

ISAIAH: OFFERING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Bible Background – ISAIAH 29

Printed Text – ISAIAH 29:13-24

¹³And so the Lord says, “These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote,

¹⁴Because of this, I will once again astound these hypocrites with amazing wonders. The wisdom of the wise will pass away, and the intelligence of the intelligent will disappear.”

¹⁵What sorrow awaits those who try to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their evil deeds in the dark! “The LORD can’t see us,” they say. “He doesn’t know what’s going on!”

¹⁶How foolish can you be? He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay! Should the created thing say of the one who made it, “He didn’t make me”? Does a jar ever say, “The potter who made me is stupid”?

¹⁷Soon—and it will not be very long the forests of Lebanon will become a fertile field, and the fertile field will yield bountiful crops.

¹⁸In that day the deaf will hear words read from a book and the blind will see through the gloom and darkness.

¹⁹The humble will be filled with fresh joy from the LORD. The poor will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰The scoffer will be gone, the arrogant will disappear, and those who plot evil will be killed.

²¹Those who convict the innocent by their false testimony will disappear. A similar fate awaits those who use trickery to pervert justice and who tell lies to destroy the innocent.

²²That is why the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the people of Israel, “My people will no longer be ashamed or turn pale with fear.

²³For when they see their many children and all the blessings, I have given them, they will recognize the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob. They will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

²⁴Then the wayward will gain understanding, and complainers will accept instruction.

-----New Living Translation

Lesson Introduction

Isaiah was the greatest prophet of his time and his calling was to bring his nation to repentance. He ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah where he served through the reign of five kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. His message is one that resonates with Christians today. God is Holy and Just and will bring judgment on those who are rebellious and perpetually remain in

that rebellion against Him. But an essential attribute of God’s nature is forgiveness. If we return to Him in the name of His precious Son, Jesus the Christ, He is waiting to forgive, restore and manifest His love in our lives.

Background: For sixty years, Isaiah served as the prophet in Judah; he stood as the voice of God amid the people’s disobedience and his message was to call them back God. At the start of Isaiah’s divine appointment, Judah experienced military and financial strength. As a result, the elite disregarded God’s commands—especially in their treatment of the poor, widows, and orphans—as well as their arrogance. Then neighboring Assyria grew in political and military power. Rather than turn to the God of their salvation for refuge, Judah’s government leaders looked to the surrounding nations for safety, which was an insult to God. Isaiah 29 opens with the prophet making a sorrowful declaration upon Jerusalem using the alias Ariel, which means “lion of God.” Isaiah predicted how God would deal with Jerusalem’s disobedience. The holy city would be under siege and in mourning because of the coming distress at the hand of their enemies as punishment for their idolatry and self-centeredness. But the message also shifts focus that after enduring punishment, He would also handle those enemies who would rise against His chosen people (vv. 5-7).

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 424

Far From Center

Isaiah 29:13-16: God should be the center of all we do and think. But the Kingdom of Judah had removed God far from that center. They were deep into the hypocrisy of paying God “lip service” and conducting religious performances. Throughout Isaiah 28 – 33, there are oracles that pronounce warnings for disobedience, followed by promises of mercy through deliverance and protection from their enemies. But the people’s response was not one of repentance and true worship, but to continue deeper into spiritual sleep and blindness.

Verse 13 begins with the pronouncement of new charges against Judah. The hypocrisy of outwardly proclaiming to honor God. However, they are not keeping His precepts—which encourage mercy, justice and equality—but are instead more concerned with their man-made legalistic rules. “Because they act like they’re worshiping me but don’t mean it, I’m going to step in and shock them awake” (v. 14, MSG). The actions of God that will follow their disobedience to Him and the covenant He had with the people, will make those who THINK they are wise and know it all, so confounded they will want to hide.

The message from God (v. 15) goes further to tell them that they are doomed for shutting God out and plotting and scheming their future as though they know everything. This may refer to Hezekiah’s alliance with Egypt, instead of turning to God for protection against neighboring enemies (30:1-5). They were behaving as though their deeds were not even visible to God—who knows all; as though God were just a lump of clay and not the potter.

◆*Are we guilty today of not making God the center of our lives by neglecting to give Him full love and devotion? Has our worship become routine and ritualistic?*

Return to Center

Isaiah 29:17-21: What happens when God’s people return Him to the center of their lives? How does God respond to that? God assures them that unless they are totally dependent on Him, their enemies will overtake them no matter how fast they run. In fact, they will be so fearful, that one attacker will scatter them until there is nothing left but a lonely flagpole—with no flag on it. But cry out to the God of Abraham and He will give you grace upon grace. He longs to show mercy and to make everything right.

There is hope that follows this very gloomy time. The prophecy declares that God will turn from judgment to restoration. The hypocrisy will turn to pure and true worship. Those who were deaf and blind to the meaning of God’s truth, will understand and see clearly. This prophecy also appears to be double layered in its meaning—a message for both the immediate and the future Messianic Age. The poor shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. The “poor” (Heb. *eyon*) or the “meek” (Heb. *anav*) can be translated the “poor and the poor in spirit), which is reminiscent of Jesus’ affirmation in Matthew 5:3. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” But while the poor and humble will rejoice, the cruel and wicked who have oppressed them will be punished.

◆*How does God’s promise of redemption give us hope today?*

Return to Covenant

Isaiah 29:22-24: God reminds the children of Israel of their forefather Abraham and the promises made to him—that he would be the father of many nations and that his seed would be great in the land (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-5). This is a call for the nation to remember what it means to return to the covenant relationship He had with them in the past and to show how it will be again. They will worship Him in truth and hold Him in awe. They will understand and follow His commands. They will destroy all vestiges of their idolatrous ways. Even the scoffers will change their ways. This points to a great revival among the children of Jacob.

◆*What does it mean for us that God would remind Judah of His promise to Abraham and reaffirm the nation’s position as Jacob’s descendants?*

Conclusion

God’s love is boundless, and He gives His grace freely to those who will receive it. God allows our poor choices and resulting circumstances to chastise us to repentance. But once chastisement is complete, we are brought to restoration. His justice is restorative. Knowing that we serve a loving and forgiving God should give us reason to rejoice for His presence in our lives.

Sources:

Banks, M. (Ed.). (2020). Call in the New Testament. *Precepts for Living*, 23(Spring Quarter), 420-431. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.
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May 9, 2021 – Study Guide 10

Lesson for Next Week – May 16, 2021 – Study Guide 11

JEREMIAH: THE SUFFERING PREACHER

Bible Background ♦ JEREMIAH 37-38

Printed Text ♦ JEREMIAH 38:14-23

Devotional Reading ♦ JEREMIAH 38:7-13; 39:15-18

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Apostles Speak Truth to Council

(Acts 4:13-22)

TUESDAY

Prophet Jeremiah is Arrested and Imprisoned

(Jeremiah 37:11-16)

WEDNESDAY

Seek and You Will Find Me!

(Jeremiah 29:10-14)

THURSDAY

Lip Service Is Not Enough

(Mark 7:1-8)

FRIDAY

Jerusalem Punished and Rescued

(Isaiah 29:1-8)

SATURDAY

Judah, Blind to God's Ways

(Isaiah 29:9-12)

SUNDAY

Israel Will Enjoy a Bright Future

(Isaiah 29:13-24)