
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXIV : EMPTY RITUALISTIC RELIGION IN JERUSALEM (29: 1-24)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. The Crisis and the Messiah (1:1-12:6)
 - A. Introduction to the Entire Prophecy (1:1-31)
 - B. Early Messages of Isaiah (2:1-5:30)
 - C. Judah's True Hope: The Messianic King (6:1-12:6)
- II. The Theocracy and the Nations (13:1-39:8)
 - A. Judah and the World Power (13:1-27:13)
 - B. God's Sovereignty Manifested in Salvation and Judgement (24:1-27:13)
- III. True Deliverance is Found Not in Egypt but in the Lord (28:1-35:10)
 - A. The Lord's Purpose (28,29)
 - 1. Samaria Ripe for Judgement (28:1-29)
 - 2. The Iniquity of Jerusalem and the Announcement of Deliverance (29:1-24)

“[This chapter] is a summons to Ariel (v1,2,7) to grasp two great truths: no problem is so far gone as to be insoluble to the Lord (v1-8), and this applies spiritually as well as circumstantially (v9-14). The same Lord who acts in judgement acts in transformation. He brings Ariel into the dust (v1-4) and visits with spiritual coma those who have chosen blindness (v9-12), but he also disperses the foe in his moment of triumph (v5-8) and acts supernaturally to reverse wrongful understandings (v13,14).” [Motyer, Isaiah]

Chastening and Deliverance (29:1-8)

Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled! Add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on. Yet I will besiege Ariel; she will mourn and lament, she will be to me like an altar hearth. I will encamp against you all around; I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you. Brought low, you will speak from the ground; your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come

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

Wo [to] Ariel, Ariel, The city of the encampment of David! Add year to year, let festivals go round. And I have sent distress to Ariel, And it hath been lamentation and mourning, And it hath been to me as Ariel. And I encamped, O babbler, against thee, And I laid siege against thee — a camp. And I raised up against thee bulwarks. And thou hast been low, From the earth thou speakest, And from the dust makest thy saying low, And thy voice hath been from the earth, As one having a familiar spirit, And from the

ghostlike from the earth; out of the dust your speech will whisper. But your many enemies will become like fine dust, the ruthless hordes like blown chaff. Suddenly, in an instant, the LORD Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire. Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel, that attack her and her fortress and besiege her, will be as it is with a dream, with a vision in the night — as when a hungry man dreams that he is eating, but he awakens, and his hunger remains; as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking, but he awakens faint, with his thirst unquenched. So will it be with the hordes of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion. (NIV)

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. 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 an 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 all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion. (KJV)

dust thy saying whisperest, And as small dust hath been The multitude of those scattering thee, And as chaff passing on the multitude of the terrible, And it hath been at an instant — suddenly. By Jehovah of Hosts thou art inspected, With thunder, and with an earthquake, And great noise, hurricane, and whirlwind, And flame of devouring fire. And as a dream, a vision of night, hath been The multitude of all the nations Who are warring against Ariel, And all its warriors, and its bulwark, Even of those distressing her. And it hath been, as when the hungry dreameth, And lo, he is eating, And he hath waked, and empty [is] his soul, And as when the thirsty dreameth, And lo, he is drinking, and he hath waked, And lo, he is weary, and his soul is longing, So is the multitude of all the nations Who are warring against mount Zion. (YLT)

THE CITY OF GOD WAS THE CITY OF PRIDE — This first portion parallels 28:1-6 where Isaiah denounced Ephraim. There Ephraim was lost in revelry as its final hours came upon it; here Jerusalem too is involved in festivities, blind to its real needs. *The difference between Jerusalem and Israel was that Jerusalem prided herself on her pure religion, and it was that pride which contributed to her downfall. She was the home of King David, the ‘ideal man of God’.* But along with the pronouncement of judgement was the promise of redemption. “It appears that the leadership was urging and alliance with Egypt precisely because they doubted God’s capacity to save them (cp 5:18,19; 7:12; 30:2; 31:1; etc.). Isaiah’s response would then be twofold: God is in fact so powerful that to refuse to trust him is to experience destruction from his hand (Assyria is not mentioned), after which destruction he is still able to save.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

