

• *Punishment and rescue of Judah*

'Ah! That crown of pride . . .', says Isaiah 28:1. Now a second section begins. 'Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled!' says Isaiah 29:1. Its four paragraphs deal with punishing and rescuing. Judah will be chastised, says 29:1–4. Judah will be rescued, says 29:5–8. Judah will be chastised, says 29:9–12. Judah will be rescued, says 29:13–14. Its four paragraphs make four important points.

1. Religiosity does not save us from God's chastening

• *Jerusalem – where religious people who love pagan customs are*

1. Religiosity does not save us from God's chastening.

¹*Ah, Ariel, Ariel,
the city where David settled!*

'Ariel' is a name for Jerusalem. It seems to mean 'fire-place of a religious sanctuary' and refers to the fact that Jerusalem is the place where the sacrifices are offered. The capital city is where the religious leaders are to be found, people who love pagan religious customs but despise the word of God. They are certainly very religious people. But God's people can decline in faith even when religious routines are commonplace and popular. God will allow their religiosity to go on one more year (apparently this bit of Isaiah's preaching comes from 702 BC, a year before Sennacherib invaded Judah). Isaiah says:

*Add one more year to this year;
let the cycle of festivals go round once more.*

• *One more year – the arrival of Judah's enemies signal God's displeasure*

One more year is allowed and then God will bring Judah's enemies to force Judah to realize that idolatry cannot be ignored by God for long. God's people become a fire-place. The fire of God's displeasure comes against them.

²*Then I will bring distress to Ariel,
and there will be groaning and wailing;
the city will be 'Ariel' indeed – an altar hearth.*

³*will encamp against you all around;
I will besiege you with towers
and set up 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 screech.*

• *Assyrians' invasion – Jerusalem humiliated*

The Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem in 701 BC, but actually it was God who was invading them ('I will bring distress . . . I will encamp against you . . . I will besiege you . . .'). Jerusalem would be forced to speak in a soft humiliated voice, like the mumblings and moanings that are found in spiritist seances.

2. God's chastening does not annihilate his people

2. God's chastening does not annihilate his people. Isaiah 29:5-8 refers to a rescue; it is parallel to Isaiah 37. At first the judgement seems to be one that will destroy Judah altogether.

⁵*But the multitude of your enemies will become
like fine dust,
the ruthless hordes like blown chaff.*

*Suddenly, instantly, it will happen.
6Yahweh Almighty will visit the city
with thunder and earthquake and great noise,
with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire.*

• *Thunder and lightning – symbolises Assyria's invasion*

The thunder-and-lightning is Isaiah's picture-symbolism for the invasion of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib.

*7Then the hordes of all the nations that bring vast numbers against Ariel,
that bring masses of attackers against the city and its fortresses and that threaten it –
they will be as it is with a dream,
with a vision in the night.*

• *Suddenly Sennacherib's forces called away – Judah saved*

Verse 7 refers to the sudden turnaround of events. Suddenly Sennacherib's forces were called away and Judah was saved. It was like waking up from a nightmare and finding that some hideous threat was unreal.

*8It will be as when a hungry man dreams that he is eating,
but he awakens, and his hunger remains; as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking,
but he awakens faint, with his thirst unquenched.
So will it be with the hordes of all the nations that bring vast numbers against Mount Zion.*

• *Like waking up from a nightmare*

• *Like a dream for the Assyrians also – expected success but woke up to failure*

Verse 8 applies the picture of a dream in a different way. It was like a dream for the Assyrians also. For them they expected success but woke up to failure. Satisfaction was the dream; hunger and thirst was the reality. The nations might dream of conquering Jerusalem but when God rescues his people his enemies wake up and find their dreams amount to nothing¹¹.

¹¹ see ch. 37

• *God chastises but later rescues His people*

God may indeed chastise his people, but in due course he rescues them. He does not annihilate his people. However, despite the goodness of God at the time of Sennacherib's invasion the nation did not turn to God but went deeper into sin than ever.

3. The worst kind of judgement is God's sending spiritual blindness

3. The worst kind of judgement is God's sending spiritual blindness. Persistent sin led to a worse judgement than Sennacherib. Those who do not wish to see eventually are unable to see. It is a terrible judgement.

*9Be indecisive and bewildered,
blind yourselves and be sightless.
They are drunk, but not from wine,
they stagger, but not from beer.*

• *Persistent sin led to even worse judgement*

*10For Yahweh has poured out upon you a sleep of slumber.
He has sealed your eyes;
the prophets and your heads (the seers)
he has covered.*

• *Some can read but will not unseal the book*

Some can read but can't be bothered to unseal the book

¹¹For 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 to him, 'Read this, please,' he will answer, 'I can't; it is sealed.'

• *Others cannot read*

Others cannot read but have no interest in learning.

¹²*Or if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, 'Read this, please,' he will answer, 'I don't know how to read.'*

• *Judgement of spiritual inability*

Either way it is a picture of total spiritual inability. God has sent upon them a spirit of slumber. It is a terrible judgement. 'Will not' becomes 'cannot'.

4. God's salvation brings the renewal of our spiritual vision

4. **God's salvation brings the renewal of our spiritual vision.** Verses 13–14 hint at another rescue even greater than deliverance from Sennacherib. Again Judah faces a terrible foe, not onslaught by a military conqueror, but something worse, spiritual unreality.

¹³*The Sovereign Lord says:
'This people comes near to me;
with their mouth and with their lips they honour me,
but their hearts are far from me.
Their fear of me is made up only of rules taught
by other people.'*

• *Will God again rescue His people?*

Will God again rescue his people? God says:

¹⁴*'Behold I will again do marvellous things,
with wonder upon wonder.'*

• *God will rescue Jerusalem from insincerity and a cold heart towards Him*



In the light of the flow of thought, this must refer to a rescue. It is human wisdom that is the cause of spiritual blindness. God will do something even more marvellous than rescuing Jerusalem from the Assyrians. He will rescue them from insincerity and a cold heart towards him.

*'And the wisdom of their wise people will perish,
the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.'*

• *Removal of 'wise' and 'intelligent' is part of the rescue!*

The removal of the 'wise' and the 'intelligent' is part of the rescue! The people had become hypocrites, but God will act in a marvellous manner. The advisers and counsellors of the nation will disappear altogether. The people who trust their own 'wisdom' will find that all human cleverness is removed, and in its place they are given spiritual wisdom. The people were rescued from Assyrians outside the nation; they will be rescued from their advisers within the nation. God's salvation brings the abolition of human religious 'wisdom' and the renewal of our spiritual vision.

• *Spiritual wisdom replaces human wisdom*

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