

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 29:1-24

Topic

The LORD diagnoses Israel with spiritual blindness and discusses how she got that way.

Title

“Random Facts on Blindness”

“I am also quite blind.”

If you are a fan, you will recognize that slightly obscure quote. It is from season one, episode twenty-nine, *Operation Annihilate*. Alien entities attach themselves to humans with cheesy 1960s special effects. In an effort to separate them, without killing the humans, they expose them to the full spectrum of blinding visible light.

It works, but in the process, Mr. Spock announces, “I am free of it and the pain. *And I am also quite blind.*”

As if he doesn't feel bad enough, Dr. McCoy discovers that he didn't need to expose Spock to the entire visible light spectrum - only ultraviolet. *Spock need not have been blinded.* Not to worry; he recovers, revealing that Vulcans have a protective inner eyelid.

The Jews Isaiah was speaking to *did not.*

In verse nine we read, “Blind yourselves and be blind!”

The nation of Israel *blinded itself*.

A spiritually blind nation. Not to worry. In verse eighteen we read, "In that day... the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness."

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Israel's Blindness Can Serve As A Warning To You**, and **#2 Israel's Blindness Can Serve As A Witness To You**.

#1 - Israel's Blindness Can Serve As A Warning To You (v1-13)

You can be born blind, and you can go blind on account of various injuries and illnesses. Rarely does a person purposely blind themselves. Israel did, without knowing. It prompts us to ask, "How?"

"Therefore the Lord said: 'Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men' " (v13).

Their blindness stemmed from a disconnect between what their mouths and lips were doing, and what was truly in their hearts.

OK, so it's heart trouble. There is an awful lot that can affect your heart. What was it for Israel?

They had removed their own hearts far from God.

Heart-removal was accomplished by preferring the "commandments of men." He was referring to the addition of man-made rules, rites, and regulations, and traditions, which were extra-biblical. That in itself isn't always wrong. But it all goes horribly wrong when you believe that keeping the commandments of men are more authoritative than God's Word.

In the NT, Jesus healed a man from a lifetime of blindness. He did it on the Sabbath. It violated the man-made commandments, the added extra-biblical traditions of men, that healing was work that could not be performed on the Sabbath. Instead of rejoicing, the so-called spiritual leaders excommunicated the man, and sought Jesus to do Him harm.

Elevating the commandments of men over the Word of God began a process, eventuating in Israel's blindness.

Isa 29:1 "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city *where* David dwelt! Add year to year; Let feasts come around.

There are only two places where "Ariel" appears in the Old Testament:

- In Ezra it is a proper **man's** name (8:16).
- In our text, no less than five times, it is a name for Israel.

I am not exactly sure what Ariel means. The top two suggestions are *lion of God*, or God's *burning hearth*. If it is the latter, it is most likely referring to the brazen altar in the Jewish scheme of worship.

What we can say is that it is a name of endearment. It heartens back to the glory days of King David. In all their distresses, the nation remained the LORD's beloved Ariel.

"Year to year," and "Feasts," is a description of what the LORD intended for His nation: To be ruled over by the man after God's own heart, the worshipping, dancing king, while celebrating Feast after Feast, year after year.

Notwithstanding persecution and trials, and the devil harassing you, and the general difficulties of life in a fallen world, *Jesus wants you to enjoy Him*.

Remember - No matter your life's path, you can always say, "It is well with my soul."

Isa 29:2 Yet I will distress Ariel; There shall be heaviness and sorrow, And it shall be to Me as Ariel.

With genuine reluctance, the LORD must "distress" the nation. Too much was at stake in Judah's backsliding. He must bring them back to their love for Him. It was through Israel the whole Earth would be blessed with the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. The LORD stepped in, as He always does, to insure a remnant of godly Jews would remain.

I love that the LORD says, "it [the nation] shall be to Me as Ariel." His Ariel, no matter their faithlessness. He loves them with His everlasting love, as *God loves **you***.

Isa 29:3 I will encamp against you all around, I will lay siege against you with a mound, And I will raise siegeworks against you.

The Assyrian invaders would be the LORD's instrument of "distress." By siege warfare, and weapons designed for such, they would conquer the northern kingdom of Israel. They would almost conquer the southern kingdom of Judah. Not long after, the Babylonian invaders sieged Jerusalem three times, ruining the city and its Temple in the final siege.