JERUSALEM THE ‘ALTAR-HEARTH’ (‘ARIEL’) — That Jerusalem is meant is without question, obvious by the references to the festivals and David. But why Isaiah used ‘Ariel’ is uncertain. Some suggestions as to why:

- **a variant upon urusalima**, ‘city of Salem’ (Jerusalem) to uruel, ‘city of El’ (God); but that does not answer the change from uru- to ari-

- **‘Lion of God’** as supported by references to Judah as a lion (Gen 49:9), the lion throne (1 Kings 10:19,20), and references to the devouring lion (Isa 31:4; cp 2 Sam 23:20; 1 Chron 11:22). But nothing in the context lends support to this rendering.

- **‘altar, hearth’** (Ezek 43:15). This has much support due to the references to Jerusalem’s festivals in v1 as well as explaining the altar-hearth in the final clause of v2. This does speak to the fact that Jerusalem prided itself on being the Lord’s ‘altar-hearth’, the very heart of the only religion that pleased Him (while in fact the Lord was not pleased at all).

The NIV margin has this note: “The Hebrew for *altar hearth* sounds like the Hebrew for *Ariel*.”

Grogan adds this comment regarding the NIV vote: “The NIV margin does not make it clear that the word translated ‘altar hearth’ in v. 2 is exactly the same word ‘Ariel’ and not simply like it in sound. The point really is that in this sentence the word clearly is not simply a name but actually *means* something, and what it means in fact is not ‘hearth’ but ‘altar hearth.’ ” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

“‘Ariel’ means ‘altar-hearth’ (Ezek 43:15), the place of the ever-burning fire (Lev 6:12,13). It was both the privilege (Ps 84:3,4) and the peril (Isa 33:14) of Zion to live with this fire, alike a danger to sinners (Isa 6:4) and the means of their salvation (Isa 6:6,7). It was the sign of the Lord’s indwelling presence. Isaiah could hardly have chosen a more cryptic title: Zion, the place of holy wrath and divine preservation.” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] **“The word ‘Ariel’ here is to be understood in the sense ‘of the hearth of the great altar’ and the meaning is, ‘I will indeed make Jerusalem like the great altar; I will make it the burning place of wrath where my enemies shall be consumed as if they were on the altar of burnt sacrifice.’ ”** [Barnes, *Notes on Bible*]

“Jehovah would make Jerusalem a besieged city, full of sighs; but ‘*she becomes to me like an Ariel*’, i.e., being qualified through me, she will prove herself a hearth of God, by consuming the foes like a furnace, or by their meeting with their destruction at Jerusalem, like wood piled up on the altar and then consumed in flame.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

THE LORD ENCAMPED AGAINST JERUSALEM — “Isaiah wants to make it plain that **God is no mere spectator in the theater of history. God will be laying siege to Jerusalem when Assyria is at the gate.** While this leaves unanswered many of the questions of sovereignty versus free will, or of God’s place in the practice of moral evil, it does emphasize and re-emphasize the point which is as easily forgotten today as then: ***all things are under God’s superintendence.***” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

In verse 4 the formerly loud, boasting voices are reduced to chirpings and twitterings of the dead, possibly imagery of the captive lying face down on the ground with the tyrant’s foot on his neck. Possibly, but the use of earth and dust here suggests Isaiah may be referring to actual death. Grogan notes the same Hebrew word *hanah* is used in verses 1,3 and could therefore be consistently translated ‘*encamped, encamped against, besieged*’ rather than ‘*settled*’. The word itself properly means ‘*to encamp, to pitch one’s tent, to station oneself*’ and is often used to refer to encamping ‘against’ anyone in the sense of making war upon or attacking. “David, in fact, besieged Jerusalem when it was a Jebusite stronghold. When he took it, it became his capital city. Through many a difficult century in its history it had never been taken again. ***The true poignancy of the ‘woe’ here lies in the fact that the God who had enabled David to take it would now besiege this city himself, through its enemies (v. 5).***” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

