



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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Outline of the Book of Isaiah

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Problems in the Nation Due to Foolish Drunken Leaders (28-29)

- Chapter 28 began with a message of doom (“*Woe!*”) to “*Ephraim*” (the Northern Kingdom of Israel and its capital, Samaria)
- Chapter 29 begins with a message of doom (“*Woe!*”) to “*Ariel*” (a pseudonym for Jerusalem, capital of Judah)
- Throughout this chapter, like the book of Isaiah itself, there are alternating messages of judgment and hope:
 - 29:1-4 – Message of Judgment
 - 29:5-8 – Message of Restoration (Hope)
 - 29:9-16 – Message of Judgment
 - 29:17-24 – Message of Restoration (Hope)
- Today we will be looking at the message of ***judgment*** in 29:9-16 which addresses the religious, but spiritually blind citizens of Jerusalem.

The Religious, But Spiritually Blind Citizens of Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:9-16)

29:9 You will be shocked and amazed! You are totally blind! They are drunk, but not because of wine; they stagger, but not because of beer. ¹⁰ For the LORD has poured out on you a strong urge to sleep deeply. He has shut your eyes (you prophets), and covered your heads (you seers). ¹¹ To you this entire prophetic revelation is like words in a sealed scroll. When they hand it to one who can read and say, "Read this," he responds, "I can't, because it is sealed." ¹² Or when they hand the scroll to one who can't read and say, "Read this," he says, "I can't read."

The Religious, But Spiritually Blind Citizens of Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:9-16)

29:13 *The LORD says, “These people say they are loyal to me; they say wonderful things about me, but they are not really loyal to me. Their worship consists of nothing but man-made ritual.”*¹⁴

*Therefore I will again do an amazing thing for these people— an absolutely extraordinary deed. Wise men will have nothing to say, the sages will have no explanations.”*¹⁵ *Those who try to hide their plans from the LORD are as good as dead, who do their work in secret and boast, “Who sees us? Who knows what we’re doing?”*¹⁶ *Your thinking is perverse! Should the potter be regarded as clay? Should the thing made say about its maker, “He didn’t make me”? Or should the pottery say about the potter, “He doesn’t understand”?*

29:9 *You will be shocked and amazed! You are totally blind! They are drunk, but not because of wine; they stagger, but not because of beer.*

- What the prophet has said about Judah's present and future has come as somewhat of a **shock** to Judah's rulers.
- Talk of trusting God instead of Egypt, leaves these men shaking their heads.
- They count themselves as **wise** in the ways of the world, but they are **unspiritual**.
- To them, such talk is simply foolishness – much like what the Apostle Paul says of unbelievers in 1 Cor 2:14:
 - *The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*
- The prophecy given to Isaiah at the time of his call continues to prove true:
 - *[The LORD says to Isaiah:] Go and tell these people: "Listen continually, but don't understand. Look continually, but don't perceive." (Isaiah 6:9)*

29:9 *You will be shocked and amazed! You are totally blind! **They are drunk, but not because of wine; they stagger, but not because of beer.***

- So, in frustration Isaiah *cries out* to them, in essence saying: “Alright, go ahead and be blind; be insensible, like a drunk. But your problem does not come from alcohol, like the Samaritans’ problems did – *your* problem comes from God, whom you have offended so deeply that he no longer enables you to hear.”
- It is God who gives people the grace to hear, but for those who stubbornly misconstrue his words, that enabling grace is often withdrawn.
- There can be no more sobering motivation to listen to God than this: if you *refuse* to hear God *today*, one day you might no longer *be able* to hear (Heb 3:15-19; 6:4-8).

^{29:10} **For the LORD has poured out on you a strong urge to sleep deeply. He has shut your eyes (you prophets), and covered your heads (you seers).**

- “*For*” introduces the explanation for their spiritual condition: it is the LORD’s judgment on their willful behavior.
- They are in a spiritual coma in which they are unable to respond to what is being said to them.
- They had culpably refused to listen to the prophetic word, and so were further hardened.
- Furthermore, the word is no longer presented to them.
- The “*prophets*” and “*seers*” should have acted as the peoples “*eyes*” enabling them to discern the hand of God in their providential circumstances.
- But those who have shut their own eyes are prevented from using the sight and gifting of others.
- The “*eyes*” of the “*prophets*” are “*shut*”, and cloth has been placed over the “*heads*” of the “*seers*”. Neither can see. Neither have guidance to impart.

^{29:11} *To you this entire prophetic revelation is like words in a **sealed scroll**. When they hand it to **one who can read** and say, “Read this,” he responds, “I can’t, because it is sealed.” ¹² Or when they hand the scroll to one who can’t read and say, “Read this,” he says, “I can’t read.”*

- This verse gives an illustration of what has just been said.
- The wise men and the seers are compared to those who know how to read and write: the scribes upon whom the illiterate had to depend in order to carry on the business of life.
- But a scribe could not open a “*sealed scroll*”.
- Only the sealer or someone that he authorizes could perform that task (cf. Rev. 5:1-5).

