

August 10

Scriptures: Read Isaiah 29, 30 & 31

Key Verse: "... In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength..." (Isaiah 30:15)

Overview

In chapter 29, Isaiah denounces "Ariel", another name for Jerusalem meaning "hearth [or lion] of God", possibly referring to the altar of burnt offerings. Even though the formalities of worship to God continued in Jerusalem, still the Lord would "distress Ariel" with the fire of judgment, making the whole city His "Ariel" (hearth, 29:2; 31:9b). God, who knows the hearts of all mankind, knew that the people of Jerusalem were hypocritical and unrepentant, like the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned (Mark. 7:6ff; 2 Tim. 3:1). Here, Isaiah is the Lord's mouthpiece to rebuke the people of Judah. God would punish them by sending the Assyrians against Judah in order to humble them to the lowest place (29:3-4). Thereafter, God would miraculously intervene in an instantaneous deliverance. The enemy would be gone, just like a bad dream that vanishes in the morning (29:5-8; cf. 2 Kings 19:35). This was the "marvelous work and a wonder" that the Lord would do to teach His people that they only have to trust in Him for help, and not in an alliance with Egypt (30:1-2; 31:1-3).

Isaiah's vision, however, was not understood, even by the supposed prophets, for because of their disbelief, they did not allow the Holy Spirit to give them understanding; they were spiritually blind. The words of Isaiah were therefore like a sealed book; no one could read it (29:11-12). Their hearts and minds were closed to the things of the Lord, since they believed themselves to be self-sufficient and wise, not needing God's wisdom and guidance. How foolish for that which is created to think that the Creator would not have the ability and wisdom to help them. He knows what is best for all His creation (29:15-16).

Isaiah predicted that proud Assyria, like the forest of Lebanon, would be cut down to insignificance, and the "terrible one" (Sennacherib king of Assyria) would come to nothing because of the Lord's intervention (29:17, 20; 2 Kings 19:35-37). At the time of God's deliverance, the humble believers "shall increase their joy in the Lord", and those who were blinded would come to understand Isaiah's vision and be ashamed because of their disbelief and disrespect of Isaiah (29:21). Most importantly, they would learn to fear God (29:18-19, 22-24).

In chapter 30, Isaiah expresses his sorrow, since the people of Judah were so rebellious that they would not look to God for counsel or help through either true prophet or priest (cf. Num. 27:21; 2 Kings 22:14): rather, they looked to Egypt, the arrogant one who sits idle (meaning of "Rahab-Hem-Shebeth", 30:7), for Egypt would do nothing to help Judah from the attack of Assyria. Yet no matter how much Isaiah spoke, the people did not want to hear his words. They wanted the prophets to say only the things they liked to hear, and history shows that the prophets who spoke the truth were persecuted (e.g. 2 Chron. 18:7,26; Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:52). They wanted a God who would not disturb them by interfering with their plans (30:9-11; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2:15). How like many people today! Yet Isaiah warns that their wall of iniquity and self-will, which they thought would protect them, would suddenly collapse on them and break into pieces (30:13-14).

The Lord was patient and gracious with the unbelieving people. He desired them to repent, turn to Him, and trust in Him, then they would receive His mercy, peace, and salvation (30:15). In returning to God (repenting), we throw away the things that prevent us from following Him (“graven images”, 30:22; 31:6-7) and trust fully in Him; then we can be sure He will bless us and give us guidance with His still small voice saying: “This is the way, walk in it” (30:21). The remnant who do heed God’s voice and faithfully walk in His way will be ushered into the glorious reign of the Messiah Jesus. In His Kingdom there will be no more weeping, only rejoicing in the manifold blessings, and the Lord Himself will lovingly bind up the bruise (30:19, 26) of His remnant who have gone through the bread of adversity and the water of affliction” (30:20).

As Isaiah foretold and history confirmed, God did indeed show them His mercy after King Hezekiah called upon Him and waited on Him with complete confidence, no longer trusting in the horses and chariots of Egypt (30:16, 18; cf. 2 Kings 19: 15-20, 34-35; Ps. 20:7). God struck Assyria with “the staff of punishment” (30:32). As chapter 31 clearly emphasizes, God did not need the chariots and horses of Egypt, nor even the swords of men (31:1, 8): “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). God would be to His people like a vicious lion that has no fear and like a bird which hovers over her nest to protect her young (31:4-5). His people were not to fear, for He would surely defend and deliver them.

Prayer

May we be quiet in our spirits today, O Lord. Our confidence is in You alone. On the basis of this, we ask for Your strength to be our daily supply.