

## Isaiah 29:1-24

### "God Wants Your Heart"

We're in a section of scripture dealing w/ God's judgment against the southern kingdom of Judah. Let's jump right in.

#### Vs 1-4

The curtain pulls back on Ch 29 in a bit of a mysterious fashion. God pronouncing "woe" to "Ariel", which makes us wonder exactly what God is talking about. We hear the word "Ariel" we start thinking "little mermaid" or something. ☺ But it quickly becomes clear that (for whatever reason God calls it Ariel) He's referring to the city of Jerusalem & by extension the nation of Judah.

We know this for 2 reasons. #1 Isaiah says quiet clearly that he's speaking of the city where "David dwelt". & Whenever the Bible speaks of the city of David, it's speaking of Jerusalem. You say, "Well, I thought David dwelt in Bethlehem as well?" He did, but here in Vs 1 Isaiah adds the detail, "Add year to year; let the feasts come around." The feasts were held annually, not in Bethlehem, but in Jerusalem.

Now, there's a little debate as to what the word, "Ariel" means. Literally, in Hebrew it means, "Lion of God." But it's very close to another word in Hebrew which means, "Altar for sacrifice." So commentators vary in their interpretation of the passage.

Is the reference to the fact that Jerusalem had a lofty opinion of itself, was elevated in pride & had come to rest upon its spiritual heritage having grown comfortable in routine (add yr to yr, let the feasts come around) rather than seeking God from the heart?

Or is God saying, "Jerusalem has become like an altar for sacrifice before Me." Referring to the fact that that God would bring judgment upon the city w/such completeness that it would be burned to the ground & be left like a sacrifice upon an altar. Saying in effect, "Go ahead, keep your routines, go through the motions, add yr to yr, let the feasts come around, it won't save you."

Truth be told, I don't have a bone to pick w/either interpretation because there's application in both directions. Yes, God would bring the pride of Jerusalem low. The bible is clear, "These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: (what's the 1st one on the list) A proud look,"<sup>1</sup> Pride. God hates pride. You say, "Wait a minute, what are the other 6 things that God hates?" Well, you'll have to write down the reference & look it up later, I'm not going to do all the work for you. ☺ But God *resists* (or wars against) the proud.

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<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Pr 6:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We made mention of it last week so we won't linger on it here, but you don't want to be found fighting against God, it's a war you can't win. God has *never* lost a battle & it certainly won't start w/you or me. God has a perfect record; He wins *every* battle & He would bring Jerusalem low.

"I will distress Ariel, there shall be heaviness & sorrow. & It shall be to Me as Ariel." Again, either He would come against it aggressively & w/ferocity as though fighting against a lion. Or, Jerusalem would be to God as an altar for sacrifice. It would be brought down (Vs 4) "your speech shall whisper out of the dust."

Keeping the feasts wouldn't save them, offering sacrifices wouldn't save them...

\* Guys, religious routines don't amount to anything before God. Too often we fall prey to the mindset of, "Well, I go to church. I *sacrifice* financially in the offering, I *sacrifice* practically in serving. I've been a good little boy (or a good little girl) I'm sure all is good between me & God." **We anchor ourselves to our religious routines. God's not interested in a religious routine, He wants a *love relationship w/you*. It's *obedience* He's after (from the heart) not sacrifice.**

**King Saul fell into that trap. He thought he could balance his otherwise chaotic & sinful lifestyle by just making a lot of sacrifices.** You know, trying to balance out the bad by doing more good... Samuel said to him, "***Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.***"<sup>2</sup> Don't think you can lead whatever kind of sinful lifestyle you want & just "make up for it" by giving more, or serving more, somehow sacrificing more.

King David (on the other hand) said this, "***You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.***"<sup>3</sup> You see? It's not religious routine God is after. It's relationship, genuine repentance, obedience to His word from the heart... \*

So either way you want to see it, the message is the same. God was going to punish Jerusalem. Bring low their proud, religious hearts that He might renew them in their relationship w/Him.

Vs 5-8

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Sa 15:22-23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 51:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The principles of God's sovereignty & man's freewill are certainly interesting to ponder. & I should say that though this would apply directly to how God handled the Assyrian army that surrounded the city of Jerusalem (killing 185,000 soldiers in the course of a single night). *It seems that, that would just be a foreshadowing of what will be fulfilled in the final battle that we refer to as the Battle of Armageddon. Because not only does Isaiah refer to the "multitude of your foes" (speaking of the Assyrian army)... In Vs 7 he speaks of the "multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel."* & He speaks of how God will frustrate them, exasperate them & absolutely destroy them as He fights for Jerusalem, scattering her enemies like fine dust, like chaff that passes away. (As for the future fulfillment of this, you might just write it down & look it up later, Zech 14:1-3).

