

When A Hungry Man Dreams

Ariel is a symbolic name for Jerusalem and is drawn from a word meaning 'lion of God', either for strength or victory. Sometimes Ariel is applied more specifically to the altar in the temple at Jerusalem. Then the inference is that the nation's strength flowed from the true worship of God because divine acceptance is received through blood sacrifice. These ideas combine in the Lord Jesus who is both the Lion of the tribe of Juda for strength and the altar and sacrifice who won victory for His people at the cross.

The curse of hypocrisy

In our verses Isaiah implies that sacrifices in Jerusalem had become mere rituals. Now they brought woe, not blessing, upon the nation because they were no longer offered to God with the eye of faith upon Christ. Notice it is God who distresses the people by bringing judgment on their hypocrisy. Over the centuries different armies were used to effect God's retribution with attacks so ferocious that the whole city is likened to an altar as blood ran freely in the streets.

No fulness without Christ

The prophet contrasts the city whose inhabitants are brought down to the dust and can speak only in faint and feeble tones with the speed, strength and power of their enemies. Through the years a succession of nations came against 'Ariel' including Assyria, Babylon and Rome but they were tools in God's hand. Though they came dreaming of great wealth and riches, they would not prosper. Even in victory they gained nothing to satisfy their lust and greed. Isaiah pictures a hungry man who dreams of food but when he awakens he is still hungry.

Scripture a sealed book

Yet, it is not physical appetite that is uppermost in the prophet's mind but the absence of spiritual food and refreshment. Jerusalem staggered not through wine but because the Lord had withdrawn. The things of God were sealed to them. They lost spiritual wisdom and were strangers to the truth. They continued to sacrifice and act out the formalities of religion but, says the Lord, 'this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me'.

They became fools

The following verses speak of the ignorance that falls upon a people bereft of true faith. Ignorance is a judgment for sin. The self-honouring religious leaders of Christ's time did not recognise the Messiah although His coming was long foretold and anticipated. We may apply this more broadly. Human attainment has grown massively yet for all of man's wisdom and knowledge, the wisdom of God, with the simplicity that is in Christ, is generally despised. Paul says, 'Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools'. This, too, is a mark of divine judgment.

'In that day'

Once again Isaiah declares 'in that day' and supplies views of the coming gospel day to comfort and encourage the Lord's remnant people. Despite the ignorance spawned by sin God Himself graciously opens eyes and ears to gospel truth. This is seen when the gospel is preached and divinely applied to the souls of God's elect. 'The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.' How blessed we are to be numbered amongst the poor and the meek of this world.

Confidence in Christ

Could there be a more apt description of a legal spirit than these words written by Isaiah? 'All that watch for iniquity ... That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.' We reply with Paul, 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth'.

We are His workmanship

'The Lord ... redeemed Abraham' Isaiah tells us. He has redeemed all the true children of Abraham; 'the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus'. These are sons and daughters of the Most High and the work of His hands. The church is God's workmanship. The promises which encouraged Isaiah's readers have been fulfilled in our sight. We have lived to see the gathering in of God's elect in ways the Old Testament people only dreamed of. We have discovered grace and

mercy in Jesus Christ. 'They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.'

Amen