

Spiritual Blindness

Isaiah 29

By Scott Huckaby

3/5/2023

**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Isaiah 29:1-8 – Woe to David’s City (NIV)

Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled!

Add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on.

² *Yet I will besiege Ariel; she will mourn and lament, she will be to me like an altar hearth.* ³ *I will encamp against you on all sides; I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you.* ⁴ *Brought low, you will speak from the ground; your speech will mumble out of the dust.*

Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth; out of the dust your speech will whisper. ⁵ *But your many enemies will become like fine dust, the ruthless hordes like blown chaff. Suddenly, in an instant,* ⁶ *the Lord Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire.*

⁷ *Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel, that attack her and her fortress and besiege her, will be as it is with a dream, with a vision in the night—* ⁸ *as when a hungry person dreams of eating, but awakens hungry still; as when a thirsty person dreams of drinking, but awakens faint and thirsty still. So will it be with the hordes of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion.*

What city is Ariel?

The name Ariel means Lion of God, and in this passage is used as a symbolic reference to Jerusalem (the city where David dwelt). The only place where Ariel is used as a name for Jerusalem is in this chapter of Isaiah, and the word only appears one other time in the Old Testament (as the name of a priest in Ezra 8:16).

- The way Ariel is used in these verses, the idea behind calling Jerusalem Lion of God is probably sarcastic.
- The repetition of the name (four times in two verses), suggests that Jerusalem may have thought of herself as the Lion of God, but God didn’t share that same lofty opinion.

What was the point of pointing out the years and feasts passing by?

Add year to year; let feasts come around: The feeling in Isaiah 29:1 is that Jerusalem is proud (*Ariel*), resting on its spiritual heritage instead of its present reality (*the city where David dwelt!*), and living for present pleasures without concern for God.

v2 – What does it mean that God will distress Ariel?

Jerusalem may have a high opinion of itself, but it is not out of the reach of God’s hand of judgment. Instead of the routine of year to year and the feasts, God will send heaviness and sorrow. If Jerusalem sees itself as a lion, then God will fight against them with the same fury a man would have against a lion (*it shall be to Me as Ariel*).

v3 – What would God do?

I will encamp against you all around: Using the images of warfare for that day, God promises a battle against Jerusalem to conquer her (*You shall be brought down*, v4).

v4 – What does it mean that Jerusalem will be brought down?

Humbled... The LORD will bring down the lofty self-image Jerusalem had of itself. Instead of calling herself Ariel, and the city where David dwelt, their *speech shall be low, out of the dust*. Instead of loud boasts, their speech shall whisper out of the dust.

- They would no longer be speaking boldly but humbly.

v5 – How would Jerusalem’s foes be like fine dust?

The closing image in the previous verses was Jerusalem groveling in the dust. Now, the LORD uses another image, spun off of the idea of dust — Jerusalem’s enemies will be scattered as fine dust. God will humble Jerusalem in the dust, and then scatter her enemies like fine dust, like chaff that passes away.

v6 – How would Jerusalem be punished by the Lord?

With thunder, earthquake, great noise, storm and fire. The Babylonians raised up against Judah would be like a force of nature with the same impact.

v7-8 – What would it be like for the nations that come against Judah?

It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams: In the long run the LORD will protect Jerusalem so the nations that come against her will ultimately be frustrated. They will be like a man who dreams of food but wakes up hungry. They will dream of fulfillment but be unfulfilled.

Isaiah 29:9-16 – Blindness of Disobedience (NIV)

⁹ Be stunned and amazed, blind yourselves and be sightless; be drunk, but not from wine, stagger, but not from beer. ¹⁰ The Lord has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers). ¹¹ For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say, “Read this, please,” they will answer, “I can’t; it is sealed.” ¹² Or if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, “Read this, please,” they will answer, “I don’t know how to read.” ¹³ The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. ¹⁴ Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.” ¹⁵ Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, “Who sees us? Who will know?” ¹⁶ You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”?

v9 – About what should we be stunned and amazed?

Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind: Jerusalem’s pride had made them spiritually blind, and spiritually drunk. The LORD tells Jerusalem to pause and wonder at this, because though they do it to themselves, they lack the self-awareness to see their condition.

Why did the Jews stagger?

not with intoxicating drink: This was a curse, both self-induced and allowed by the LORD.

