

Isaiah: Offering Hope for the Future

Bible Background • ISAIAH 29

Printed Text • ISAIAH 29:13-24 | Devotional Reading • JEREMIAH 29:10-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER how God's promise of mercy will triumph over God's judgment, BELIEVE that an essential characteristic of God's nature is forgiveness, and REJOICE in the manifestation of God's love in our own lives.

In Focus

Pamela was in a bind and needed help with an unexpected car repair, so she called in a favor from her friend Aisha who was always willing to lend a helping hand. What Pamela didn't know was that Aisha was fed up with being her emergency fund and had already determined the next time she made one of her 9-1-1 calls for financial help she was not going to help. The reason: Pamela was not a good steward over her finances and was known for making poor choices. Aisha loved her friend but for her well-being and the sake of their friendship, she had to set that boundary. Also, Pamela was slow to return what she borrowed, and when she did, there was always an excuse for not repaying the full amount.

She called Aisha and asked for a five hundred dollar loan and said: "I promise I will pay you back next week when I get paid. I will set it up to send electronically." Aisha thought, "My Father in heaven is rich, but I am not your bank!" But instead, she responded, "Girl, I don't have the full amount, but I will give you half. I am so sorry that's all I can do right now."

"I understand," Pamela said, "I have been to your well too many times. I need to make changes." *If someone was a repeat offender, would you continue to give your resources to help them?*

"They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (Isaiah 29:24, KJV)

KJV

Isaiah 29:13 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:

14 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.

15 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?

16 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?

17 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?

18 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.

19 The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off:

21 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.

22 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.

23 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.

24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

NLT

Isaiah 29:13 And 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.

14 Because 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."

15 What 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!"

16 How 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"?

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

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

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

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

21 Those 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.

22 That 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.

23 For 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.

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

People, Places, and Times

Isaiah. One of the greatest prophets of his time, Isaiah had a vision of God and was called by God to do God’s work bringing his nation to repentance to save it from a whirlpool of destruction. His very name means “Yahweh is (the source) of salvation.” Isaiah came to the people with messages of judgment tempered with hope. He ministered for 60 years or more and prophesied during the reign of five kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. He pleaded with the people to turn from their wicked ways back to a loving God who would forgive and restore them. Isaiah saw the deliverance of Jerusalem from her enemies, the Assyrians. It was through his prayers and by the intervention of God that Jerusalem was spared from being destroyed. But even this great show of God’s mercy and protection did not sway the people back to the worship of Yahweh alone.

Lebanon. In biblical times, Lebanon was synonymous with the cedar trees that grew there. Cedars were most often referred to as “the glory of Lebanon” (Isaiah 35:2; 60:13). The trees grew very tall (Isaiah 2:13) and had plenty of branches to make shade (Ezekiel 31:3). Much of the Temple, Solomon’s palace, and public buildings in Jerusalem were made from Lebanon’s cedar.

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 to 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 selfcenteredness. 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).

Have you experienced times where you thought God’s help wasn’t needed?

At-A-Glance

1. Far From Center (Isaiah 29:13–16)
2. Return to Center (vv. 17–21)
3. Return to Covenant (vv.22–24)

In Depth

1. Far From Center (Isaiah 29:13–16) God caused the false prophets, rulers, and seers to fall into deep delusions for choosing to follow after darkness. As a result, Judah was unable to understand the word of the Lord and brought into a drunken stupor (vv. 9–12). Isaiah called them out for their hypocrisy, lip service, and religious performances. The Lord would go on to pronounce spiritual judgment against them through Isaiah, saying that their worship of Him was misguided. While Judah followed what had become man-made rituals, they failed to reach His heart. Further in their conceit, Judah’s leaders thought they could outsmart and hide from God and live without His wisdom. He warned that they would soon be met with sorrow for being so high-minded. The Lord God reminded them that nothing is hidden from Him. He is the potter, the one who fashioned and created everything.

What are some instances when worship becomes routine?

2. A Return to Center (vv. 17–21) The Lord shifts the message to bring forth hope for what is to come. God delivers the message through Isaiah that He would turn from judgment to restoration of Judah. God did a review of His covenant and promised that if the people repented, they would be restored. They would see fruitfulness in the land; the deaf would hear and understand what the Lord says, the blind will see and have the ability to read, those that would humble themselves for Him would be filled with joy and the poor would rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. In contrast, those who were oppressive, corrupt, evil, and deceivers would be killed and banished from the land. The people would be brought back to their place of dependence and trust in the Lord God because their idols would be destroyed.

How does God's promise of redemption give us hope today?

3. Return to Covenant (vv. 22–24) God reinforces His message to the Children of Israel by reminding them of their forefather Abraham. Although He chastises the people for their waywardness, He assures them that they would no longer live in shame and spiritual poverty. God would continue to fulfill His promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that his seed would be great in the land (Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–5). If God's chosen people would return to a position of worship and awe of God, then the spiritual plug would be removed to comprehend and follow God's commands. God's people need only remember to look for how God has remained faithful to the promises He made to Abraham, all those hundreds of years ago. With those blessings of wealth and progeny fulfilled, even those who scoffed at God and ignored His instruction would change their ways.

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?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was God's accusation against Judah (Isaiah 29:13)?
2. How did Judah insult the Lord (vv. 15–16)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we examine the sincerity of our private worship and watch out for hypocrisy in our public worship?
2. What are the themes of hope in verses 17–24 that connect with your faith to trust God in every situation?

Liberating Lesson

God's love is boundless and He freely lavishes His grace on those who would receive it. God's kindness is intended to lead to repentance. However, He will allow circumstances and experiences to chastise and bring us to a place of surrender. After chastisement, God lovingly restores. What would happen if our current system of justice followed God's model? The intent of the criminal justice system should not only be to punish for offenses, but to be effective it should also be restorative. Offenders should have access to programs within the system that rehabilitates—bringing mental, emotional, and spiritual healing that gets to the root causes of deviant behavior for true transformation. Essential to restoration and cultivating honorable citizens is access to education that teaches life skills and provides opportunities to be productive members of society rather than breeding criminalization. Look for ways your small group or church can support a charity working toward criminal justice reform.

Application for Activation

When you consider God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ, how can you focus your attention on making disciples? How can you mentor and support individual or group their development? Is there a person or population you feel called to serve? What hope from your testimony is an indicator of what you can offer to bring healing to another soul?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

Say It Correctly

Sennacherib. seh-**NACK**-rib.

Mosaic. mow-**SAY**-ik.

Assyria. ah-**SEER**-ee-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Discipline the Immoral Person
with Respect
(1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

TUESDAY

Uphold Justice for All Peoples
(Exodus 23:1-9)

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)