GETTING THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE — In verses 5-8 the tone shifts from judgement to redemption. “The prophet wants his hearers to know that not only can God save them now, he can also save them after they will have experienced the consequences of their refusal to trust him. ***How foolish to trust Egypt in view of such powerful grace.*** What now seems so horrifying and insurmountable is in fact of no more substance than a dream. ***But human beings***

have a very hard time getting above the immediate and getting perspective upon their lives. This is where the divine word assumes critical importance. When we see issues from God's point of view, we are much less likely to rush into foolish attempts to extricate ourselves." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

JUDGMENT, THEN REDEMPTION — *Before Judah's enemies were weighty and powerful, but with the presence of the Lord they are nothing more substantial than powder (dust beaten even finer) or wind-driven chaff. "As the besieging of Jerusalem was an expression of God's sovereignty, so also is his deliverance.* He comes as the Lord of Hosts, the God of armies, disposing of the troops of heaven and of earth as he will. He also comes as the Lord of nature, with the forces of that realm responding to his presence in a sympathetic way." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] "These verses (vs 5,7,8) contain a beautiful description of the destruction of the army of Sennacherib. Though they had laid the plan of a regular siege; though the city, in itself, would not be able to hold out against them, and all was alarm and conscious imbecility within; yet in an instant the siege would be raised, and the advancing hosts of the Assyrians would all be gone.... 'Shall be like small dust' — Light, fine dust that is easily dissipated by the wind. 'Of the terrible ones' — Of the invading, besieging army, that is so much the object of dread. 'As chaff that passeth away' — This image of chaff driven before the wind, to denote the sudden and entire discomfiture of enemies, is common in the Scriptures (Job 21:18; Ps 1:4; 35:5; Hos 13:13). 'Yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly' — *The forces of Sennacherib were destroyed in a single night by the angel of the Lord (Isa 37:36), and the siege of Jerusalem was of course immediately raised."* [Barnes, *Notes on Bible*]

THE LORD'S ENEMIES ARE AS A DREAM — At the time a dream might seem so real; what a relief to awake and discover it was all just a nightmare. *The hordes of Assyria were as a nightmare that disappeared when one day the inhabitants of Jerusalem awoke to find them destroyed by the Lord's death angel.* Verse 8 could be applied to the Assyrians with the intent of unfulfilled desires ('Jerusalem was as a dream, within their reach but when they awoke it was unfulfilled, as a hungry man dreams of food and yet awakes hungry') but there would be no reason to shift the focus away from the Judeans to the Assyrians.

Blindness and Sight (29:9-14)

<i>Be stunned and amazed, blind yourselves and be sightless; be drunk, but not from wine, stagger, but not from beer. The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers). For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I can't; it is sealed." Or if you give the</i>	<i>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</i>	<i>Tarry and wonder, look ye, yea, look, Be drunk, and not with wine, Stagger, and not with strong drink. For poured out on you hath Jehovah a spirit of deep sleep, And He closeth your eyes — the prophets, And your heads — the seers — He covered. And the vision of the whole is to you, As words of the sealed book, That they give unto one knowing books, Saying, 'Read this, we pray thee,' And he hath said, 'I am not able, for it [is] sealed;' And the book is given to him who hath not known books, Saying, 'Read</i>
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scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, “Read this, please,” he will answer, “I don’t know how to read.” The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.” (NIV)

not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as 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: 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. (KJV)

this, we pray thee,’ And he hath said, ‘I have not known books.’ And the Lord saith: Because drawn near hath this people, with its mouth, And with its lips they have honoured Me, And its heart it hath put far off from Me, And their fear of Me is — A precept of men is taught! Therefore, lo, I am adding to do wonderfully with this people, A wonder, and a marvel, And perished hath the wisdom of its wise ones, And the understanding of its intelligent ones hideth itself.’ (YLT)