- This speaks powerfully to those today who wrongly promote the idea of God “blessing” His people with being “drunk in the Spirit.” This is no blessing.

v10 – What had the Lord poured out on Judah?

Jerusalem had chosen blindness and spiritual drunkenness, so the LORD poured out on them the spirit of deep sleep. As drunks will “sleep it off,” so the LORD will send blind, proud, drunk Jerusalem into the lethargy and vulnerability of spiritual sleep.

- As a drunk has blurred vision and poor perception, so God closed the spiritual eyes of the nation — namely, the prophets.

What is the problem with spiritual sleep?

When we are asleep, we are doing nothing productive and are vulnerable due to insensitivity. God sent these things to a blind, proud, drunk Jerusalem.

Is spiritual slumber a problem today?

Romans 13:11 – *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

Christians need to be awake, especially knowing the time because time is running out.

Why did God silence the prophets for about 400 years after Malachi until John the Baptist & Christ?

The prophets were silent, and the word of God was neglected because the people wanted it that way. In silencing the prophets and the seers, God simply gave Jerusalem what she wanted.

Amos 8:11-12 – *Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, “That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it.”*

v11-12 – What does this analogy describe?

A book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is illiterate: Isaiah had likened Jerusalem to the blind and drunk. Here, he likened them to the illiterate. But this wasn’t a literal literacy, because the literate man received the vision of God, but to him it was like a sealed book. When the book of the vision was brought to the illiterate man, he did no better (*I am not literate*).

What is necessary to understand God’s Word?

The presence of the Holy Spirit; otherwise, the Bible reader is the same as the illiterate. Many today read or receive God’s word like an illiterate man “reads” the newspaper. They can pick out a few words here and there, and they can certainly look at the pictures. They can sit with an open newspaper, enjoy themselves to some degree, and appear to be reading. But the true content of what is written has no impact on them.

How do people mis-read God’s Word today?

They take it out of context... textual, historical, doctrinal. They consider it to be of human origin and thus prone to error and not inspired by God thus making it inerrant.

v13 – What does this tell us about why the Lord makes Jerusalem spiritually blind?

These people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me: Jerusalem knew how to talk the spiritual talk, but their hearts were far from God.

- You can’t always tell a person’s heart by what they say. You can’t always tell a person’s heart by what they do.

Though only God can really know the heart, the closest we can come is by looking at the whole of their life — not only what they say or do, and especially not only at how they act at church or among Christians.

Is it possible to recognize Christians who are faking it?

Matthew 12:34 – *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*

Not always because people can draw near to God with their mouths and honor the LORD with their lips, and their hearts can still be far from God. Of course, their speech will betray them eventually — but just maybe never at church.

- Jesus quoted this passage from Isaiah when He rebuked the religious leaders of His day for their hypocrisy (Matthew 15:7-9, Mark 7:6-7).

How do people’s hearts get far from God?

God didn’t move away from His people; they removed their hearts from Him.

How is it *their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught?*

The people of Jerusalem had no fear of God in themselves; it had to be commanded by others. Their hearts did not respond to God, but only to men. As Jesus would say...

Matthew 6:2 – *they have their reward*

v14 – What *marvelous work* would God do?

The wisdom of their wise men shall perish: Because Jerusalem’s pride had led them into spiritual blindness, sleep, drunkenness, illiteracy, and hypocrisy, God will destroy the wisdom of their wise men. Their wise men promoted the pride that led to all these evils.

How is causing the wisdom of men to perish be a marvelous work and a wonder?

This causes people to fervently seek the wisdom of God instead.

Are we seeing the wisdom of men perish today?

It seems to be growing as God is removing His restraint of evil... the perishing consequences will reach its climax during the Tribulation. Global warming, transgenderism, transhumanism, etc...

v15 – What was the attitude of those whose hearts were far from God?

Who sees us? In their false wisdom, the proud people of Jerusalem thought they could hide their thoughts and deeds from the LORD.

- They did not know God and His omniscience

v16 – Why are those whose hearts are far from God often arrogant?

They have things exactly opposite. As the proud people of Jerusalem thought they had God all figured out, people are making this same error today. They are trusting in human reasoning rather than revelation from the Creator.

How were the people of Jerusalem esteeming the potter as the clay?

The people of Jerusalem made the terrible mistake of raising themselves up and lowering God at the same time. So, for them, the clay was just as worthy, just as intelligent, just as powerful, as the potter was. As Satan tempted Eve:

Genesis 3:4-5 – *Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

Who says, “for shall the thing made say of him who made it, “He did not make me”?”