Isa 29:4 You shall be brought down, You shall speak out of the ground; Your speech shall be low, out of the dust; Your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground; And your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

"Medium" is a broad title that describes anyone who dabbles in the occult: A witch, sorcerer, psychic, etc. My personal favorite is necromancer. An example of their speech coming from "out of the ground" is the time King Saul consulted a medium. A Philistine army was advancing. The LORD did not speak to Saul, so he sought spiritual advice from a witch. The deceased prophet Samuel came up "out of the ground" and rebuked the king, predicting his defeat and death (First Samuel 28).

Isaiah had warned against such practices (8:19). It seems they ignored him, and were involved in occult stuff.

Satan comes to church on a regular basis. At some point, he will introduce the occult, or the esoteric. He gives them Christianized names to fool you.

Isa 29:5 "Moreover the multitude of your foes Shall be like fine dust, And the multitude of the terrible ones Like chaff that passes away; Yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly.

If this episode was made in to a movie, we might title it, *A New Hope*. The LORD will conquer their enemies and restore them. The Assyrian siege of Judah matches this prediction. Overnight, the Angel of the LORD would kill 185,000 soldiers. "Instantly," "suddenly," the feared and fierce Assyrians would be reduced to chaff.

Isa 29:6 You will be punished by the LORD of hosts With thunder and earthquake and great noise, *With* storm and tempest And the flame of devouring fire.

Isa 29:7 The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel, Even all who fight against her and her fortress, And distress her, Shall be as a dream of a night vision.

Isa 29:8 It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams, And look - he eats; But he awakes, and his soul is still empty; Or as when a thirsty man dreams, And look - he drinks; But he awakes, and indeed *he is* faint, And his soul still craves: So the multitude of all the nations shall be, Who fight against Mount Zion."

Notice verse seven: "The multitude of all the nations who fight against Arie." The OT prophets skillfully wove present conditions, the near future, and the far future. Verses six, seven, and eight look forward beyond Assyria's defeat to the End Times Battle of Armageddon.

Isa 29:9 Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.

Isa 29:10 For the LORD has poured out on you The spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, *namely*, the seers.

Their confusion wasn't from beer, but from what the LORD "poured out" on them. It was a potent potable that dulled their spiritual senses.

Did they blind themselves? Or did God blind them? Both are true. Since they were acting in a manner that could only lead to spiritual blindness, and would not repent, God let it happen, then enforced it.

Isa 29:11 The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which *men* deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it *is* sealed."

Isa 29:12 Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am not literate."

Imagine you go to the doctor, and he orders an MRI of your brain. When he receives the results, he cannot comprehend them. After struggling for a while, he hands them to you and says, "Go figure out what's wrong with you." But you are even more illiterate than your doctor.

Isa 29:13 Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

Their worship had become about *works*, and not *walking* with God. Works always, *always*, appeal to our pride. Since God hates pride, it erects a wall between us and God.

Next thing you know, Israel was messing around with the other gods of their pagan neighbors. If you have no heart for God, you will entertain other gods.

A.W. Tozer wrote, *"If we compare what we ought to be and could be with what we are, and we don't see that we are in a rut and we are not concerned, then one of three things may be wrong:*

1. *First, we may not be converted at all.*
2. *Second, people may not be concerned about the rut because of sin they have committed.*
3. *Third, some people are so self-righteous that they are impervious to any work of the Holy Spirit. They cannot be cured of their blindness because they think they see."*

Works do not require love for Jesus, or love for others. Anybody can do them.

You do not need a heart in order to carry out religious acts.

I can almost, in verse thirteen, hear Jesus addressing the church of the Laodiceans in the Book of the Revelation:

Rev 3:17 Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, **blind**, and naked

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Rev 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; **and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.**

Rev 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

The church 'of' the Laodiceans was mostly unsaved individuals. Their repentance would 'procure the cure' for spiritual blindness, and these other things.

The few believers in Laodicea were not blind, but the blindness of those around them could certainly influence them.

It is a warning to all, and warnings are good.

#2 - Israel's Blindness Can Serve As A Witness To You (v14-24)

We like a good mystery.

The apostle Paul was into mysteries. He was tasked by God to reveal seven mysteries:

1. First Timothy 3:16, The Mystery of the Incarnation
2. Ephesians 3:1-10, The Mystery of the Church
3. Colossians 1:25-28, The Mystery of the Indwelling of Believers
4. Ephesians 5:22-32, The Mystery of the Headship of Jesus
5. First Corinthians 15:50-58, The Mystery of the Translation of the Church
6. Second Thessalonians 2:1-9, The Mystery of Lawlessness

These mysteries were things unknown to the human race until revealed by God.

The seventh mystery is pertinent to our text in Isaiah. In Romans 11:25-26 we read, "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this **mystery**, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved."

