

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #39

Isaiah 29:1-14

We come now to our second “woe” judgment in Isaiah chapters 28-33, which is a very negative predicted judgment, which will leave people mourning. As we saw last time, judgment was coming to the crown of northern Israel, Samaria, and now Isaiah says God’s prophetic judgment is going to come against southern Judah and will be aimed straight at its capital city, Jerusalem. The prophecies given here start during the time of Isaiah and take us through time to the final moment when Gentile nations will surround Jerusalem, just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Ariel is a metaphorical “code name” for Jerusalem. According to William Gesenius, the name “Ariel” means a couple of things. It means “lion of God” in the sense of a mighty hero (II Samuel 23:20) and it means “the altar hearth or chimney of God” a place where the fire burns (*Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 78-79). By virtue of the fact that **verse 1** refers to it as the city in which David camped and settled, that city is none other than Jerusalem (II Samuel 5:7, 9, 13), which is further substantiated by **verse 8** which refers to Mount Zion. As Joseph Alexander observed, “All interpreters agree that Ariel is here a name for ... Jerusalem” (*Commentary On Isaiah*, p. 461).

Now Jerusalem was and is a very religious city. There are well over 6,000 Jewish synagogues in Israel, and the Bible and the Talmud which is the written version of the Mishna which is the record of the teachings of Jewish leaders back about 200 years before Christ, are still studied in schools. One would think that this would be the most scholarly Biblical place in the entire world; a place that loves God, loves Jesus Christ and loves the Word of God. But it is a spiritually barren desert and God says I’m going to have to do something about that.

The specific prophetic message given by Isaiah is this:

GOD WILL SEND HIS JUDGMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM AND TOTALLY HUMBLE HER AND THEN HE WILL EVENTUALLY DELIVER JERUSALEM AND TOTALLY EXALT HER, AND AS ALL OF THIS IS HAPPENING GOD’S PEOPLE WON’T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT GOD IS DOING.

Now the religious people of Jerusalem would not and still do not acknowledge their sin and their need for Jesus Christ to give them a righteousness they do not have. So when you come to **verse 1**, God says to Jerusalem, go ahead and play your religious games year after year and observe all your religious feasts right on schedule. Celebrate Hanukkah every December, celebrate the “feast of Purim” in February, celebrate the Passover in April, celebrate Rosh Hashanah every September, celebrate Yom Kippur at the end of September, and celebrate Sukkot (feast of Tabernacles) in October. Isaiah says, go ahead Jerusalem add year to year because you will finally reach the moment when God says He will cause Israel to face Him and His Son.

Jesus Christ physically went into Jerusalem and physically went to the cross and nailed the law, our sins and the Sabbath days and the festivals to that cross. The people of Jerusalem have totally rejected this and continue to this day to have their religious days that were nothing but a shadow of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:14-17). So what Isaiah says is, go ahead and play your religious games year after year until God finally forces you to turn to Him; all of your religious pomp will not prevent My judgment.

As we come to this portion of Isaiah, **there are three main prophetic messages to this prophecy:**

PROPHETIC MESSAGE #1 – God will send His judgment against Jerusalem. **29:1-4**

As you look down through these first four verses you will notice the emphasis on the personal pronoun “I” which is used for God. God Himself gives this warning against His own people. God is the One actually doing the negative things against His own people and there are four warning predictions that He makes:

Warning Promise #1 - God would bring His distress against Jerusalem. **29:2**

The Hebrew word “distress” is one that means to narrow and compress something (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 706). The idea is that you press something together so intensely that you compress it or narrow it. God is going to do this with Jerusalem. There is an intense pressure that will hit her, the likes of which has never been seen in history.

The result would be she would be a city of lamenting and mourning and she would be like an Ariel or like a burnt offering to God. Whenever God sends one of His judgments against any one or any nation, the end will always be the same, sadness and sorrow.

Warning Promise #2 - God would camp and encircle Jerusalem. **29:3a**

God would actually bring political powers against Jerusalem and they would surround her and literally be camped all around her.

Warning Promise #3 - God will set siege works against Jerusalem. **29:3b**

God will cause powerful military forces to come and surround Jerusalem.

Warning Promise #4 -God will raise up battle towers against Jerusalem. **29:3c**

The plural which is used for “siege works” and “battle towers” indicates that this will be a time when God will summon multiple military forces to enter Palestine and surround Jerusalem. This is not referring to one major military force but several.

The results would be twofold:

(Result #1) - The city would be brought low. **29:4a**

God will totally and completely depress His own city and people. The word “low” is one in Hebrew that means to be in a totally depressed and cast down state (Ibid., p. 845). Sometimes depression is caused by God to get a person or a nation to turn to Him.

(Result #2) - The city will be destroyed to dust. **29:4b**

The city will not speak as a grandiose metropolis but out of the dust of the ground. In fact, most Jews who live in the city will become nothing but spirits in the dust. They will speak from the ground because they will be buried because they have been killed as a judgment of God. Don't be fooled; the keys of life and death are in the hands of God.