Indeed, man says exactly this today. Man looks at God our Creator, and says, “He did not make me.” For the Lord and His prophet, this was absolutely absurd, but today it passes for “settled science.”

How do people today effectively say of the Creator, “He has no understanding”?

Instead of seeing the absolute need for an Intelligent Designer who created all things, many believe that chance — absolute blind, random, purposeless chance, having no understanding at all — brought all things into being.

- They seek to “force evolution” by altering DNA (transhumanism)
- They seek to bring the masses under their control

Isaiah 29:17-24 – Future Recovery of Wisdom

¹⁷ In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest? ¹⁸ In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. ¹⁹ Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. ²⁰ The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down— ²¹ those who with a word make someone out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice. ²² Therefore this is what the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, says to the descendants of Jacob: “No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale. ²³ When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. ²⁴ Those who are

wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.”

v17 – What is the encouragement here?

God’s restoration will come, and all things considered, it is in a very little while. It may not seem so to us when we are in the midst of a trial, but it is true. So, be patient!

How would Lebanon be turned into a fruitful field?

The land of Lebanon was known for its mighty forests, which would be brought low and later turned into a fruitful field. God would cut one down and raise another up.

v18 – What would happen in that day?

The deaf shall hear...the eyes of the blind shall see: When God’s people are restored, pride no longer prevents them from hearing God’s word or seeing God’s work. Just as much as these are miracles in the natural realm, they are miracles in the spiritual realm also. We need to humbly seek God for ears to hear and eyes to see.

v19 – How would the humble be blessed?

The joy of the Lord is the proper reward for the humble. When we are humble — having an accurate estimation of ourselves, and a proper perspective of ourselves in relation to God and others — our lives are filled with the most joy.

How is pride the enemy of joy?

To whatever degree we are proud, we are missing joy in the LORD. The proud can never have joy in the LORD if they are in humble or poor circumstances.

v20 – How is the terrible one brought to nothing?

The work of the LORD does not stop at restoring His corrected people. It extends to bringing justice upon the wicked. Ultimately, God will ensure that justice is done.

v21 – To whom is God’s justice directed?

To those who have distorted true justice with human interpretations of justice (like social justice).

- Those who take offense with the use of some word that is not politically correct
- Setting traps for those who do not share their ideology
- Rejecting those of God for minor human rules.

How is growing political correctness is sign of the soon return of the Lord?

Jesus gave this as one of the signs in the Olivet Discourse:

Matthew 24:9-10 – they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

v22 – When would the House of Jacob not be ashamed?

During the Millennial Kingdom after they acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah during the Tribulation.

Why is Israel referred to here as the House of Jacob?

The name Jacob, given to the father of the 12 tribes, is not complimentary. It means usurper; and has the idea of a “con-man” or a “trickster.” Anyone who is really a Jacob, has good reason to be ashamed, but when God restores His people, even the “Jacobs” shall not now be ashamed.

v23 – Who will be pleased with their descendants who hallow the Lord’s name?

The picture is of the patriarch Jacob looking over his descendants, and no longer being ashamed of them, because they now hallow the name of the LORD, and respect the holiness of the LORD.

v24 – What would the spiritual restoration of Israel look like?

These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine: Finally, in God’s day of restoration, the truth is taught and known and exalted. Those who erred in spirit now have understanding, and those who complained know better because they know the truth.

What do we learn in this chapter about spiritual blindness?

- Spiritual blindness is caused by pride.
- Spiritual blindness will bring us low.
- Spiritual blindness leads to spiritual drunkenness.
- Spiritual blindness leads to spiritual sleep.
- Spiritual blindness leads to spiritual illiteracy.
- Spiritual blindness causes hypocrisy.
- Spiritual blindness makes men believe God cannot know what they think or see what they do.
- Spiritual blindness makes men deny God as Creator.
- Spiritual blindness is cured through humility.
- Spiritual blindness can only be healed through the LORD’s restoration.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Pride is deadly and invites the Lord to humble us.
- Pride is the enemy of joy... stay humble & be joyful!
- The presence of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite to not being spiritually blind.
- Don’t be deceived, God is omniscient!
- Man’s view of justice is not God’s view... don’t be deceived by the world.
- Don’t be spiritually blind... seek the illumination that only comes from God.