

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SECOND AND THIRD WOES

THIS CHAPTER begins, we listen, for the second time in this section, to a woe pronounced by God through His servant, the prophet, and farther down in the chapter we have a third woe. The first message is addressed directly to Ariel, a name we have not found previously in this book, and which may be understood in two different ways. It is the same as that which is rendered “**lion-like**” in II Samuel 23:20. The margin there gives the rendering, “lion of God,” but in Ezekiel 43:16. the first part of the word is translated “**altar**,” so that Ariel might either be “**lion of God**” or “**altar of God**.”

The reference, undoubtedly, is to Jerusalem, David’s city.

“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. 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 passeth away; yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. 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”
(verses 1-6).

After having taken Jerusalem, David made it his capital and built his palace on Mount Zion. In the years that followed the glory of God was manifested there in a marvelous way. In Solomon’s day the temple of the Lord was erected on Mount Moriah, another section of the Holy City. And the service of God was carried on by His anointed priests officiating as representatives of Deity, standing between God and His people to offer up their sacrifices and offerings; but as the centuries went by, declension came in. Judah turned away from the fear of the Lord; formality took the place of true spiritual worship until God Himself could no longer tolerate the unfaithfulness and hypocrisy which so frequently characterized the people with whom He had entered into covenant relationship.

They had failed completely to carry out their part of the covenant; therefore, Jerusalem which had been as the lion of God should become as a great altar-hearth where its own population would be sacrificed through the ruthless enmity of their bitter foes. The reference cannot possibly be to the threatened destruction by Sennacherib and his army, for at that time God intervened to deliver Jerusalem and to destroy the Assyrian host.

We must look to the future for the fulfillment of that which is here predicted. In the last days, the time of Jacob's trouble, God will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, as we read in Zechariah 14, and then the judgments on Ariel will be consummated.

So terrible will be the sufferings of the people that they will cry to God as out of the dust, and their voices will be like the whisperings of those who profess to communicate with the spirits of the dead. Nevertheless, eventually the Lord will appear for their deliverance and for the destruction of their enemies.

“And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel. even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of an the nations be, that fight against mount Zion” (verses 7, 8).

At the very time when it will seem as though Satan's effort to destroy Jerusalem utterly and to blot out the nation of Israel from the face of the earth will surely succeed, the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations that besiege Ariel as when He fought in the day of battle, and they will find themselves deprived of their prey, and after their “dream” of world conquest they will awaken to realize that they have been fighting not only against Judah but against the Lord, whose power will completely annul their efforts to blot out the people whom He has separated to Himself. As when a hungry man dreams that he has a rich repast before him of which he is just about to partake, and then awakens to realize his starving condition; or as when a thirsty man dreams that he has an abundance of that which will refresh his parched throat, and awakens to realize that his condition is worse than before, so will it be with all those nations who will be taken in red-handed opposition to God and His people.

“Stay yourselves, and wonder: cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine: they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is 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” (verses 9-12).

Again the prophet turns to depict the reasons why God will give Judah up to judgment until the time when they turn to Him in repentance.

Despite all the revelations of His will made known to them through His Word and confirmed by His prophets, they have turned away to their own devices, walking in the imaginations of their own hearts; like men surfeited with wine, they have become inebriated by the traditions of men which have made void the Word of God, and so have failed to act upon or even to comprehend the messages sent to them by the Lord.

His Word has become to them unintelligible, not because it lacked in clearness of expression or in simplicity of teaching, but because they themselves were so blinded by unbelief that they read as men with a veil upon their hearts, as we are told in the New Testament (II Corinthians 3).

That Word, if handed to the wise of this world, brought forth the declaration that it was sealed and therefore to them incomprehensible. If presented to the illiterate, they turned from it, declaring that they were not educated. In the New Testament we have one great prophetic book - that of the Revelation.

May we not see in Israel's attitude to their prophetic records an illustration of the attitude of many in Christendom today toward this solemn book, God's final word to man before the return of His Son from heaven?