JUDICIAL BLINDNESS — “It is apparent that what the prophet has said about Judah’s present and future has come as something of a wonder to Judah’s rulers. Talk of trusting God instead of Egypt, of victory through defeat, leaves these men shaking their heads. They are not spiritual men, but are wise in the way of the world. To them, such talk is simply foolish (1 Cor 2:14). The words accompanying Isaiah’s call continue to come true. The more he speaks the truth, the less intelligible it becomes to his hearers (6:9,10). So here in an agony of frustration he cries out to them, ‘Alright, go ahead and be blind; be insensible, like a drunk. But your problem does not come from alcohol, like the Samaritans’; your problem comes from God, whom you have offended so deeply that he no longer enables you to hear. Characteristically for a Hebrew prophet, *it is God who gives enabling grace, and if a people stubbornly misconstrue his words, then that enabling grace is withdrawn. There can be no more frightening motivation to listen to God than this, the thought that if you refuse to hear today, one day you might no longer be able to hear* (Acts 28:26-28; Rom 1:24,26,28; Heb 4:1-11).” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Calvin, quoted in Young: God deprived the light to those who ‘by a wicked and depraved hatred of truth of (their) own accord wish for darkness.’

THE DANGERS OF ‘DEAD ORTHODOXY’ — The rulers in v9 are drunk, not literally as in 28:7,8 but figuratively; they are ‘*drunk but not from wine, stagger but not from beer.*’ These rulers are drugged on their own orthodoxy, dead and departed from God that it is. “*This is always the word to the orthodox: while God takes no pleasure in the debauched, neither does he delight in those who make their religion a substitute for a life-changing relationship with him* (Ps 51:18,19; Micah 6:6-8). *This is not to say that God does not care for ceremony, but only that the ceremony he approves is not an end in itself* (Deut 10:12-16; Ps 84:2-13; Col 3:12-17).” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] The question must be asked in relation to what we’ve just read: *Where is your heart? Do you (as much as possible) concentrate on what’s being said during SS / church? Do you pray for your teacher, the pastor and others in attendance before and during the message? When a point is made regarding sin, do you look at your own heart and ask the Lord to search you, confessing the sin to Him if necessary? When the work of Christ is presented, do you*

breathe a prayer of thanksgiving and praise? Do you pray and seek for the Lord to be lifted up during the lesson / message? Or are you only here because you have to be here? Are your thoughts on people instead of Christ? When sin is mentioned do you immediately think of someone else prior to considering your own heart? As the lesson / message is given, is it being evaluated critically for every word said? What the Lord through Isaiah confronted 2700 years ago in Jerusalem is very much a problem for us today if we're not careful.

GOD'S PROPHETS: THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE IN A NATION — In v10 Isaiah points directly to the problem which interestingly enough was not the rulers nor the priests. *Surely they bore their part of the problem but Isaiah here centers on the lack of integrity in the prophets themselves.* “The ones really to blame were those who could have received a corrective word from God as Amos did (5:21-24) — the prophets and the seers — but did not. *So long as a nation has prophets in sufficient number and with sufficient integrity, the religious functionaries can have their perceptions continually purified. But if those upon whom the nation depends for a word from God lose contact with God, that nation is lost like an airliner in a fog with dead radios.*”

[Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Is this to blame the faults of a nation entirely upon the prophets? No, for a prophet is only as effective as people hear (‘*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*’ — 2 Tim 4:2,3). What Isaiah is saying is that *a sign of the withdrawing hand of God is the absence of great men of God who faithfully proclaim His word.* As men begin to harden their hearts the prophets may still be faithful, but the people will rebel from that kind of preaching until the churches die from lack of attendance, the prophet stops due to discouragement, or perhaps even physical persecution will drive away the good men of God ... but the lack of faithful prophets is still a sign of degeneracy. *What does this say about America, whose land is filled with churches people attend to ‘feel good’ and ‘be uplifted’ rather than having their sins rebuked? What does it say about America that young people are not responding to the call for preaching and missions?*

