

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

Isaiah 29:1-2, 10, 18 – Woe, O Ariel, Ariel the city where David once camped! Add year to year, observe your feasts on schedule. I will bring distress to Ariel, and she will be a city of lamenting and mourning; and she will be like an Ariel to me. ... For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, the seers. ... On that day the deaf will hear words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

Context

Chapter 29 is the second of the woe oracles that run from chapter 28 through chapter 33, and it turns the searchlight from Ephraim to Jerusalem. Chapter 28 opened with the fading crown of Samaria and ended with the tested Stone laid in Zion; chapter 29 opens with Zion herself under the name Ariel, besieged, brought to the dust, and delivered by the very God who besieged her. The historical setting has not moved. This is still Hezekiah's Judah in the years before 701 BC, with Assyria on the horizon and the royal counselors quietly negotiating an alliance with Egypt (30:1-2; 31:1). The covenant with death of 28:15 and the plans deeply hidden from the LORD of 29:15 are the same policy seen from two angles.

The chapter also answers a question from chapter 28. The priests and prophets of 28:7 reeled with wine, and the class was told the drink was that of a deeper pride. Chapter 29 names the deeper condition outright: "they become drunk, but not with wine" (29:9), because "the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep" (29:10). The stupor is judicial, and it is the commission of chapter 6 arriving on schedule: "render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim" (6:10). What was announced at the prophet's call is now poured out on the city.

Two settings sit inside the one chapter, and the seam between them is visible. Verses 1–8 are set at the Assyrian siege of 701 BC and end in a deliverance that Jerusalem watched from her own walls (37:36). Verses 17–24 are set in the kingdom, when Lebanon becomes a fertile field, the sealed book is opened to the deaf, and the house of Jacob sanctifies the Holy One of Israel. Between them, verses 9–16 indict the Jerusalem of Hezekiah's day. The covenant lawsuit (*riv*) that structures the whole book is heard here in its plainest form: the charge (29:13), the verdict (29:14), and the second woe against the accused who imagine the Judge cannot see (29:15–16).

Structure of the Chapter

Isaiah 29 unfolds in four greater sections, two woes and the answer to both:

- 1–8: Ariel besieged and delivered. The city of the altar becomes the altar (1–4); the LORD of hosts visits her with thunder and fire, and the multitude of her enemies vanishes like a dream (5–8).

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

- 9–12: The stupor and the sealed book. The people are drunk without wine because God has poured out deep sleep (9–10), and the entire vision has become a sealed scroll that neither the literate nor the illiterate can read (11–12).
- 13–16: The covenant lawsuit indictment. The charge of lip service and tradition (13), the sentence that the wisdom of the wise will perish (14), and the second woe against those who hide their plans from the LORD and invert the potter and the clay (15–16).
- 17–24: The great reversal. In a very little while Lebanon becomes a fertile field, the deaf hear the words of the book, the blind see, the ruthless come to an end, and Jacob sees his children and sanctifies the Holy One of Israel.

One movement runs underneath: the city that God besieges is the city God delivers, and the eyes God shuts are the eyes God will open. The sealed book of verse 11 and the heard book of verse 18 are the same book, closed in judgment and opened in grace.

Exposition

Ariel Besieged and Delivered (1–8)

“Woe, O Ariel, Ariel the city where David once camped! Add year to year, observe your feasts on schedule” (29:1). The city is identified before the name can be puzzled over: this is the city David took and camped in (2 Samuel 5:6–9), Jerusalem. The name Ariel (*ari’el*) carries two possible senses. It can be read as “lion of God,” and it is also the term for the altar hearth, the top of the altar where the fire burns, the word used for the altar in the temple vision of Ezekiel 43:15–16. Verse 2 settles which is understood here: “I will bring distress to Ariel, and she will be a city of lamenting and mourning; and she will be like an Ariel to me” (29:2). The threat only works if Ariel means the hearth. Jerusalem, the city of the altar where the feasts come round year after year, will herself become the altar, the place where the fire burns. The command to keep adding year to year and observing the feasts on schedule is not a compliment; it is the picture of a city keeping the calendar of worship while the God of the calendar prepares to lay siege to it.