Sealed Scroll



Then I saw in the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne a scroll written on the front and back and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice: “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it. So I began weeping bitterly because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered; thus he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” (Rev. 5:1-5).

29:11 To you **this entire prophetic revelation** is like words in a **sealed scroll**. When they hand it to one who can read and say, “Read this,” he responds, “I can’t, because it is sealed.”¹² Or when they hand the scroll to one who can’t read and say, “Read this,” he says, “I can’t read.”

- “**This entire prophetic revelation**” is like a “**sealed scroll**” to these people.
- They have the technical skills to understand God’s word, but they lack the spiritual insight which would enable them to see the plain meaning.
- The situation is **especially** hopeless for the common person.
- He can’t even **read**, let alone **open** and read.
- The Church today is in a perilously similar situation.
- The pews are full of people who look to someone who can “**read**,” but for all too many who can do so, the document is still sealed.

29:13 *The LORD says, “These people say they are loyal to me; they say wonderful things about me, but they are not really loyal to me. Their worship consists of nothing but man-made ritual.*

- Here the sovereign LORD speaks of the spiritual deadness of those whom he describes as “*these people*” – an indication of the *distance* that separates them from him.
- **Externally** their conduct seems *impeccable*: they “*say they are loyal to me*” and they “*say wonderful things about me*”.
- However, true religion is a matter of inner attitudes.
- In reality, “*these people*” were “*not really loyal to*” the LORD.
- Our inner motives can be hidden from other people, but not the LORD, and he looks for a genuine devotion that shows that we are **totally** committed to him.

29:13 *The LORD says, “These people say they are loyal to me; they say wonderful things about me, but they are not really loyal to me. Their **worship** consists of nothing but **man-made ritual**.”*

- Their “*worship*” was nothing more than “*man-made ritual*” that they had been taught to perform.
- They knew this was the “correct” way to behave *outwardly*, but they weren’t doing it out of a deep love for and devotion to the LORD that resulted in transformed lives.
- This description reflects the imperfect nature of the religious reform that had taken place under King Hezekiah.
- Though the king himself was totally committed to the worship of the LORD and had restored the temple, it was quite another matter to restore *true devotion* to the LORD on the part of the people.
- They were prepared to do what they were told by the king, but not with an inner commitment of faith.

29:14 **Therefore** I will again do **an amazing thing** for these people – **an absolutely extraordinary deed**. Wise men will have nothing to say, the sages will have no explanations.”

- “**Therefore**” introduces the conclusion that follows from the previous verse.
- After reading what we did in the previous verse, we expect a word of **judgment** from the LORD.
- Instead the LORD promises to do “**an amazing thing**”, “**an absolutely extraordinary deed**” – not the kind of thing we normally associate with judgment!
- In the Hebrew, three forms of the Hebrew word for “**wonders**” are used in this verse.
- He does not tell us **specifically** what the “**amazing thing**” is that he will do – but he does give us some clues.

29:14 *Therefore **I will again do** an amazing thing for these people – an absolutely extraordinary deed. Wise men will have nothing to say, the sages will have no explanations.”*

- When he says he will “**again do**” such “*wonders*”, it shows he has done such wonders in the *past*.
- Often such “*wonders*” were done for the *redemption* of his people:
 - *So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the **wonders** that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.* (Ex 3:20 ESV)
 - *Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do **wonders** among you.”* (Jos 3:5 ESV)
 - *And Gideon said to him, “Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his **wonderful deeds** that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’”* (Jdg 6:13 ESV)
 - *Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does **wondrous things**.* (Ps 72:18 ESV)

29:14 *Therefore I will again do an amazing thing for these people – an absolutely extraordinary deed. **Wise men will have nothing to say, the sages will have no explanations.***”

- Furthermore, he tells us that “*wise men will have nothing to say, the sages will have no explanations*”.
- This seems to suggest that this “*amazing*” display of divine wisdom will *silence* those who previously claimed to possess wisdom, and had not realized that all they had was mere human cleverness, which, in comparison to the wisdom of God is mere foolishness!
- Later we will see that the Apostle Paul applies this passage to the message of the gospel (1 Cor 1:19).

29:15 *Those who try to **hide their plans from the LORD** are as good as dead, **who do their work in secret** and boast, “**Who sees us? Who knows what we’re doing?**”*

- Woe is pronounced upon those “*who try to hide their plans from the LORD*” and “*who do their work in secret*”.
- Their consciences are sufficiently at work to realize that their deeds are not pleasing to God, and yet they are naïve enough to think they can actually hide them from him: “*Who sees us?*” “*Who knows what we’re doing?*”
- Their behavior reflects how poorly they understand God’s omnipresence and omniscience.

