

<sup>1</sup> *Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year; let the feasts run their round.* Isaiah 29:1 This second woe (ah), is to Ariel. Ariel represents Jerusalem, the city where David encamped (2 Samuel 5:9). It is also the Hebrew word for the hearth of the altar where a fire was stoked to consume the sacrifices the Israelites offered to the Lord (Ezekiel 43:15-16). At the same time it is a compound word composed of lion (*ari*) and God (*el*) (2 Samuel 23:20). This play on words seems to be the message of the entire chapter. The people were going through their cycle of religious feasts that God had appointed in a monotonous fashion. The Lion God doesn't tolerate lukewarm worship. He deserves much more than ritualized performance. False religions might believe their gods are appeased with ceremony and ritual, but the true God is worthy of whole-hearted devotion (Revelation 3:16).

<sup>2</sup> *Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation, and she shall be to me like an Ariel.* <sup>3</sup> *And I will encamp against you all around, and will besiege you with towers and I will raise siegeworks against you.* <sup>4</sup> *And you will be brought low; from the earth you shall speak, and from the dust your speech will be bowed down; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and from the dust your speech shall whisper.* Isaiah 29:2-4 God was declaring He would distress Jerusalem and make it burn like an altar hearth. God doesn't even mention Assyria or Babylon, for this siege is God's work. As He declared in the last chapter, a "strange is His work – alien is His deed" (28:21). God was going to humble Jerusalem and put an end to hypocritical worship. The noise of the celebratory feast would be replaced with just the whisper of the dead.

The words are meant to be shocking. It was a wakeup call. What is it about human nature that turns vibrant heart felt faith into dry routine? How do we go from passionate faith to meaningless rituals? I think it has something to do with the deceitfulness of sin. We are steadily bombarded with the false promises of the world. How many thousands of commercials promise satisfaction and joy if you just use their product? But Israel didn't have advertisements. They did have the same old nature that is tantalized by the temporary pleasures of this passing world. In every age the temptation is the same. And **when we listen to its "siren song," the flame of passion is doused, not all at once, but little by little.** It happens slowly, almost imperceptibly. That is when God must do His strange and alien work.

He allows trouble to rattle our cage. We seem besieged all around with one problem after another. We are brought low with illness or financial problems or relational difficulties and find we don't have a solution. Then we turn to God and ask, "How could You let this happen?" How could He not love us enough to get our attention and turn us around? How could He not let His bride know she is flirting with disaster? It seems strange or alien to us because we are so used to His abundant blessings. What we are

**Commented [PW1]: 2 Samuel 5:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward.

**Commented [PW2]: Ezekiel 43:15-16 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> and the altar hearth, four cubits; and from the altar hearth projecting upward, four horns.

<sup>16</sup> The altar hearth shall be square, twelve cubits long by twelve broad.

**Commented [PW3]: 2 Samuel 23:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two ariels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen.

**Commented [PW4]: Revelation 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

really asking is, "Why didn't You let me go on in the delusion of lukewarm apathy and stray further from You?" Then the answer is obvious. **Our trials may be an expression of His love (James 1:2).** It's a slap in the face to wake us from our drug induced stupor and save us from spiritual death.

This is the point in marriages when people start talking about divorce. That's because the passion is gone. But why is it gone? We found satisfaction in other things or other people. We grew irritated at the response of our spouse who became distant or tried to wake us up. Fortunately for us, God has more grace than any spouse. He is our example of patience and love, and He knows just how firm to be. He never draws away. He just keeps pursuing us in spite of our unfaithfulness to put Him first (2 Timothy 2:13).

When we finally let go and without reservation throw ourselves on the Lord, He shows up. *<sup>5</sup> But the multitude of your foreign foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff. And in an instant, suddenly, <sup>6</sup> you will be visited by the LORD of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.* Isaiah 29:5-6 Isaiah's message takes on the flavor of an end-time prophecy. Jesus spoke of the time when Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20). But that was not in reference to this passage. Jesus told his audience to flee when those conditions came. That was Rome's conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70. In our present passage, it is a multitude of foreign foes that is not ultimately victorious. That language points us to the day of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7).

That will be a time when it will seem that Jerusalem has been lost and the Jewish people are on the verge of extinction. It is then the Lord will appear as they turn to Him as their Messiah (Zechariah 14:1-3). The enemy will vanish as if they were just a dream, like chaff blown away with the wind.

That is just like our troubles when we return to the Lord. We put our trials in His hands. Either He takes care of them, or shows us how to, or gives us such grace that we rise above them so that they do not oppress us as they once did. He loves to rescue us, but He'd rather we stayed passionately in love with Him, worshiping with our whole heart as we should.