“I will camp against you encircling you, and I will set siegeworks against you, and I will raise up battle towers against you” (29:3). The verb is the one used of David in verse 1 (*chanah*, to camp). David camped in the city to take it for the LORD; now the LORD camps against the city to take it back from its own pride. God Himself is the besieger of His own city before He is its deliverer, and the enemy outside the walls is only His instrument, as the Assyrian rod was in chapter 10. “Then you will be brought low; from the earth you will speak, and from the dust where you are prostrate your words will come. Your voice will also be like that of a spirit from the ground, and your speech will whisper from the dust” (29:4). The proud city that spoke so confidently of its refuge (28:15) is reduced to a whisper from the ground, its voice like the thin muttering of a medium’s familiar spirit (8:19). Ariel is flat on her face in the dust of her own altar.

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

Then, without transition, the picture inverts. “But the multitude of your enemies will become like fine dust, and the multitude of the ruthless ones like the chaff which blows away; and it will happen instantly, suddenly” (29:5). The dust that was Jerusalem’s humiliation becomes the dust that her enemies are ground into, and the chaff blows off the threshing floor in a moment. “From the LORD of hosts you will be punished with thunder and earthquake and loud noise, with whirlwind and tempest and the flame of a consuming fire” (29:6). The verb is *paqad*, to visit, and the visitation is God’s own arrival at His city, in the same storm language that marks His appearing throughout Scripture (Psalm 18:7–15). The siege is not lifted by an ally or a treaty; it is lifted by the LORD of hosts coming down in person.

“And the multitude of all the nations who wage war against Ariel, even all who wage war against her and her stronghold, and who distress her, will be like a dream, a vision of the night” (29:7). The besieging host is there one evening and gone by morning, a dream that leaves nothing behind. Verse 8 doubles the figure: the hungry man dreams he is eating and wakes as hungry as before; the thirsty man dreams he is drinking and wakes faint. “Thus the multitude of all the nations will be who wage war against Mount Zion” (29:8). The nations dream of devouring Zion and wake up with nothing in their mouths.

The setting of these eight verses must be located with care, and two readings are on the table. Some place the whole scene in the Tribulation, reading the multitude of all the nations as the armies of the Antichrist gathered against Jerusalem in the time of Jacob’s trouble (Zechariah 14:2), the thunder and fire as the cosmic judgments of the Day of the LORD, and the sudden deliverance as the Return of Christ. The text itself points the other way. “Add year to year” is a short countdown, the same kind of near marker as “within a year and a few days” in 32:10. The entire block of chapters 28–33 is fixed in Hezekiah’s Egyptian-alliance crisis. The deliverance is sudden, divine, and without a human sword, which is exactly what is promised in 31:8, “the Assyrian will fall by a sword not of man,” and exactly what happened in 37:36, when the angel of the LORD struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians overnight and Sennacherib went home. Assyria’s army was in fact a multitude drawn from all the nations of its empire, so verse 7 is historically true as it stands, and the besiegers who vanished like a dream were the ones who woke up dead. Verses 1–8 are set at 701 BC, and that setting is held firmly.

Holding the setting does not mean denying what the setting points to. The siege of 701 BC is a foreshadowing of the final siege, when “all the nations” are gathered against Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:2), when the Antichrist brings the city to its knees under the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15), and when the LORD goes forth to fight against those nations (Zechariah 14:3) and fire comes down from heaven on the armies that surround the beloved city (Revelation 20:9). The near deliverance and the far deliverance have the same shape because they have the same Deliverer. But foreshadowing is not dual fulfillment. Verses 1–8 were fulfilled once, in Hezekiah’s day, and what they foreshadow will be fulfilled once, at the end of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. Verse 8 keeps making this clear: the outcome

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

here is that the nations wake up empty, not that Messiah reigns. That further outcome waits for verses 17–24.

The Stupor and the Sealed Book (9–12)

“Be delayed and wait, blind yourselves and be blind; they become drunk, but not with wine, they stagger, but not with strong drink” (29:9). Here is the answer to the question left open in chapter 28. The priests and prophets of 28:7 was it the wine from the vine, or delusion? The stagger of Jerusalem is a stagger without a cup. “For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, the seers” (29:10). It is poured out by the LORD Himself, and it falls precisely on the men whose job was to see. The prophets have their eyes shut; the seers have their heads covered.

