

Isaiah 28:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim,
whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the
head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!

Analysis

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Isaiah pronounces the first of six "woes" in chapters 28-33 (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1), this one targeting the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim/Israel) shortly before Assyria's conquest in 722 BC. **Crown of pride** (ateret ge'ut, אֶתֶרֶת גִּאוּת) depicts Samaria's geographical position—crowned on a hill overlooking fertile valleys—and its spiritual arrogance. The wordplay is devastating: their literal crown (hilltop capital) represents their prideful crown (self-exaltation).

Drunkards of Ephraim (shikkore Efrayim, שִׁכְּוֹרֵי אֶפְרַיִם) isn't merely literal alcoholism but symbolizes spiritual stupor, self-indulgence, and irresponsibility. Amos 6:1-6 similarly condemned Northern Israel's complacent luxury. **Whose glorious beauty is a fading flower** (tsevi tif'arto tsits novel, צִיָּב תִּפְאַרְתּוֹ צִיץ נָבֵל)—the city's splendor is transient as a wilting bloom. What seems permanent and beautiful is actually dying. **On the head of the fat valleys** emphasizes Samaria's location above rich agricultural land, source of wealth that bred pride and complacency.

Them that are overcome with wine (halume yayin, הָלוּמֵי יַיִן, literally "struck down by wine") suggests people knocked senseless by drink—spiritually and morally incapacitated. This isn't social drinking but enslaving drunkenness that

clouds judgment and numbs conscience. The New Testament warns similarly against drunkenness that prevents spiritual alertness (Romans 13:13, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:6-7).

Historical Context

Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom, sat magnificently on a hill with panoramic views of fertile valleys. Built by King Omri (1 Kings 16:24), it was architecturally impressive but spiritually corrupt. Under Jeroboam II (793-753 BC), Israel experienced economic prosperity breeding luxury, injustice, and spiritual complacency. Prophets Amos and Hosea condemned this era's moral decay. Isaiah wrote this oracle around 730-722 BC as Assyria threatened. In 722 BC, Assyria conquered Samaria after three-year siege, deporting population—the "fading flower" withered completely. Jesus later contrasted worldly glory's transience with eternal kingdom values (Matthew 6:19-21).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does material prosperity sometimes breed spiritual pride and complacency, as it did in Ephraim?
2. What modern 'fading flowers' (temporary beauties, transient glories) tempt believers to find security in what cannot last?
3. In what ways can spiritual 'drunkenness' (moral numbness, dulled conscience) overcome believers who indulge in worldly pleasures?

Interlinear Text

ה וי	עֵט כֶּתֶר	גִּאוּת	שִׁכְרֵי י	אֶפְרַיִם	וַצִּיץ	נֵבֶל
Woe	to the crown	of pride	to the drunkards	of Ephraim	flower	is a fading
H1945	H5850	H1348	H7910	H669	H6731	H5034
	צָבִי	תִּפְאַרֶת ו	אֶשֶׁר	עַל	רֹאשׁ	גִּיא
whose glorious	beauty	H834	H5921	which are on the head	valleys	
H6643	H8597			H7218	H1516	
שְׁמֵן ים	הֵל וּמִי	יָיִן:				
of the fat	of them that are overcome	with wine				
H8081	H1986	H3196				

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 7:5 (Parallel theme): In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners.

Isaiah 28:7 (Parallel theme): But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.