Blinded, the nation of Israel did not see, and does not see, her Messiah, Jesus Christ. They will, when He returns in His Second Coming. Meanwhile God's program is the Gospel going out to the whole Earth saving mostly Gentiles. It isn't that individual Jews cannot be saved; they can & they are. But as a nation Israel is blind and living in unbelief of Jesus.

Isa 29:14 Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hidden."

They substituted the commandments of men, here called "the understanding of their prudent men." The LORD says He will cause that to perish, and do "a marvelous work and a wonder." The Jews will look upon the returning Lord, Jesus, and realize He is their God & King. All Israel will be saved.

Isa 29:15 Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the LORD, And their works are in the dark; They say, "Who sees us?" and, "Who knows us?"

This reminds me of the many warnings of false Christ's and false teachers in the End Times. Be skeptical and check things out.

Isa 29:16 Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, "He did not make me"? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

The Potter working with clay is a favorite illustration of God's to show His relationship to Israel. The Potter makes something that is both beautiful and useful; it has beauty and purpose. Clay is inanimate and ought to yield to the Potter's touch on the wheel. However, in the case of Israel (and all other nations as well), *the clay hardens itself and talks back*.

In the future, the nation of Israel will yield to the Master Potter, rather than resisting Him.

Isa 29:17 *Is it not yet a very little while Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?*

Historians say that Lebanon was the encampment of the invading Assyrians. In the future, it would be "a fruitful field," with such abundance and growth you'd think it was a "forest."

This is another prophetic jump to the far future, to the Millennial Kingdom on Earth. Many wonderful physical changes will occur upon the Earth.

Quick pause. If you have never heard some of the terms... The Great Tribulation is a future, seven years during which the Lord will pour out judgments upon the inhabitants of Earth in an effort to save them. The Jews who survive that Time of Jacob's Trouble will all be saved, as well as multitudes of Gentiles... The Second Coming is the return of Jesus after the Tribulation... The Millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom, is a one-thousand year reign over the Earth by Jesus after His return.

Isa 29:18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.

"When the nation moves away from its stranglehold of traditions, rejects the commandments taught by men, and turns fully to God, then her spiritual blindness and spiritual deafness will be removed" (Fruchtenbaum).

Isa 29:19 The humble also shall increase *their* joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.

This is more future kingdom talk. Jesus said those who would "rejoice" in that Kingdom were the poor in spirit, mourners, meek, merciful, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5).

Isa 29:20 For the terrible one is brought to nothing, The scornful one is consumed, And all who watch for iniquity are cut off -

Isa 29:21 Who make a man an offender by a word, And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, And turn aside the just by empty words.

The ISV translates these two verses, *"For the ruthless will vanish, and mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down - those who make a person appear to be the offender in a lawsuit, who set a trap for someone who is making his defense in court, and push aside the innocent with specious arguments."*

Isa 29:22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, Nor shall his face now grow pale;

This takes us back to the beginnings of God's chosen nation. The Lord chose Abraham, and made a covenant with him that is unconditional. He was promised land, multitudes of descendants, and that all nations would be blessed through him and them. Jacob is singled out because it was through him the twelve tribes would descend.

Finally, after centuries, Israel will be in a spiritual condition to receive their promises by recognizing her Messiah.

Isa 29:23 But when he sees his children, The work of My hands, in his midst, They will hallow My name, And hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And fear the God of Israel.

God's intent for His beloved Ariel has always been that they reveal Him to the Gentile nations. In the Millennium, they will finally, fully hallow God's Name.

The A-Team used to say, "I love it when a plan comes together." This verse speaks of God's plan of redemption of the human race, and restoration of Creation, 'coming together' in the Millennial Kingdom.

Isa 29:24 These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine."

Quoting Dr. Fruchtenbaum again, *“Verse 24 reveals the end product of Israel’s national regeneration. Israel will understand the Word of God. Now partially blinded in their ability to understand the Scriptures, in the future they will fully understand.”*

Israel’s blindness is a witness that we are in “the fullness of the Gentiles.” Jesus mentioned a time in which Jerusalem would be under the dominion of Gentile authority (Luke 21:24). Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem in 588BC began that period, and it has continued through the present time. God’s purpose in the fullness of the Gentiles: The spread of the Gospel throughout the whole world.

Speaking of the Gentiles and blindness, the apostle Paul said, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (Second Corinthians 4:4).

The Gospel opens blind eyes. Nothing else can. It is the power of God unto salvation.

What is ‘Job One’? To share the Gospel.