29:16 *Your thinking is **perverse**! Should the potter be regarded as clay? Should the thing made say about its maker, “He didn’t make me”? Or should the pottery say about the potter, “**He doesn’t understand**”?*

- Their thought processes are “*perverse*”
- Instead of recognizing God’s right to authority over them as their creator, they **defy** his authority: Like a pot that says to the potter who made it, “*He doesn’t understand*”!
- This is quite likely a reference to the events of 701 BC when Hezekiah sent envoys to Egypt to plead for assistance against Assyria (see 30:2–7).
- What Israel no doubt considered a shrewd maneuver to repel Assyria would be turned upside down by God.
- He would use Assyria to **destroy** the Egyptian forces and to **punish** Israel.

New Testament Usage of Isaiah 29:13,14, & 16

Isaiah 29:13 *And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..." (ESV)*

Mat 15:7 *You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (ESV)*

Mark 7:6 *And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (ESV)*

- Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus' citation of **Isaiah 29:13** in a context where the scribes and Pharisees came to ask Jesus why his disciples *"ignore our **tradition** of ceremonial hand washing before they eat?" (Mat 15:2 NLT)*
- Jesus turns the question around on them by asking *them "why do you, by your **traditions**, violate the **direct commandments of God?**" (Mat 15:3 NLT).*

Isaiah 29:13 *And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..." (ESV)*

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- For example, they say "it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.' In this way, you say they don't need to honor their parents. And so you **cancel the word of God** for the sake of your own **tradition.**" (Mat 15:5 NLT)"

Isaiah 29:13 *And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..." (ESV)*

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- Therefore Jesus calls them "*hypocrites*" because they teach others how to evade the commandments of God while pretending to be pious and devout.
- It is at this point that Jesus cites **Isaiah 29:13** saying "*Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you*" (Mat 15:7 NLT).

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- By this, Jesus does not mean Isaiah was specifically talking about these Pharisees and scribes.
- He meant that what Isaiah wrote concerning the people of his **own day** was still very relevant, for both then and now those condemned were honoring God with their **lips**, while their **hearts** were far removed from him.
- History, in other words, was repeating itself.

Isaiah 29:14 *Behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and **the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.*** (ESV)

1Cor 1:19 *For it is written, “**I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.**”* (ESV)

- The Apostle Paul cites **Isaiah 29:14** in **1 Cor 1:19**.
- In this section of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul shows that human wisdom (which the Corinthians held in high regard) is ***diametrically opposed*** to the ***message of the Gospel***.
- Several aspects of **Isaiah 29:14** and the surrounding verses fit very well with Paul with the point Paul is making to the Corinthians.

Isaiah 29:14 *Behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.* (ESV)

1Cor 1:19 *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."* (ESV)

- **Isaiah 29:14** indicates that a **judgment** on the "**wisdom of the wise**" will occur at a future time when God will "**do wonderful things with this people**".
- Many early Jewish writers believed there were Messianic overtones to **Isaiah 29:14**.
- In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul associates the destruction of the "**wisdom of the wise**" with the preaching of the Gospel – a Gospel in which we tell of the "**wonderful things**" that God has done through Christ in order to "save" his people:
 - *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart"... **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, **it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.** (1 Cor 1:19-21 ESV).*

Isaiah 29:16 *You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"? (ESV)*

Rom 9:20 *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" (ESV)*

- The Apostle Paul cites **Isaiah 29:16** in **Romans 9:20** as a part of his response to a hypothetical objection someone might raise to his teaching about God's sovereign choice in who will be saved.
- The objection is: Since the destiny of all men is in the hands of God and he extends his mercy to one while withholding it from another, why does God still hold men accountable for their actions? (Rom 9:19)

Isaiah 29:16 *You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?* (ESV)

Rom 9:20 *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"* (ESV)

- The **first** part of Paul's response to this hypothetical objection is to ask the objector: "*But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?*" (Rom 9:20 ESV)
- Paul then quotes **Isaiah 29:16** to remind the objector of the dependent and subordinate position of the human being in respect to God.
- Human beings are in no more of a position to answer back to God than a vase is to criticize its molder for making it a certain way.

Next Time

I plan to begin looking at **Isaiah 36-39** which describe the end Hezekiah's reign.

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- In our passage today, we saw where the Lord condemned the Israelites saying “*These people say they are loyal to me; they say wonderful things about me, but they are not really loyal to me. Their worship consists of nothing but man-made ritual.*” (Isaiah 29:13)
- Are there people in our day of whom the Lord might make this same condemnation?
- If so, what does it look like for people today to say wonderful things about God, but not really be loyal to him or have worship that “*consists of nothing but man-made ritual.*”?

Class Discussion Time

- We also saw a passage where Jesus, citing Isaiah 29:13 condemned the religious leaders of his day for valuing their own religious traditions above the Word of God.
- Can you think of an example where you have seen people do this in our day?

