

Review

In chapter 28, we saw how God was lamenting over the fact that although there was a small remnant of faithful Jews, the vast majority of them were living in sin and drunkenness - even the prophets and priests! They had made themselves blind and deaf to the Word of God. As a result, judgment was coming upon both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

29:1 Ariel

A woe is pronounced over the city of Ariel. This has led to much confusion, for historians are not aware of any city by that name where David camped. However, I do not believe it is a city name at all. The word "ar-ee-ALE" literally means "altar hearth." I think that God is speaking of Jerusalem, the location of the altar of sacrifice.

How have I arrived at that conclusion? The word "camped" can mean "to lay siege against," and this was how Jerusalem was conquered by David (2Sam. 5:6-7). It is also specified as the location where the feasts were observed (Isa. 29:1). Verse seven tells us that all the nations will wage war against the city, and verse eight (the obvious clincher) refers to it as Mount Zion.

Add Year To Year

Of Ariel, God says,

Is. 29:1 ...Add year to year, observe your feasts on schedule.

Year after year, the Jews were plodding through the tradition of their forefathers. They diligently observed the feast schedule, and performed the actions that their tradition required of them. But God was not impressed. The Jews were bored with it, for it had no meaning to them. God was tired of it, because their hearts were far from Him (Isa. 1:11-15).

29:2-4 Ariel Distressed

The city God calls "altar hearth" will soon become an altar hearth. The city would be attacked, and many of the Jews would die - essentially sacrificed by the Babylonians.

Fortunately, God has some reassuring news as well...

29:5-8 Enemies Blown Away Instantly

Jerusalem has had many enemies. In fact, the day is coming when...

Zech. 12:3 ...all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.

The book of Zechariah tells us about the day that all the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem, and what the Lord's response will be:

Zech. 14:2-3 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.

When the Lord fights against them, they will be blown away. It will happen so fast, that they will disappear like a bad dream does when you wake up.

Unfortunately, in spite of the promise of deliverance, the Jews in Isaiah's day were still hardened against their God...

29:9-12 Blind To The Vision

Blind, drunk, unstable, and asleep. Not a good combination for people to be able to hear the Word of God. The vision God gives to Isaiah is closed to the Jews' understanding. Not only will it be unintelligible to those who can't normally read the Word of God, but it will be sealed even

to those who can. Both groups are equally blinded to the vision.

They chose sinfulness and spiritual blindness, deafness, and drunkenness. Their hearts were insensitive (Isa. 6:9-10), and they refused to understand the vision.

29:13-14 Tradition And Lip Service

The Jews said all the right things. They would speak honoring words to God like "hallelujah" and "praise the Lord." But in reality, it was all just lip service. In their hearts, they did not honor God. They were distant from Him.

This is a perfect description of empty religion. Of many people who even this week will go to church. They will stand when they're supposed to, read the responsive reading, sing the songs, and maybe even put money in the offering plate. But it's all lip service. They are drawing near to God in word only.

They have no concept of the reality of God, and certainly don't have reverence for Him. They are just practicing tradition they've learned by repetition.

Certainly it is easy for us to sit back and say, "What a terrible thing. I know Catholics like this. I know Lutherans in this kind of practice. They don't understand what they're doing, and don't have any kind of emotion involved. They only do this because it's what they're supposed to do, and they certainly don't have a personal relationship with Christ."

But we don't have to turn to the ancient practices of the liturgical church to see this demonstrated to us. We can see it even in our own midst. How many who will be here next Sunday will sing the words to the worship songs while not worshipping God? How many will listen to the Bible study, yet have absolutely no intention of applying to their own lives what is taught? How many will say "praise the Lord," but won't?

Religious tradition and repetition of any sort can be dangerous. Oh, there's nothing wrong with the words to a beautifully written prayer, but

if it becomes mindless repetition, it becomes empty. Jesus said,

Matt. 6:7 "...when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

And there's nothing wrong with the hymns and praise choruses that exalt God, at least until we begin to simply sing them like we sing along with the radio in the car. At that point, they become just as empty as if we were singing "Louie Louie."

God's warning to the Jews to avoid this state included a preventative measure:

Deut. 6:17-25 "You should diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to give your fathers, by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken. When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.' So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before

the LORD our God, just as He commanded us."

We need to continually be asking ourselves, "Why do we do this? What purpose does it serve? Am I simply going through the motions, or is this genuine before the Lord?"

Are you connected to God tonight? Do you have a heart for Him? Do you love Him? Do you love the opportunity to hear from Him and be with Him? Or do you just sing and read and come to church out of traditional habit?

The Jews had lost that. And in order to get them back to the place of being near to Him, God was going to make things terribly difficult for them. They would no longer be led by priests going through the motions, or teachers giving them the traditional, canned sermons. They would be in desperation, crying out to Him in prayer for deliverance. They would truly seek Him for the first time in a long time.

29:15-16 Does God Not See?

The Jews had been living lives of religious tradition, where the ceremony is everything, and the reality of God is unknown. When a person lives like this, they think that God doesn't see what they're doing. They think they can fool the Lord.

The Psalmist wrote of the wicked,

Psa. 94:7-10 They have said, "The LORD does not see, nor does the God of Jacob pay heed." Pay heed, you senseless among the people; And when will you understand, stupid ones? He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see? He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, even He who teaches man knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of man...

God sees everything. Jesus said,

Luke 12:2-3 "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly,

whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops."

God is not the ignorant one in this relationship - it is us.

29:17-21 On That Day

Again, good news following bad news: In the future, God will restore Israel and its surrounding areas to fertile fields and forests. When the Lord Jesus Christ rules as king of the earth, then spiritual blindness and deafness will be a thing of the past. Those who were once needy and afflicted will be rejoicing.

The wicked, who took advantage of their positions and falsely condemned the innocent, will be done for. ("Finished and cut off" are nice ways of saying "dead.")

29:22-24 They Will Know The Truth

The Lord says that Jacob would be ashamed of his descendants if he could see the way they had fallen away from the Lord. But when the Lord brings them through their trials and into repentance, Jacob won't be. At that point, his descendants will be overcome with reverence and love for their God.

And all those who believed false doctrines and were critical fault-finders will finally understand and truly learn from God.