So He will humble Jerusalem in the dust, then destroy/disperse her enemies like fine dust... *Which brings us back to my previous point. God was going to allow the pagan nation of Assyria to march on Judah, & He would even use the tremendous, merciless damage they would do to serve His own purposes in punishing Jerusalem. But that doesn't mean that He wouldn't hold them accountable for coming against His people. He would use their efforts for His purposes, but He would hold them accountable for what they did of their own volition.*

He says that for those who would come against Jerusalem it would be a frustrating & exasperating experience. Because God would protect them & fight for them. He says, "It'll be like going to bed hungry, dreaming that you ate a feast, but when you wake up you're still hungry... or thirsty." You can see it, even taste it, but you'll never apprehend it.

*I just want to remind you that even when it comes to the chastening of the Lord, the discipline of God in our lives, He's carefully managing every detail. If the enemy had their way w/Jerusalem they'd have been destroyed completely & utterly. I'm just telling you, if the enemy of your soul had his way, he would utterly & completely destroy *your* life. But God wouldn't allow it. He only allowed as much as would serve His purpose in purifying their lives & no more. However, whom the Lord loves, He chastens... If you've ever had the heavy hand of God's chastening upon you, thank God for that. He loves you. He's purifying you, preparing you as a vessel of His glory & grace.*

### **Vs 9-10**

Isaiah says, "Pause & wonder!" We might say, "Stop & think." Isaiah says, "Something truly astounding has happened here. You've become spiritually blind & numb to the things of God! & The wonder of it all is that you (though your own pride & religious routines) did it to yourselves!"

& We have some overtones here that remind us of how God dealt w/the Pharoah & it's a principle that we see threaded throughout the scriptures & that is this: God will honor the condition, the position of your heart... \* Some people struggle w/the verses in the book of Exodus that speak of God "hardening" the Pharoah's heart when Moses was seeking to deliver His people from bondage. Really, all it means is that He "stiffened" or "strengthened" his already resolved position. Moses said, "Let my people go." Pharoah thought it over & said, "No." So, God said, "Fine, if that's your resolve I'll affirm you in that position. I'll honor your decision."

But ladies & gentlemen, it works on the other hand as well. If you purpose in your heart to honor God, to humble yourself before God, to serve God, to love God w/all your heart, all your mind, all your strength & all your soul... God will honor that as well! He'll affirm you & strengthen you in that resolve. \*

Here, they had blinded themselves, they had numbed themselves to the things of God, they were spiritually inebriated/intoxicated. So, God responded to their position, we see it in Vs 10. Go ahead & look at it... (read).

He gave them over to the lethargy, vulnerability, the insensitivity of spiritual sleep. Namely the prophets & the seers, those who would give God's word to the people. – \*Ladies & gentlemen, I need you to see this. God gave them what they wanted. They chose spiritual blindness so God poured out upon them a spiritual of deep sleep, He "closed their eyes". & This is a real problem (I believe) in the church today! Many Christians are spiritually asleep, insensitive to the things of God, ineffective in their "walk" w/God. But listen, we live in a day & in an age where every child of God needs to be spiritually sober, awake, watching & praying!

Paul wrote to the Romans, "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."<sup>4</sup> Paul issued an "every hand in the building" kind of statement. By show of hands, how many of you believe that the return of J.C. is nearer now than when you 1<sup>st</sup> believed? Then now more than ever we need to be awake & alert spiritually speaking! \*

Another example of people being accountable for their own choices resulting in God giving them over to their own desires (as a form of judgment) is found in Romans Ch 1. You might write it down & read it later it's Vs 18-32.

<sup>4</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 13:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So again, the people blinded themselves, desensitized themselves & so God gave them over to said blindness (spiritually speaking). & The way He did that was to cease giving “vision” to those who were responsible to bring the revelation of God’s word to the people. The prophets & seers, the pastors & preachers of Judah were no longer hearing from God. If the people didn’t want the truth of God’s word, then God would honor that.