Two things must be said together about this stupor, because the text says both. It is a judgment: God poured it. And it is a willing blindness: “blind yourselves and be blind.” The people closed their own eyes first, and God sealed them shut. The order matters. This is not a God who blinded a people that wanted to see; it is a God who confirmed a people in the blindness they chose. That is the pattern of chapter 6, where the commission to make the heart insensitive was given to a people who had already refused, and it is the pattern here.

The apostle Paul uses verse 10 as a standing judgment on the nation. Explaining why Israel as a whole has not obtained what she sought, he writes, “just as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day” (Romans 11:8), fusing Isaiah 29:10 with Deuteronomy 29:4. The words “down to this very day” carry the stupor from Hezekiah’s Jerusalem into the first century, and Paul then fixes its end: “a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25–26). So, the timeline of verse 10 is this.

The stupor was poured out on Jerusalem in the eighth century before Christ. It was not lifted by the deliverance of 701 BC; the nation spared from Sennacherib kept the same closed eyes. It was in force when the King came to His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). It is in force on corporate Israel today. And it will be lifted only at the close of Daniel’s Seventieth Week (the Seven Years of Tribulation), when the surviving Remnant looks on Him whom they have pierced and mourns (Zechariah 12:10), and then only for that Remnant. The refining of the nation burns away the unbelieving portion and leaves the third that calls on His name (Zechariah 13:8–9).

The corporate judgment must be distinguished from the individual. In the very chapter that quotes verse 10, Paul writes, “in the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (Romans 11:5), and he is himself the proof of it. The nation is under a stupor; any Israelite who turns to the Lord has the veil removed (2 Corinthians 3:16). The blindness is a corporate sentence on a people who refused to see; individual salvation is by faith, as it has always been.

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

“The entire vision will be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, ‘Please read this,’ he will say, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed.’ Then the book will be given to the one who is illiterate, saying, ‘Please read this.’ And he will say, ‘I cannot read’” (29:11–12).

The figure is a simile: the whole vision, everything given through the prophet, has become to Jerusalem *like* a sealed scroll. Two men are handed it. The educated man says the seal is the problem; the uneducated man says his ignorance is the problem. Neither excuse touches the real problem, which is that the readers are under the stupor of verse 10. The word of God has not become unclear; the people have become unable. Learned and unlearned alike are shut out, so no one can plead that a better education, or a simpler text, would have made the difference. The scroll is closed to the nation.

Let’s set this beside 8:16, where the same sealing was commanded in the opposite direction: “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.” In chapter 8 the sealing preserved the word for the Remnant who would wait for the LORD (8:17). In chapter 29 the sealing shuts the word away from the nation that would not. It is the same idea with opposite effects, depending on who holds it, and that is the whole distinction between the Remnant and the nation. Verse 18 answers verses 11–12 directly: “on that day the deaf will hear words of a book.” The sealed book is opened in the kingdom, and it is opened by God.

The Covenant Lawsuit Indictment (13–16)

“Then the Lord said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned’” (29:13). The charge is read aloud in the LORD’s own voice, and it is the charge of the whole lawsuit (*riv*) from chapter 1 forward: the sacrifices are brought, the feasts are kept, the calendar of verse 1 is observed on schedule, and the heart is somewhere else. The reverence is real as a habit but empty, “tradition learned,” a commandment of men memorized and repeated. Israel did the things she was told to do without believing the God who told her.

Verse 13 is not a prediction; it is a diagnosis, and the diagnosis has held from Isaiah’s day to this one. When the Pharisees pressed the Lord about the tradition of the elders, He answered with this verse: “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (Matthew 15:7–9; Mark 7:6–7). That citation is not a second fulfillment of a prophecy; it is the same condition, unchanged after seven centuries, recognized by the One who first named it. The Pharisees kept Moses’ words as tradition and added their own, and believed neither. They did not believe Moses, and so they did not believe the One of whom Moses wrote (John 5:46–47). The stupor of verse 10 had never been lifted, and verse 13 in the mouth of the King is the evidence. The same lip service, and

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

the same closed heart, mark corporate Israel from Hezekiah's Jerusalem through the first century to the present day.

“Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed” (29:14). The sentence follows the charge. God will do a marvel, and the marvel will be that the wise men of Judah, the counselors who drew up the Egyptian treaty, will be left without wisdom, and the discerning without discernment. The men who could not read the sealed book will find their own learning sealed. Paul lifts this verse as the charter of the gospel's foolishness: “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside” (1 Corinthians 1:19). The wisdom that cannot read God's scroll is the wisdom God sets aside.

“Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are done in a dark place, and they say, ‘Who sees us?’ or ‘Who knows us?’” (29:15). The second woe names the specific sin behind the general charge. The plans hidden deep are the Egyptian negotiations of 30:1–2, an embassy sent south “without consulting Me,” conducted as if the God who camps against Ariel could not see the envoys leaving the gate. This is the political form of the lip-service religion of verse 13: worship God on schedule in the temple and run the kingdom in the dark. “You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, ‘He did not make me;’ or what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’” (29:16). They have inverted the order of creation. The clay is planning in opposition to the potter, the vessel declaring that the one who shaped it does not understand. The question answers itself: the potter is not the clay's equal, and the clay that says so has said nothing about the potter and everything about itself. The figure returns in 45:9 and 64:8, and Paul uses it in Romans 9:20–21 for exactly this point, that the thing molded has no standing to answer back to the One who molded it.

The Great Reversal (17–24)

“Is it not yet just a little while before Lebanon will be turned into a fertile field, and the fertile field will be considered as a forest?” (29:17). The tone changes on a single phrase, “yet just a little while” (*me'at miz'ar*), and everything that follows sits on the other side of judgment. Lebanon, the great northern forest, becomes cultivated ground, and cultivated ground grows so lush it looks like a forest. The line is repeated word for word in 32:15, where it is tied to the Spirit poured out from on high. The transformation is taken literally: when the kingdom is established and the land comes under its proper headship, with Israel restored to her place as the head and not the tail (Deuteronomy 28:13), the land itself becomes fertile again. The curse on the ground is reversed where the people of the covenant are restored to the covenant land, and the forest that supplied the cedars of the city of man becomes the farmland of the city of God.

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

“**On that day** the deaf will hear words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see” (29:18). The sealed book of verse 11 is opened. The deaf hear its words; the blind who could not read it see. This is the direct undoing of verses 10–12, and the undoing is God’s act, “on that day,” not the gradual result of a nation coming to its senses. Verse 18 is corporate and national; it describes a people whose eyes are opened to the book, and it sits inside a section in which the ruthless are brought to an end and Jacob sanctifies the Holy One of Israel.

“The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the LORD, and the needy of mankind will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless will come to an end and the scorner will be finished, indeed all who are intent on doing evil will be cut off; who cause a person to be indicted by a word, and ensnare him who adjudicates at the gate, and defraud the one in the right with meaningless arguments” (29:19–21). The reversal reaches from the land to the people. The afflicted and the needy, the ones the ruthless trampled, rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, and the ruthless themselves, the scorner of 28:14 among them, are finished. Verse 21 lists their trade: framing a man with a word, trapping the judge at the gate, and cheating the innocent with empty argument, the very injustice the lawsuit charged in chapter 1 (1:17, 23) and chapter 5 (5:23). The end of the ruthless is not a reform; it is a cutting off.

“Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: ‘Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now turn pale; but when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will sanctify My name; indeed, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. Those who err in mind will know the truth, and those who criticize will accept instruction’” (29:22–24).

The chapter ends where Israel’s story began, with the God who redeemed Abraham, and it ends with the promise that the house of Jacob will one day stop being ashamed. The shame is the shame of verses 1–4, the face in the dust, the covenant with death exposed, the king who turned to Egypt. It is lifted when Jacob “sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst.” The restored nation is God’s workmanship, the potter’s finished vessel over against the clay that talked back in verse 16, and the sight of it moves the people to sanctify the name they had honored only with their lips. The Holy One of Israel is named here as the Holy One of Jacob, the God of the patriarch who wrestled and was renamed, and the nation that wrestled against Him for so long stands at last in awe. The final line closes the sealed book for good: “those who err in mind will know the truth, and those who criticize will accept instruction.” The people who could not read will understand, and the scoffers who mocked line upon line (28:9–10) will take the lesson. This is the national salvation of Romans 11:26, “all Israel will be saved,” the Remnant of the final generation brought through the fire and given eyes to see.