THE WORD OF GOD A CLOSED BOOK — in v11,12 Isaiah continues to give an illustration concerning what he just said. One who was illiterate comes to one who could read and asks him to read the contents. But the reader is not allowed to open a sealed scroll; only the one who sealed the scroll or his designate could perform that task (Rev 5:1-5). Such was Isaiah’s vision to the prophets and seers. *“They have the technical skills to understand God’s word, but they lack the spiritual insight which would enable them to see the plain meaning. So, of course, the situation is hopeless for the common person. He cannot even read, let alone open and read. The Church today is in a perilously similar situation. The pews are full of people who look to someone who can ‘read,’ but for all too many who can do so, the document is still sealed.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION — *“The spiritual blindness of vv. 9-12 is an appropriate partner of the externalism and traditionalism of v. 13....* Verse 13 is quoted by our Lord in Matt 15:9 with reference to the Pharisees. The spiritual parallel is very striking. In both cases wrong teaching was based on a mishandling of God’s true revelation, the sacrificial regulations, and the Mosaic Law as a whole respectively. *In each case tradition allied to bad theology resulted in a mishandling of Scripture, and in each the result was a self-justifying complacency in the presence of the most holy God.”* [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

GOD IS GREAT IN BOTH MERCY AND JUDGMENT — *“The God of Israel who had shown himself to his people in one of his great attributes for their blessing would demonstrate that*

same quality in an act of judgment. He is ‘wonderful’ (*pete*) and has done wonderful things for his people (Exod 15:11; Ps 77:2, 15; cf. Isa 9:6), but his power to astound them is turned against them. The prophet seems still to have in mind the judgments God has decreed against his people in vv. 1-3, and the repetition of the word ‘woe’ in v. 15 confirms this. The apostle Paul quoted v. 14 in 1 Cor 1:19. Isaiah shows great interest in the distinction between worldly and godly wisdom (e.g., 5:21; 11:2; 26:7, 10). This makes a verse like v. 14 most appropriate in the context of Paul’s thought in 1 Corinthians 1.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

Spiritual Transformation (29:15-24)

Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, “Who sees us? Who will know?” You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “He did not make me”? Can the pot say of the potter, “He knows nothing”? In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest? In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down — those who with a word make a man out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice. Therefore this is what the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the house of Jacob: “No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces

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? 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. Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his

Wo [to] those going deep from Jehovah to hide counsel, And whose works have been in darkness. And they say, ‘Who is seeing us? And who is knowing us?’ Your perversion! as clay is the potter esteemed? That the work saith of its maker, ‘He hath not made me?’ And the framed thing said of its framer, ‘He did not understand?’ Is it not yet a very little, And turned hath Lebanon to a fruitful field, And the fruitful field for a forest is reckoned? And heard in that day have the deaf the words of a book, And out of thick darkness, and out of darkness, The eyes of the blind do see. And the humble have added joy in Jehovah, And the poor among men In the Holy One of Israel rejoice. For ceased hath the terrible one, And consumed hath been the scorner, And cut off have been all watching for iniquity, Causing men to sin in word, And for a reprover in the gate lay a snare, And turn aside into emptiness the righteous. Therefore, thus said Jehovah, Who ransomed Abraham, Concerning the house of Jacob: ‘Not now ashamed is Jacob, Nor now doth his face

grow pale. When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.” (NIV)

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. (KJV)

become pale, For in his seeing his children, The work of My hand, in his midst, They sanctify My name, And have sanctified the Holy One of Jacob, And the God of Israel they declare fearful. And the erring in spirit have known understanding, And murmurers learn doctrine!’ (YLT)