The prophet Amos spoke to this same principle. Listen to what he wrote,\* “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, *“That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, But shall not find it.”*<sup>5</sup> & I have to confess (as I read that) that I can’t help but wonder if we (here in the U.S.) aren’t in the throes of some of that right now... **We look around & we wonder, where are all the churches that are truly teaching the word of God, line upon line, precept upon precept? Family, they are few & far between! There is a famine of God’s word in the land! Oh, there’s plenty of people standing behind pulpits, & they’re all talking about something, but where are the people simply teaching the Bible?**

& We wonder if the Lord isn’t simply saying, “Listen, I’m giving you what you want! If you don’t really want My word, you just want to hear what you want to hear, then you can have it.” Now, it’s easy to blame the unfaithful pastors & preachers who don’t teach the word of God (& it’s certainly appropriate in some measure to do so), but listen, what about the unfaithful people in the pews who simply don’t want to *hear* the word of God? They just don’t want to hear it! **They want, “I’m ok, you’re ok, you can live whatever lifestyle you want & we all go to heaven in the end!” I’m tellin ya, there’s enough responsibility to go around for everyone! – We need to recognize the precious gift that God has entrusted to us in His word. Ascribe value to it & desire more of it. \***

### **Vs 11-12**

You see? God keeps stacking it on. He likens them to the blind, to the drunk & now to the illiterate. Meaning that even though they could read what was written, it wouldn’t do them any good. No different than if they couldn’t read at all. What’s the take home here?

Jesus said it like this. He said,\* *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Am 8:11-12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 6:63]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Paul put it this way, *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*<sup>7</sup>

Guys, when it comes to God's word; it's not about *education* or more *information*. It's about *revelation. Illumination* that comes from the Spirit of God. (Write it down, look it up later, 1 Jn 2:27.) Unless the Lord opens our understanding, we can never truly comprehend the word of God. & Isaiah is telling them, "The Lord isn't going to open your understanding. Read it all you want; it won't serve you in any way spiritually. You may as well be illiterate." Listen, if at the bottom line, you don't really want to respond to God's word, or be changed by God's word, then simply going through the motion of reading it won't do anything for you. But if you're seeking truth, you want the Spirit of God to challenge, convict & change you, it'll come alive for you, the Spirit of God will teach you.\*

These people didn't want that. They were content w/their religious routines & simply going through the motions of ministry.

### Vs 13-16

What a powerful passage of scripture we've come to today... & I have no doubt that is sounds somewhat familiar to many of you. \* "These people draw near to Me w/their mouths & honor Me w/their lips," God says, "But have removed their hearts far from Me." This was a *real* problem in Isaiah's day. It was a real problem in *Ezekiel's* day. God told him, "...they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them."<sup>8</sup> My how the people loved to hear Ezekiel speak. He had a real way w/words. He was so eloquent, so articulate, so... entertaining... The people would come & listen to him, but not respond to the application of God's word he was sharing *with* them.

It was a real problem in *Jesus' day*. He quoted this same passage to the religious leaders of His day. (& We may as well get this on the table.) It's a real problem in *our* day as well... Oh, we know how to lift our voices & sing all the right songs, we know how to conversate & say all the right words. & Though man may look to the outward appearance...

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Co 2:14]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eze 33:31-32]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God searches – the heart. & It's so easy for our heart & mind to be miles away when we should be engaged & involved in giving worship to God & receiving the word of God. \*

This just goes to show that you can't always know the heart of a man simply by the words they say. It's true that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. But equally true is that I can draw near to God w/my mouth, I can honor Him w/my lips, "Oh what a blessing!" "Oh, praise God!" But my heart is far from Him.

What are we learning here? 2 Things. #1 \* We have an accountability, & a responsibility before God regarding the position & condition of our heart. We're either preparing the soil of our hearts for the seed of His word & the leading of His Spirit through repentance/obedience. Or we're allowing our hearts to harden against Him, to drift away from Him through rebellion, rejection of the instruction of His word & the entertainment of sin in our lives... You hear me say it on the regular around here. Prov 16:1, "*The preparations of the heart belong to man,*"<sup>9</sup>. When Joshua was preparing to die, encouraging the nation to stay true to God, he said this, "*Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel."*<sup>10</sup> That word "incline" means "to stretch out toward". Incline your heart to the Lord. Listen, the message is the same from cover to cover. God wants *your heart!* He doesn't want our religious efforts. He wants a relationship w/us. \*

#2 If your heart is no longer near God like it once was, we learn here how it happens. We remove it. God didn't leave nor forsake us! That only leaves 1 option. We removed our hearts from Him.

They thought they were so sophisticated spiritually, so wise in their own understanding. God says that He's going to bring their wisdom to nothing & the understanding of their prudent men will be hidden.