The foreshortening must be named at the close. From where the prophet stood, the deliverance of 701 BC and the deliverance of the kingdom lay along one line of sight, and

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

“yet just a little while” measures the distance to the nearer peak while the farther peak rises behind it. The valley between the two, which holds the centuries after Hezekiah, the first coming, the rejection of the King, and the whole Church age, is invisible from the eighth century. The New Testament supplies that valley: Romans 11 sets the duration of the stupor, the Gospels show the King offering and being refused, and Revelation sets the final siege and the final deliverance in their order. The sequence is held firmly; the timetable is held loosely; both peaks are equally literal.

Synthesis with All of Scripture

The Prophets. Within Isaiah, chapter 29 is stitched to what precedes and what follows. The stupor of 29:10 is the commission of 6:9–10 carried out. The sealed book of 29:11 inverts the sealed testimony of 8:16. The revelry of Jerusalem under siege in 22:12–13 and the wine of 28:7 are explained by 29:9. The hidden plans of 29:15 are named as the Egyptian embassy in 30:1–2 and 31:1. The deliverance of 29:5–8 is promised again in 31:4–5, where the LORD of hosts comes down to wage war on Mount Zion and protects Jerusalem like hovering birds, and is recorded as history in 37:36. The Lebanon line of 29:17 is repeated in 32:15, and the opened eyes of 29:18 in 35:5. The potter of 29:16 returns in 45:9 and 64:8. Among the other prophets, Micah, Isaiah’s contemporary, indicts the same rulers who “build Zion with bloodshed” and warns that “Zion will be plowed as a field” (Micah 3:10, 12). Ezekiel supplies the altar hearth, the *ari’el* of the future temple (Ezekiel 43:15–16). Jeremiah gives the potter’s house (Jeremiah 18:1–6). Daniel is told to “seal up the book until the end of time” (Daniel 12:4, 9), a book closed until its day exactly as the vision of 29:11 is closed until “that day” of 29:18. And Zechariah supplies the far siege that 29:1–8 foreshadows: “I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle... then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations” (Zechariah 14:2–3), with the Remnant’s eyes opened as they look on Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

Jesus. The Lord takes up verse 13 and verse 18, and the two uses must be held apart. Verse 13 He applies to the Pharisees as a diagnosis: “rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me” (Matthew 15:7–8; Mark 7:6). The condition named in Hezekiah’s day is the condition He meets in His own, and the men who kept the tradition did not believe the Scripture the tradition was built on (John 5:46–47). Verse 18 He echoes to John’s disciples as a credential: “the blind receive sight... and the deaf hear” (Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22). The King who could open a blind man’s eyes was showing Israel who stood before her, and the nation that watched Him do it stayed under the stupor (Matthew 13:13–15, quoting 6:9–10). The signs were the firstfruits of the kingdom; the kingdom itself, with a nation’s eyes opened to the book, awaits His return.

Revelation. John closes both of the chapter’s figures. The nations that surround Ariel and vanish like a dream (29:7–8) foreshadow the nations that “surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (Revelation

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

20:9), the last siege of Jerusalem and the last deliverance. And the sealed book of 29:11 shares its motif with the scroll in the right hand of the One on the throne, “sealed up with seven seals,” which no one in heaven or on earth could open until the Lion of Judah prevailed (Revelation 5:1–5). The two books are not the same document; the vision of 29:11 is a simile for a nation’s blindness, and the scroll of Revelation 5 is the scroll of the end-time judgments. What they share is the principle that God’s word about the end stays closed until God Himself opens it, at the time He has appointed, and that its opening is His act and not the reader’s achievement. The book is sealed in Isaiah 29, sealed until the end in Daniel 12, and opened by the Lamb in Revelation 5, and the day the deaf hear its words (29:18) is the day of His reign.

The Apostolic Letters. Paul builds three arguments on this chapter. On Israel’s hardening he cites 29:10: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day” (Romans 11:8), and then dates its end, “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25–26). On the foolishness of the gospel, he cites 29:14: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside” (1 Corinthians 1:19). On the sovereignty of God over the nation he takes up the potter of 29:16: “The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay” (Romans 9:20–21). Beside these, the sealed book of 29:11 has its apostolic ally in the veil: “until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted... but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:14–16), the corporate blindness and the individual door stated in one breath. And the “tradition learned by rote” of 29:13 is the target of the warning against “the commandments and teachings of men” (Colossians 2:22).