WOE #3 : THE FOOLISHNESS OF THINKING THE POTTER DOES NOT SEE THE CLAY

— Verse 15 contains the third woe of this section: the first was to the drunkards of Ephraim (28:1) and the second to Jerusalem, David’s city (29:1). “It is apparent that some sort of secret political plan had been made without consultation with people or prophet, and thus, in Isaiah’s view, without consultation with God. Probably this is in reference to the decision to break the vassal-covenant with Assyria and to rely on help from Egypt (2 Kings 18:7b). Clearly, God has no brief for Assyria as he could have none for Babylon when he would lead Jeremiah to counsel against that revolt (Jer 27:8-11). *What he did contest was the idea that a nation calling itself God’s people should endeavor to insure its own freedom and security through a system of secret compacts with other nations without reliance on God.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “Isaiah anticipates Jeremiah in his use of the illustration of the potter and the clay (v. 16; cf. 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:1-6). Paul too used this illustration in Rom 9:19-21. Each of the three writers made somewhat different points; yet each argued for the sovereignty of God from this analogy. The Assyrian too had boasted of his independence from this sovereign God (10:15).” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] Literally, ‘*they go deep from the Lord to hide counsel*’ (Oswalt); ‘*hide deep from the Lord their counsel*’ (RSV). *The picture is one of a small group of officials huddled around some candle-lit table in a basement, as if God could not see them there!* Isaiah’s rebuttal to them rests on the doctrine of creation: as the Maker God does understand His creation and has the right to determine its direction.

GOD WILL OVERTURN THOSE WHO OVERTURN JUSTICE — ‘*Ah, your perversity*’ (v16) is literally ‘*your overturning*’; ‘*do you see to overturn your work?*’ (Targum); ‘*things are overturned by you?*’ (Dead Sea Scrolls). “‘*Ah, your perversity*’ sums up the intensity of the prophet’s feelings. They have turned things upside down. They tell God what to do rather than seeking to discern what he means to do.... *God promises some overturnings of his own. The leaders have taken counsel as if God did not exist, with the result that the ordinary people must bear the brunt of the disaster which those mis-guided policies will bring about. Nevertheless, God will change all that. The blind will see, the helpless will be empowered, and those who have made a living of injustice will disappear.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Following the flow, this verse could have several interpretations. It could refer to the downtrodden (the deaf and blind possibly representing all the handicapped) who will hear and see when the Lord’s kingdom is established; it could also refer to those who are presently blind and deaf spiritually, a result of hardening their hearts to Isaiah’s message (8:16-18; 29:9-12). “So his preaching was a closed book to his own generation. But God here promises that the day will come when the blind will see and the deaf will hear. No longer will the words of promise fall on hard, dry ground.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] The result will be to praise the Lord (v19, 23).

DESTRUCTION OF THE ‘MIGHTY’ WHO OPPRESS THE WEAK — ‘*The ruthless*’ are the oppressors who heartlessly squeeze the weak to extract what they can from them; ‘*the scoffer*’ mocks the normal standards of truth, honor and decency, delighting to serve himself at the expense of others; ‘*all who watch to do evil*’ are those in political and judicial authority who are always on the alert to prey on the innocent. Verse 21 describes manners in which they work: perjury to make an innocent man look guilty, going before the elders when one pleads his case to trip up the supplicant in legal niceties, and by confusing words to cloud the issue.

THE TRUE SEED OF ABRAHAM REVEALED... — “Evoking the patriarchs of the past and pointing to the children of the future, he looks to a time when the true holiness of God will be in the forefront of everyone’s mind because he will have manifested his sole lordship through the deliverance of his people.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Jacob will be ‘*no longer ... ashamed*’ stresses one of the themes of Isaiah and the bible as a whole: Jacob will finally trust in God and not other places.

...AND THE LORD WILL BE PRAISED — “The response of Jacob will be to sanctify the name of the Holy One.... *One might think of such perfection as a source of terror, but because it is a perfection of love, though it is awe-ful, it is not terrifying. In fact, his otherness, his holiness, is the source of our hope. For we have proven in this century, if not before, that the universe cannot save itself. We must have Someone from beyond who is holy enough to save us. So those who have experienced the depths of his grace have no desire to bring him down to their level. They wish to tell the world of his holiness. For them the opening lines of the Lord’s Prayer come easily, especially the second: ‘Hallowed (sanctified) by thy name’*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Note deliverance is followed by praise which is followed by understanding.

The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”

— Isaiah 29:13 NIV