Now God began to stir things against Jerusalem and against His own people in **701 B.C.** and He continues to stir things to this very day. Jerusalem has been captured more than any other city in the world. J. Vernon McGee said that years ago he had compiled a list of 27 times in which this city had come under siege. God has at various times done different things in history both positive and negative to Jerusalem in an attempt to get His people to turn to Him, and yet she refuses. I will cite 17 events from history that should have caused Israel to turn to Him:

It started in **701 B.C.** when Assyria marched into Jerusalem and almost took the city during the days of Hezekiah. But God graciously intervened in behalf of the city for His name's sake and defeated the Assyrians by striking 185,000 of them dead (**Isaiah 37:35-36**). You would have thought that this would have caused the people of Israel to fall in love with God and His Word, but soon after the death of Hezekiah they fell right back into their sins.

In **586 B.C.**, God sent the Babylonians into Jerusalem and this time they conquered it and destroyed it and the temple and took Israel captive. Most had no clue what God was doing.

Then in **520 B.C.**, Darius, king of Persia, permitted Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. You would have thought the people of Israel would fall in love with God and His Word this time, but again they fell back into their idolatry.

Around **A.D. 30**, God did a most amazing thing; He literally sent His own Son into Jerusalem several times to offer Israel her King and her Kingdom, but she didn't want either and ended up crucifying Him on a hill called Golgotha.

In **A.D. 70**, Titus, the son of Vespasian, the Roman Emperor, went to Jerusalem and surrounded the city and destroyed it and the temple. Over one million Jews died in the attack and still they refused to turn to God and to His Son.

In **A.D. 361**, Julian became Roman emperor and promised to rebuild Jerusalem. You would have thought that the nation Israel would have turned to God then, but it didn't.

In **A.D. 614**, Chosru invades Jerusalem and burns most churches. Still the nation refuses to turn to God.

In **A.D. 1099**, Jerusalem is captured by the crusaders and still Israel refuses to turn to Christ.

In **A.D. 1187**, Saladin, the ruler of Egypt and Syria, captures Jerusalem and there is no turning to God.

In **A.D. 1228**, a crusade led by Frederick II restores Jerusalem. Still no national repentance.

In **A.D. 1878**, Jewish people begin to become the overall majority of a mixed people living in Jerusalem. There is no national focus to embrace Jesus Christ and turn to God.

In **A.D. 1918**, the building of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem begins. This university has the potential of turning the entire nation to Jesus Christ, but does not do it.

In **A.D. 1946**, terrorists blow up King David Hotel in Jerusalem and again no national repentance.

In **A.D. 1948**, the state of Israel is born (May 14). Jews start returning to Israel in record numbers and still there is no major turning to Jesus Christ.

In **A.D. 1949**, Israel moves its government to Jerusalem. For the first time in centuries the political power of Israel is headquartered in Jerusalem and still no turning to God.

In **A.D. 1967**, a six day war breaks out and amazingly Israel seizes Arab lands and unifies Jerusalem.

In **A.D. 1980**, Prime Minister Begin and the Israeli Knesset vote to reaffirm Jerusalem is Israel's capital.

None of these things have prompted the nation Israel to turn to Jesus Christ. She has refused no matter what God has done.

So God says I have one more catastrophe that I will bring against you. It will be the worst you have ever seen. It is clearly predicted in Scripture that "all the nations of the world" will be gathered by God to surround Jerusalem one final time. These nations will completely box her in. Houses will be plundered and women will be ravished and the city will be captured (Zechariah 14:1-2).

This event will be led by a world leader who is the Antichrist. God will cause nations from all over the world to come to the Middle East to surround Israel as a judgment from Him. It will take this to get Israel to turn to Jesus Christ and cry out to Him and it will be at this moment that the entire nation will cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39). It will be precisely at this moment when Jesus Christ will come and fight those nations and destroy them all (Zechariah 14:3).

When we lived in Idaho, over by Sun Valley are the White Cloud Mountains. Way up on the back side of those mountains is an old mining village. I have hiked up there a few times and am amazed every time I visit the place. Today it is nothing more than some rotting boards and rusty equipment. But during its day it must have been quite an operation. As I wander in the various buildings, I often think, I wonder what happened. I wonder what finally put an end to this. I wonder what went wrong. When you look at Jerusalem today, you cannot help but wonder what has gone wrong. This was supposed to be a city that displayed the glory of God. What happened? That glory is gone. And the worst is yet to come because God will send one more final judgment against Jerusalem, and it will be so ferocious that Jesus predicted Jews need to get out of there and not even go back to get a coat.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please see a critical point about Biblical prophecy; God fulfills prophecy literally. The prediction may be positive or it may be negative, but when God predicts it, it does happen just as He predicted.