Hermeneutic Checkpoints

Start literal. A real city was besieged by a real army in a datable year, and a real deliverance followed that the historical chapters record. A real judicial blindness fell on a real nation and is still on it. And a real land will become fertile, real eyes will be opened, and a real house of Jacob will stand in awe of its God. Nothing in the chapter asks to be spiritualized, and the burden of proof sits on any reading that would.

Let the text interpret itself. Ariel is identified in the same verse that names it, “the city where David once camped,” and the sense of the name is fixed by verse 2’s play on the altar hearth; no outside key is needed. The stupor of verse 10 is expounded by Romans 11:8 and 11:25 as the hardening of corporate Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles; a stated referent is not traded for a guess. The sealed book of verse 11 is defined by verse 18, where the same book is heard.

Symbol still equals substance. Ariel is a play on a word, the sealed book is a simile, and the potter and clay are a figure, but recognizing each figure does not dissolve the reality it

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

describes. The city that becomes an altar really burned in her distress; the nation that cannot read really cannot see; the clay that answers back really is a nation planning around its God.

Keep the method consistent. Whoever reads the siege of 1–8 as the literal Assyrian siege must read the fertile Lebanon of verse 17 as literal land under Israel’s restored headship, and whoever takes the blindness of verse 10 as a literal judgment on a literal nation must take the opened eyes of verse 18 as a literal reversal for that same nation. The method cannot go literal in the siege and figurative in the kingdom.

No dual fulfillment. Verses 1–8 were fulfilled once, in 701 BC. The final siege they foreshadow (Zechariah 14; Revelation 20:9) will be fulfilled once, at the close of the Tribulation. Verse 13 is not a prophecy at all but a diagnosis that has held from Isaiah to the present, so the Lord’s use of it in Matthew 15 is application, not a second fulfillment. Verse 18 is not fulfilled by the healings of Matthew 11:5, which are its firstfruits, but by the opening of the nation’s eyes in the kingdom.

A foreshortening checkpoint. The chapter sees the deliverance of 701 BC and the deliverance of the kingdom as one range, and “yet just a little while” measures only the nearer peak. The New Testament supplies the valley: the centuries after Hezekiah, the first coming, the rejection of the King, and the Church age, during which the stupor of verse 10 remains on the nation while individuals turn and are saved. The sequence is held firmly and the timetable loosely, every peak equally literal.

Tying the Threads Together

The Messianic Hope. The Hope stands behind every turn of this chapter without being named in it. The LORD of hosts who visits Ariel with thunder and fire (29:6) is the One who will come down to fight for Mount Zion when all the nations gather (Zechariah 14:3), and the King who opened blind eyes and deaf ears in Galilee (Matthew 11:5) is the One who will open the eyes of the nation to the book on that day (29:18). The Stone laid in Zion in chapter 28 is the reason Ariel is not consumed on her own altar in chapter 29; the city is spared for the sake of the foundation God has laid in her. And the Lion of Judah who alone can open the sealed scroll (Revelation 5:5) is the One who will finally unseal the vision to the house of Jacob.

The Motif of the City. The Motif turns on a single verb. David camped in the city to take it for God; God camps against the city to take it back from its own pride (29:1, 3). Jerusalem, the city of the altar, becomes the altar, and Zion lies in the dust whispering like a ghost. Yet the city that God besieges is the city God delivers, and the multitude that surrounded her blows away like chaff. Against the fading crown of Samaria in chapter 28, Ariel is the city that is humbled and kept. The Motif reaches forward as well: the last siege of the beloved city ends with fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9), and the city on the other side of that siege is the one where Jacob sees his children in his midst and stands in awe.

Isaiah – Chapter 29

Ariel: The Besieged City and the Sealed Book

The Holy One of Israel. The title surges back by name in this chapter (29:19, 23) after its quiet in chapter 28, and it is joined to a new form, “the Holy One of Jacob” (29:23). His holiness is seen in the stupor He pours out on a people who honor Him by rote, in the wisdom He causes to perish, and in the potter’s absolute right over the clay. His faithfulness is seen in the visitation that scatters Ariel’s enemies, in the book He will open to the deaf, and in the oath to the house of Jacob, sworn by the God who redeemed Abraham, that Jacob shall not now be ashamed. The same holiness that shut the eyes will open them, and the same God who camped against His city will be sanctified in its midst. The needy rejoice in the Holy One of Israel (29:19) because the Holy One of Israel is the One who keeps His word to Jacob.