At this point in the prophecy, God turns again to the present condition of Judah. The hardness of their hearts has caused them to be calloused toward the things of God. Rather than have them become even more accountable in their sin, God causes them to be unable to perceive the message. *<sup>9</sup> Astonish yourselves and be astonished; blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not with strong drink! <sup>10</sup> For the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers).* Isaiah 29:9-10 It reminds me of the work God did with Pharaoh. First Pharaoh hardened his heart (Exodus 8:32). Then God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12). It's as if God gives

**Commented [PW5]: James 1:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

**Commented [PW6]: 2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

**Commented [PW7]: Luke 21:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.

**Commented [PW8]: Jeremiah 30:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.

**Commented [PW9]: Zechariah 14:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst.

<sup>2</sup> For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.

**Commented [PW10]: Exodus 8:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

**Commented [PW11]: Exodus 9:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

us what we insist on. If we don't want to see, He keeps us from seeing. But that brings on the troubles that bring us to our knees.

It's interesting that God uses drunkenness as an analogy. I have a number of friends that were alcoholics. Their testimonies have several things in common. They couldn't see where they were headed until they were at rock bottom, had nowhere else to go but total surrender to God, and then they began to see. That is the same pattern for nations and individuals who turn from a vibrant relationship with God.

There are rare times in history when God sovereignly moves to stir hearts even when things are going well. We call these times "awakenings" or "revivals." But the most common pattern throughout the Bible and history is that we will not awaken unless we hit the bottom and have nowhere else to turn. This is where the nation of Judah was headed. They were receiving the leadership they deserved, prophets with closed eyes and seers that covered their heads.

It did not matter if one was literate scholar or an illiterate laborer. All were in the same condition of being unable to see what was coming or hear the Word from God. <sup>11</sup> *And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed."* <sup>12</sup> *And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot read."* Isaiah 29:11-12 God is emphasizing the blindness of the people to what is coming. They could not see or hear when it came to God's Word. I hear the same thing today. "I just don't understand it when I read it." You have to want to and be willing to hear what it says to us. It is like the parables the Lord used (Matthew 13:13-15). It really is a supernatural thing. For some people it is rich and meaningful, while for others it seems to say nothing. It doesn't matter how educated you are. It's the spiritual condition of your heart that matters.

<sup>13</sup> *And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,"* Isaiah 29:13 Every time I read this I feel I must pause and examine my heart. It is a stinging indictment. Jesus quoted it when the Pharisees confronted Him about the oral law. Jesus pointed out how they broke God's law and taught others to do the same. He told them this verse was prophesied for them (Mark 7:6-7). It is for everyone that puts rules and the sayings of man above God's Word.

If our mouth professes love for God and our actions show a lack of love for man, John declared that we are spiritually dead (1 John 3:14). One of the worst effects of this hypocrisy is that it turns others away from God. But just as bad is the chance that we have deceived ourselves. Religion can have a crippling effect on our spirit. If we think by coming to church and not using curse words and dropping some money in the plate that God is pleased with us, we've missed the point. **God wants our whole heart, not a just obligatory acts of duty** (1 Chronicles 16:29). He is, after all, the Lion God!

The fear of God is a reverence for the glory and honor He deserves (Psalm 90:11). It is knowing that His holy nature requires justice and expects gratitude for grace received.

**Commented [PW12]: Matthew 13:13-15 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.'"

<sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

**Commented [PW13]: Mark 7:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

<sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

**Commented [PW14]: 1 John 3:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

**Commented [PW15]: 1 Chronicles 16:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;

**Commented [PW16]: Psalm 90:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

It's knowing that if we are casual about our relationship with Him, He may deal with us to help us know how dependent we are on Him. It's not just an expression we recite.

Because of this hypocrisy and lack of the true fear of God, <sup>14</sup> *therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.*" Isaiah 29:14 "Wonder" is the Old Testament word for the miraculous. God was promising miracle upon miracle in spite of their hypocrisy. The other way to wake people out of their lethargic spiritual condition is to show them the power of the Spirit, something so amazing the wise are dumbfounded and the discerning miss it.

I believe this is not only referring to the coming captivity and restoration, but also to the coming of the Messiah. **God's response to our hypocrisy is grace. He will graciously intervene in our lives to wake us and change us.** It seems that we have this opportunity in our own lives every time we hit a crisis. When we are up against a wall, we have a chance to take a new direction, to see God at work in our life. We can experience His grace to get us back on track. It may not feel like grace, and certainly may not be what we would have desired, but if it causes us to face the real condition of our heart and invites us to change, then it is certainly the grace of God.

<sup>15</sup> *Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"* <sup>16</sup> *You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?* Isaiah 29:15-16 It is ridiculous to think we can hide anything from God. It is ignorant to think we can avoid the justice of God on our actions. People try so hard to deny the existence of God because they don't want to believe that there is a day of reckoning.