How many of our so-called Christian scholars and prominent pulpитеers declare that it is useless to attempt to study the book of Revelation as it is sealed, or else a mere collection of weird dreams without meaning or coherence, while others take the ground that it is only the learned who can understand it and therefore simple Christians could not expect to unravel its mysteries.

Yet the Lord Himself has twice pronounced a blessing on those who read this book and those who keep its sayings (Revelation 1:3 and 22:7).

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid”
(verses 13, 14).

Because of this willful blindness, God will send judicial blindness so that those who had no heart for His Word will be given over to strong delusion and believe the lie of the Antichrist, that they all might be judged who obeyed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Outwardly they kept up the form of religion, and professed to worship and honor the God of their fathers, even when in works they denied Him.

Because of this, judgment, long delayed, must be poured out; and this has been true throughout all the centuries since the hand of God first fell upon them because of their disobedience to His Word and their rejection of the Saviour that He provided. In the time of the end their unbelief will come to its full consummation, when, instead of the Christ of God they accept the false Messiah, the Man of Sin, and thus fill up their cup of iniquity to the brim.

Then God will deal with them in unsparing judgment, destroying the apostate part of the nation, but saving a remnant who will turn to Him in that hour of desperate sorrow and will become the nucleus of the new nation to be blessed under Messiah's rule when He appears in glory to set up the kingdom of God in visible manifestation here on the earth, returning to the very city where He was crucified and from which He ascended to heaven.

His feet shall stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, and He will take over His great power and reign.

“Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth 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?” (verses 15, 16).

Now we have the third woe pronounced upon those who presume to be wiser than God. We are at once reminded of the way in which the Apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, uses the same figure of the potter and the clay in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. It is the greatest folly for man to strive with his MAKER, to attempt to find fault with God, or to put upon Him the blame for the misery and wretchedness which he has brought upon himself by his own unbelief and waywardness. God, we are told in the book of Job, **“giveth not account of any of His matters”** (Job 33:13).

It is well for man if he humble himself before the all-wise CREATOR and bow in subjection to His holy will. This alone is the path of blessing for the creature. Because of Judah's failure and that of all the nations, God has to deal in retributive justice, pouring out His wrath upon those who have refused His grace. But He will never forget His covenant with Abraham nor the promise He has made to bring blessing to all the earth through the Seed that was to come, even our Lord Jesus Christ. So in the verses that follow, we read once more of blessing to come upon Ariel and the land of Palestine after the judgments have been meted out.

“Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought” (verses 17-21).

It is a Millennial picture upon which we are now called to gaze. When the blight that has rested upon Palestine for so many centuries is removed and that country, once the glory of all lands, again becomes fruitful and populous as the redeemed of the Lord are sought out and restored from all countries of earth and brought back to their ancient patrimony, there to rejoice and flourish under Messiah's beneficent reign; then, in that day, the blindness that has veiled the heart of Israel for so long will be taken away.

The Word of God will become clear and luminous to them and they will rejoice in the revelation that He has made known. The Gentile powers under which they have suffered for so long will no more affright them. The “**terrible one**,” perhaps a direct reference to the Beast, and the “**scorner**,” possibly the Man of Sin himself, and all who have been associated with them in their oppression of the Jew will be consumed by God and His people delivered from their power.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine” (verses 22-24).

Never, in times past, have these words had their fulfillment, but we may be assured that nothing that God has spoken will ever come to naught. These words tell of a time when the spared of Israel will be all righteous because taught of God, and instead of following after the vain imagination of their own hearts, as in the past, they will be brought to the place of perfect subjection to His holy will.

This will be the time when none will need to say to another, “**Know the Lord**,” for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest (Jeremiah 31:34).

At that time the fullness of blessing promised to Abraham and his seed will be manifested, not only toward the natural children of him who was called the Friend of God, but all nations will be blessed with them in accordance with the promise.

~ end of chapter 29 ~

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