

## ISAIAH 29

## THE BIBLE – A SEALED BOOK?

The “woe to Ariel,” with which this chapter opens, is directed against the same target as the “burden of the valley of vision” in chapter 22 – namely, the city of Jerusalem. And it is very probable that this chapter also points at the same event during the reign of King Hezekiah: the besieging of the Lord’s city by the Assyrian army, which was cut off by the Angel of Jehovah. Why the prophet used the name of Ariel instead of Jerusalem is very uncertain, but it is probable that the name and the reason were well-known in those days. Ariel means “the lion of God,” or “the strong lion”; for as the lion is the king among beasts, so Jerusalem was the queen among the cities of the earth. She was the city of the great King (Ps. 48:1-2). She was the head-city of the Kingdom of Judah, who was called a lion’s whelp (Gen. 49:9), and whose emblem was a lion; for the One Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah was the glory of it! Jerusalem was dreaded by the neighboring nations; and as long as she was a righteous city, she was as bold as a lion.

The distress of Jerusalem is foretold in the first few verses. Although Jerusalem was the city of the Lord, and a city that was as strong as a lion; yet if iniquity was found there, woe to it! It was the city where David dwelt, who brought it to its height of glory, and made it a picture of the Gospel-Church, and whose dwelling there was representative of Christ’s residence among His people. This is mentioned as an aggravation of Jerusalem’s sin; for within her walls, she had the house of the Lord and the thrones of the family of Godly King David. The people of Jerusalem were here made to know that their external performance of religious ceremonies would not serve as an exemption from the judgments of God. They might fulfill the letter of the law from year to year (verse 1); but as long as their lives remained unreformed and their hearts stayed unhumiliated, they could not imagine that they were pacifying an offended God and turning away His wrath. Hypocrites may flatter themselves in their constant track of devout exercises, but these works of their own can never please the Lord nor make their peace with Him.

But the destruction of Jerusalem’s enemies is also foretold here (verses 5, 7, 8). She would indeed be brought down to the dust; yet the numerous armies of the enemy would not only be like dust, but they would even be like chaff that blows away in an instant. Jerusalem would be humbled, but the Assyrians would be quite smitten. And so it came to pass when the Assyrian army was instantly laid dead upon the spot by the Angel of the Lord. Such shall be the destruction of all the enemies of the Gospel.

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ A prediction of distress for Jerusalem, but of defeat for her enemies – verses 1-8
- ❖ Reproofs are given to several different kinds of sinners – verses 9-16
- ❖ Promises of grace and mercy are given to the Lord’s remnant – verses 17-24



In verses 9-12, the prophet stands amazed at the stupidity of the greater part of the Jewish nation. They had Levites among them, who taught them the good knowledge of the Lord. They had prophets, who brought them messages directly from God, and showed them the causes and effects of His displeasure against them. Now one would think that this great nation, which had all these advantages, would surely be a wise and understanding people (Deut. 4:6). But alas! It was quite otherwise (verse 9). The prophet addressed himself to the few sober thinkers among his people, calling upon them to lament such folly in their midst, and to cry out to God in prayer for these sottish people. They were drunk with spiritual drunkenness. To them, God's Word had become like the words of a book or letter that is sealed up; and so they could not discern the truth of real visions and the falsehood of pretended ones. The common people excused themselves from regarding what the prophets said because of their poor education – as if they were not concerned to know and do the will of God, because they were not born scholars. At the same time, those of better rank pretended that the prophet had a peculiar way of speaking, which was obscure to them. Both of these are groundless pretenses, for knowledge is easy to him who has a desire to understand and who prays to the Lord to bestow it upon him. The prophet, in God's name, threatens these formalists and hypocrites with judgment – despite all their ceremonies of devotion (verses 13-14).

The prophet shows the folly of those who attempted to act separately and secretly from God's all-seeing eye, turning things upside down; but He tells them that He will turn things upside down *His* way. "Wait awhile," said the Lord, "and you shall be convinced by visible demonstration that there is indeed a God Who governs the world for the good of His Church!" The wonderful change that is here foretold (verses 17-24) describes the happy turn of affairs of Judah and Jerusalem after the defeat of Sennacherib's army. And many blessings of this happy change are predicted here. The persecutors of God's people would be quieted, and those whom they troubled would enjoy quietness and peace. Sennacherib and his great army – which put the country into such a consternation – would be brought to nothing, and quite disabled to do any further mischief. And in the same way, the power of Satan shall be broken by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and those who were subject to his bondage shall be delivered (Heb. 2:14-15).

*Lord, we pray that the Scriptures may not remain a closed Book to us. Give us grace to apply ourselves to seek that heavenly wisdom that is easy to find for those who seek it. Amen.*