We are seeing this hardness of heart now more than ever. As the evidence for a Creator becomes overwhelming, the explanations of man become more farfetched. The latest theory I've heard to try to explain away our existence is that ours is one of the infinite number of multiverses. The odds of life developing as we know it from what we know of the universe is so impossible that for it to be possible one must increase the possibilities. It does nothing to explain the origin of matter. It does reveal the desperation of man to avoid acknowledging a Creator. It is just as God predicted, the pot is telling the potter He is just part of the clay and has no understanding. But as God explained earlier, they just can't see it. It's sealed to them. The heavens declare the glory of God, but they can't read it (Psalm 19:1; 14:1).

God's viewpoint is right side up. It is to see things as they really are, unbiased truth! Turning things upside down is to make the temporal of greatest importance and the detestable things honored while dishonoring the sacred and eternal.

Again, in spite of the hardness of the heart of man, the grace of God comes in. The prediction is about the effects of God's intervention in our lives. <sup>18</sup> *In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.* <sup>19</sup> *The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among*

**Commented [PW17]: Psalm 19:1 (ESV)**

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

**Commented [PW18]: Psalm 14:1 (ESV)**

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

*mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.* Isaiah 29:18-19 In contrast to those who just could not understand or receive the message, the day was coming when the deaf would hear the words of a book, and out of gloom and darkness blind eyes would see. The words "gloom" and "darkness" points us back to 9:1-2, which is clearly a prediction of the coming Messiah. Not only would Jesus fulfill this literally, but in an even greater way He would cause the spiritually deaf ears and spiritually blind eyes of mankind to hear and see.

The meek were those who could hear and receive the truth to which Jesus opened our eyes (John 9:39; Matthew 5:5). That was the source of their fresh joy. The spiritually poor will be blessed with the kingdom (Matthew 5:3). The physically poor were the bulk of the followers of Jesus, exulting in the Holy One of Israel. Their possessions did not hinder them from receiving His message of laying up treasures in heaven instead of on the earth (Matthew 6:19-21). Jesus' Sermon on the Mount used terms from this passage, showing the fulfillment had come.

These terms of "fresh joy" and "exulting" are in contrast to the vain worshipers who are focused on the commandments of men. It happens today too, doesn't it? Granted, we can go overboard in either direction. We can be so focused on the letter that we neglect the fruit of the Spirit, or we can be so focused on the fruits and feelings we neglect the good boundaries of the Word. We must always seek that balance of worshiping in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

In that day when hypocritical worship was normal, religious instruction was the commandments of men, when truth was turned on its head, and when the leaders thought God didn't see what they were up to, into all that gloom and darkness Jesus came. The deaf could hear the Word. The blind could see the truth. Light came into the darkness (Matthew 11:4-6). The poor and meek received the Messiah. Judah would get a preview of this when they returned from captivity and Ezra brought back the importance of the Word (Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 8:1). But the fullness came with Jesus (John 1:14-17).

Even though it appeared that evil men prospered, yet <sup>20</sup> *For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,* <sup>21</sup> *who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.* Isaiah 29:20-21 Where is Caiaphas? Where is Herod? Where are all those who predicted the demise of Christianity? Death feeds on them (Psalm 73:18-20). They will stand before the Judge and be asked to give an account. They will receive a just compensation for all their deeds.

The chapter closes with a promise of the greatest revival, the ingathering of the Jewish people to their Messiah. <sup>22</sup> *Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. <sup>23</sup> For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in*

**Commented [PW19]: Isaiah 9:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

**Commented [PW20]: John 9:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

**Commented [PW21]: Matthew 5:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

**Commented [PW22]: Matthew 5:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**Commented [PW23]: Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,

<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Commented [PW24]: John 4:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

**Commented [PW25]: Matthew 11:4-6 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

<sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

<sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

**Commented [PW26]: Ezra 10:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly.

**Commented [PW27]: Nehemiah 8:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel.

**Commented [PW28]: John 1:14-17 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")

... [1]

**Commented [PW29]: Psalm 73:18-20 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

<sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

... [2]

*awe of the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction.*" Isaiah 29:22-24 Anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord can come to understanding (Romans 10:13). The work of God in a child's life can pierce some of the hardest hearts. Though deaf and blind in Isaiah and Jesus' day, God encouraged Isaiah with the promise of a future day when all Israel would be saved (Romans 11:25-26)

#### Questions

- 1 What is "ariel"?
- 2 What question are we often really asking when faced with difficulty?
- 3 What is the prediction of future grace to Judah?
- 4 Can God do for us what He will do for Judah?
- 5 How does God use our stubbornness to turn us?
- 6 Has 29:13 ever been true of you?
- 7 How does God respond to our hypocrisy?
- 8 Why are the actions in verse 16 so common today?
- 9 How does man explain our world?
- 10 What is right side up? Upside down?
- 11 What are the promises that were yet to be fulfilled?

#### Commented [PW30]: Romans 10:13 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

#### Commented [PW31]: Romans 11:25-26 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup> Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

<sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

**John 1:14-17 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")

<sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

<sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

**Psalm 73:18-20 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

<sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

<sup>20</sup> Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.