

ARIEL

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Isaiah chapter 29 contains a prophecy against Ariel. “Ariel” is a Hebrew word that literally means a “lion of God” or “lioness of God.” In this chapter, Ariel is a name applied to Jerusalem. We know it is Jerusalem because Isaiah 29:1 says, “Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, *the city where David dwelt.*” The connection made with David, and the term referring to a lion of God, is a reminder of the city’s righteous heritage. Sadly, this city which was conquered by David (2 Sam 5:6-7), and was then chosen by God for His name to dwell there (1 Kgs 8:44), had turned to wickedness. The people of Ariel (Jerusalem) were saying that God did not see or know what they were doing. In Isaiah 29:15-16, God said, “Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who sees us? and who knows us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?” Now God was pronouncing his woe upon this backsliding city.

Ariel’s coming distress

God was going to “*distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel*” (Isa 29:2). A Hebrew word, “arieyl” (Strong’s 741), meaning “altar” (see Ezekiel 43:15-16, which is the only passage where this word is used), comes from the same word as “ariel” and Isaiah 29:2 could be indicating that God was going to make Jerusalem like an altar where her people would become like a sacrifice. God said further, “And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust. Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passes away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly” (Is 29:3-5). The Assyrians did besiege and humble Jerusalem, just as God predicted here through Isaiah (see Isaiah 36-37).

Though God did spare Jerusalem from destruction *at that time*, nevertheless, the complete destruction came via Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians about a century later. God then told His people, “Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire” (Isa 29:6). As God had terrified their fathers at mount Sinai and humbled them (Exod 19:17-25; 20:18-20; 24:17; Deut 4:9-12,33-36; 5:1-5,22-29), so God would now use foreign invaders in a similar way. After He used them to punish His wayward people, God would then judge these wicked nations who distressed Ariel (Isa 29:7-8; see also Isa 10:7-34; 21:1-10; Isa 13,36,37,47; Jer 25:12-38; Jer 50-51)

Ariel’s spiritual blindness

In Isaiah 29:9-12, God said that His people were “drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. *For the Lord has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers has he covered.* And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is

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(continued)

sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.” God said that the reason He had blinded these people and hidden understanding from them was that *“this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men”* (Isa 29:13). Jesus applied Isaiah 29:13 as a prophecy of the Pharisees in his time. The Pharisees criticized Jesus’ disciples for not washing their hands according to the tradition of the elders (Matt 15:1-2; Mark 7:1-5). But Jesus pointed out that these Pharisees were transgressing God’s commandment to honor father and mother by their tradition of allowing children to purchase their freedom from this divine obligation with a gift, and doing many similar things (Matt 7:3-6; Mark 7:8-13). Jesus then said, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draws nigh unto me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:7-9; Mark 7:6-7). Because these Jews in First Century A.D. were hypocrites, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, just like their fathers in the time of Isaiah, God also blinded them like He had their fathers. A small remnant of Jews believed on Jesus Christ (Rom 11:1-6), “and the rest were blinded (according as it is written, God has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day” (Rom 11:7-8). Isaiah 29:10 is here applied to the same people Jesus applied Isaiah 29:13 to.

A marvelous work

In Isaiah 29:14, God said, *“Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.”* In 1 Corinthians 1:19, God applies this “marvelous work” to what was still happening when the gospel was first preached. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor 1:18-25). Few of the “wise” of this world are converted to Christ. Most Christians are the “foolish” ones of the world (1 Cor 1:26-29). But the lesson for us is to pursue this kind of so-called foolishness, rather than the actual foolishness of this world that ended up causing the ruin of Ariel.