10)
 - i. In Isaiah's ministry this came in the form of precept upon precept
2. The prophetic ministry is a simultaneous revealing and concealing
 - a. Ezekiel's call (Ez 12:1-2)
 - i. In Ezekiel's ministry this came in the form of parables (Ez 17:1-2)
 1. Which the people also complained of (Ez 20:49)
3. Another form of prophetic judgment ministry would be speaking to the people in foreign tongues (Is 28:11; De 28:49; Je 5:15)
4. This prophetic judgment ministry was fulfilled, culminating in the rejection and killing of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem
 - a. Jesus taught in parables (Mk 4:11-12)
 - b. Tongues (Ac 2:4-12; 1 Co 14:21-22)

Conclusion

1. Precept upon precept is not prescriptive of preaching ministry today
 - a. Our command (2 Timothy 3:16-4:2)
2. If we preach in elementary, or rudimentary, ways, like precept upon precept
 - a. It is to babes
 - i. Immature (He 5:11-14)
 - ii. Carnal (1 Co 3:1-2)