& To make matters still worse they thought they were being slick. Like they could hide what was really going on from the Lord. They did their deeds in the dark, kept their thoughts quiet, thinking God didn't know. But God searches the heart, He tests the mind, He weighs our thoughts... He *knows!* The bible says, "*Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.*"<sup>11</sup>

Where can I go to escape the always there, always aware presence of God? Nowhere.

More literally, the 1<sup>st</sup> word of Vs 16 is "Perversion". You've turned things upside-down.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Pr 16:1]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>10</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jos 24:23]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>11</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 139:12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He gives them an illustration, “Is the potter on the same level as the clay?” Btw, you know that God is the Master Potter, yes? He made us out of dust... literally. He says, “Shall the thing made say of him who made, ‘He did not make me?’ Or shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’?”

They thought they had God all figured out. But that God didn’t understand them. God says, “Actually, you have that turned around. I have *you* all figured out & you really don’t know *Me!*” You see, they’d elevated themselves & brought God low. Esteemed the clay as the potter. The clay was just as worthy, just as intelligent, just as wise & understanding as was the potter.

& What we have here is so important. People denying that the Lord had made them, or that God doesn’t understand them & had erred w/them. What does this look like today? People believing they’re the product of random chance & evolution. Or believing that God erred w/them because they’re a man trapped in a woman’s body, or a woman trapped in a man’s body. \* Ladies & gentlemen, it’s so important that we understand this...

Your gender is no mistake, God didn’t make a mistake & place a man in a woman’s body or a woman in a man’s body. – Now, I want to be careful here because what I *don’t* want to do is diminish the confusion that’s very real to people. But what I *do* want to emphasize is that though for some, a state of confusion concerning their gender may be real, *God is not the author of confusion*. That confusion isn’t coming from God! James Ch 3 tells us that it’s the wisdom of the *world*, & it’s earthly, sensual & demonic.

Ladies and Gentlemen: The Bible speaks to all these issues! We’re not seeing a political problem. We’re seeing a spiritual problem & the way we need to come against it is on our faces in prayer & sharing the truth in love. Fighting the good fight of faith for the souls of the precious people whom God has created in His own image! Satan seeks to mar that image, distort/pervert the image... “I was born this way.” Listen, none of us were born w/a desire to honor God. We’re all born selfish, defiant & rebellious toward God. It’s called a “sin nature”. That’s why the Bible says we must be “born again” of the Spirit of God.

Believe me when I tell you, it’s not *God* who lacks understanding, *we’re* the ones (humanity) has fallen out of fellowship w/& forsaken God. The question is, “What are we going to do about it?” Should we sit back, hurl insults, spew venom at ungodly people because they act ungodly? Or should we get on our faces, cry out to God for the salvation of a generation? Ask God to strengthen us to live out what it means to be light & salt in a dark/decaying world that people might come to know Him & be saved *by Him?* \*

**Vs 17-21**

We see this kind of “character assassination” & “cancelation” all the time in the political world today. A twisting of words to make a criminal out of someone, a racist or a bigot out of someone when we all know that honestly, contextually such is not the case.

God says, “It won’t be long, the high will be brought low, & the humble will be lifted up.” He will right what’s wrong, bringing restoration & reconciliation to Himself. Ultimately this will all be fulfilled when Jesus is ruling the earth in righteousness during His millennial kingdom.

**Vs 22-24 (Close)**

Isaiah pictures Jacob overlooking his offspring & being embarrassed & ashamed. But when God restores them, heals them & does His work in them, there’ll be no need for shame. They’ll hallow the name of the Holy One of Jacob & fear the God of Israel.

& One piece of evidence, the *fruit* of their restoration will be a hunger *for* & an understanding of the truth of God’s word. No longer will they be critical, they’ll be teachable. Quick question: critical spirit, or teachable spirit? Which better describes you. A complainer or a learner?

May God open our understanding. & May we be those who value, drink *in* & respond appropriately *to* the truth of God’s Word.

**Prayer Points:**

Father, that’s our prayer. That we would know our place, & honor *Your* place in our lives. You are the Master Potter, we are the clay. Have *Your* way, mold us, shape us, make us more like Jesus. Guard us from religious routines, & may we love You w/all our heart, all our mind, all our soul & all our strength.

God wants your heart. Don’t delay another day, turn from your sin. Believe on J.C. who has loved you & given Himself for you upon the cross & you will be saved.