

Notes

The Woe of Spiritual Blindness (29:1–24)

- Although Jerusalem was God's chosen city and the location of His Temple, the people had become spiritually blind. They continued their religious activities, but their hearts had drifted far from the LORD. Spiritual blindness is a condition in which people become unable or unwilling to perceive and understand God's truth despite being exposed to it.
- Isaiah 29 traces this progression of spiritual blindness. It begins with hypocritical worship, develops into spiritual blindness, produces empty religion & proud self-reliance, but ends with God's gracious promise of restoration. God's judgment is real but His purpose is to open blind eyes, restore sincere worship & transform hearts that turn back to Him.

1. Hypocritical Worship Exposed (29:1–8)

- Isaiah addresses Jerusalem as "Ariel." The name carries two meanings:
 - 'Lion of God' – a symbol of strength and security.
 - 'Altar hearth of God' – referring to the altar where sacrifices were consumed by fire (Ezek 43:15–16).Jerusalem believed she was secure because she was God's city. Instead, God declared that she would become His "altar hearth" - consumed by His judgment. Spiritual privilege is never a substitute for obedience.
- Although the people continued their annual feasts & sacrifices, their worship had become empty: *"Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices"* (v1). God was not impressed by outward religion because their hearts were far from Him. He desires obedience from the heart, not merely outward ritual (1 Sam 15:22).
- Because Jerusalem's worship was hypocritical, the LORD declared, *"Yet I will distress Ariel"* (v2). Instead of joyful feasts, the city would experience mourning and sorrow. God Himself would surround Jerusalem like an enemy army (v3), and her proud voice would become a voice *"out of the dust"* (v4). Even God's covenant people are not exempt from His judgment when they persist in disobedience.
- The LORD also promised to deal decisively with the nations attacking her (vv5–6). This was partially fulfilled historically in 701 BC, when the Angel of the LORD destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (37:36; cf. 2 Kings 19:35). However, the language of Isaiah 29:5–8 finds its fullest prophetic fulfilment when Christ returns and defeats the nations gathered against Jerusalem (Zech 12:2–9; Rev 19:19–21).

- Isaiah compares Jerusalem's enemies to a hungry or thirsty man dreaming that he has found food or water, only to awaken still empty (vv7–8). Their apparent victory would prove to be an illusion. God's enemies may seem to prosper for a time, but their plans cannot ultimately prevail against Him.

2. Spiritual Blindness Declared (29:9–12)

- Jerusalem's greatest danger was not Assyria but spiritual blindness. Isaiah describes a people who were unable to understand God's revelation (vv9–10). Though they possessed God's Word, His Temple, and His covenant, they had become spiritually insensitive to His truth. Pride and unbelief had clouded their spiritual judgment.
- Because the nation had persistently rejected God's truth, the LORD gave them over to a condition of spiritual blindness (v10). This judgment extended even to the nation's prophets and spiritual leaders. Persistent refusal to heed God's truth can result in judicial hardening, where God gives people over to the blindness they have repeatedly chosen (Rom 1:24–28; 11:8). Scripture therefore warns, *"To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts"* (Heb 3:15).
- God's revelation had become like a sealed book (vv11–12). The educated man could not read it because it was sealed, while the uneducated man could not read it because he lacked the ability to read. The problem was not with God's Word but with the spiritual condition of the people. Their blindness prevented them from understanding God's revelation (cf John 5:39–40).
- Through the Holy Spirit, God uses His Word to convict us of sin, reveal Christ, and enlighten our understanding (2 Cor 4:6; Luke 24:45). A humble and obedient heart is receptive to God's truth (John 7:17). Only God's grace can remove spiritual blindness and enable sinners to see the truth.

3. Empty Religion Condemned (29:13–14)

- God now exposes the root of their blindness - a heart that had drifted away from the LORD (v13). Outwardly they appeared devoted to God, yet religion had replaced relationship, tradition had replaced truth, and routine had replaced love (Matt 15:7–9). God looks beyond outward appearance and examines the heart (1 Sam 16:7; John 4:24).
- Because Judah's worship had become empty, the LORD declared that He would *"do a marvellous work among this people"* (v14). The "marvellous

work" is a shocking act of judgment. Those who rejected God's wisdom would discover that human wisdom could never save them (1 Cor 1:19).

4. Proud Self-Reliance Rebuked (29:15–16)

- Isaiah now uncovers another expression of spiritual blindness - proud self-reliance. Judah's leaders were secretly making plans and seeking political security with Egypt. Isaiah exposes their arrogance: *"Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?"* (v15). Nothing is hidden from the LORD, who sees both our actions and our motives (Heb 4:13).
- Isaiah uses the picture of the potter and the clay to expose the folly of such pride (v16). The clay cannot question the wisdom & authority of the potter because the potter is its maker (Rom 9:20–21). God sees what we cannot see and knows what we cannot know (Prov 3:5–6)

5. Messianic Restoration Promised (29:17–24)

- The chapter ends with hope. God's discipline is never His final purpose. One day He will restore His people under the Messiah's righteous reign.
 - Restoration of the Land* (v17). The land that had been unproductive will experience remarkable fruitfulness (35:1–2).
 - Restoration of the people* (vv18–21). In that day, *"the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see"* (v18). The humble will rejoice in the LORD, while the wicked will be judged (vv19–21). During His earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly gave sight to the blind and restored hearing to the deaf. These miracles were not only acts of compassion but also signs that the promised Messiah had come (cf. Isa 35:5–6; Matt 11:4–5). The passage also points to the future spiritual restoration of Israel (Rom 11:25–27).
 - Restoration of the Nation* (vv22–24). God's faithfulness to Abraham assures us that His covenant purposes cannot fail (v22). God will remove the shame and reproach of His covenant people and sanctify them to Himself (v23). The result will be a transformed people (v24). Spiritual blindness will give way to understanding, faith, humility, and joyful obedience.
- The greatest miracle is the transformation of the human heart. Those who humble themselves before God and trust in His Son will discover that His grace is greater than their sin, His power is greater than their blindness, and His promises can never fail.