PROPHETIC MESSAGE #2 – God will lift His judgment from Jerusalem and target those against Israel. **29:5-8**

Now God gives Jerusalem some positive news and that news is this - I intend to punish you but then pardon you and destroy all of your enemies. In the middle of a prophecy against Jerusalem, God takes time to tell her what He will do to her enemies. God makes a series of amazing predictions in this text:

Prediction #1 - Your enemies shall become like dust that I will blow away. **29:5**

The actual words used in Hebrew for dust describe a very fine or light dust which is less than regular dust. The point of the metaphor is that God will destroy Israel's enemies and blow them away like a light breeze or as light as a feather.

If God uses someone or some power to chastise His people, you may be certain the agent He used will eventually be totally crushed and thrown away. What ultimately will happen is that God will summon all of the nations to come against Israel and then He will blow them all away. His people will turn to Him and instantly and suddenly they will be gone. This will happen near the end of the Tribulation.

God says it will happen quickly.

Prediction #2 - God will punish you with a ferocious cosmological judgments. **29:6**

You will notice that the pronoun in **verse 6** changes to “you” which again goes back to a focus on Jerusalem. What He is saying to Jerusalem is that you are the real target of all of this judgment and when I blow your enemies away, you will see My punishing power in the sky, because I will send thunder and earthquakes and loud noises and whirlwinds and flames of fire. There will be no missing this judgment because it will come from heaven.

When you read the book of Revelation it is very clear that God will use a variety of cosmological judgments in destructive ways during the Tribulation. He will destroy vegetation, fresh drinking water, and send earthquakes and killer hail storms. In just one judgment He will burn up one third of the earth, the trees and the green grass (Revelation 8:7). Things will be so bad for people in the world that they will actually want to die and God won't let them (Revelation 8:5-6). Everyone will know this is a judgment from all mighty God. Isaiah saw that right here. The LORD of hosts (Jehovah Sabaoth) will use fire and tornadoes and earthquakes and thunder and lightening to bring every enemy of Israel His full punishment.

Prediction #3 - God will bring down all enemies who wage war against Jerusalem. **29:7-8**

In fact, Isaiah says God's judgment will be like a bad scary dream for those nations against you. Only it won't be a dream. It will be real. God, Himself, will come and attack and destroy every enemy of Israel and they will vanish just as fast as a dream. God will pour out His wrath and nothing will stop it. Nothing will quench His thirst and nothing will prevent it. All who wage war against Jerusalem will go down.

PROPHETIC MESSAGE #3 – God will blind the minds of His people until He fulfills His plan for Israel. **29:9-14**

The people in Jerusalem had a different intoxication problem, but it wasn't alcohol. They were intoxicated by their arrogant, self-righteous religion. The Jews loved their religion more than God's Word. They were so spiritually insensitive to the Word of God that they were blind. According to **verse 9** they were to blind themselves, and according to **verse 10** it was God who made them blind. God pronounced a judicial blindness on this nation.

If you reject God's convicting truth long enough, God can and will put you into such a sleep that you will never see it. He can completely shut down a person's ability to grow and this is not just Old Testament teaching (Hebrew 6:1-3).

Now look carefully at **verse 10**; even the religious leaders of Israel, such as their prophets and their seers, cannot and do not grasp prophecy. There was not one religious leader such as a prophet or teacher in Jerusalem who can figure out what God is trying to do. There are many religious teachers and preachers and professors who will tell you prophecy and a book like Revelation cannot be understood. Yet when one actually reads Revelation (1:3; 22:10), it is clear that it is to be clearly understood. I am convinced that God has shut down many religious people because they do not truly love Him or His Word.

Jerusalem is the city that has a university and schools to train Jews in the things of God and no one can see it. They did not understand God's Word, they could not understand His Word and they don't have the foggiest idea about Biblical prophecy either. They can't see what we can so plainly see.

Look at **verse 13**; it is pathetic. The religious people in Jerusalem have all kinds of religious ritual and they can talk with their lips about God, but they do not know Him in their hearts.

If you would have gone to Jerusalem in Isaiah's day, you would have wondered what in the world is Isaiah talking about. These are people who love God. These are people who go to the temple and they take their animal sacrifices and they give their tithes. What is Isaiah saying? God says - their hearts are not right with Me.

They do not reverence God based on His Word; they reverence God based on their memorized traditions. God wants you and me to reverence Him in our hearts. Israel refuses to this very day so God says, one day I will change all of that. I will bring the people of Jerusalem to the place where they will be forced to honor me. I will humble them and break them down. I will do marvelous and majestic and wonderful things with them and to them and their so called wise men will all perish.

Please do not make the same mistake Israel has made. It is possible for a person to be very religious and not really know Jesus Christ. It is possible for a person to be involved in all kinds of religious ritual and traditional teaching and not really understand the Word of God.

God wants your heart. God wants to be revered on the basis of His Word and if people refuse, this same God can blind you and break you.