



18 June 23

## Meaningless Worship

Lesson Text: **Isaiah 28:9-16**  
Bible Background: **Isaiah 29**  
Devotional Reading: **Luke 8:9-14**

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**Keep in Mind:** *“13 Wherefore the Lord said, for as much 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.” (Isaiah 29:13 KJV)*

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### Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** that God expects worship from the heart; **UNDERSTAND** that God is worthy to be praised; and **PRAISE** God from the heart.

### In Focus

*Today’s lesson focuses on the nation of Judah during a time when the nation’s prosperity and the people’s pleasures caused them to forget about God and serves as a reminder that God is always to be worshiped in spirit and in truth.*

### Lesson Text

#### **Isaiah 29:9-16~NKJV**

**9** Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.

**10 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.**

**11** 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:

**12 And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.**

**13** 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:

**14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even 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.**

**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 see us? and who know 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?

## The Lesson

### **The People, Places and Times**

**Worship.** The first clear mention of a worship act is found in Genesis 4:2–7. Adam and Eve recognized God had given them “every herb... and every beast” (Genesis 1:29–30), so their children Cain and Abel presented simple offerings to God. We do not know precisely where or how the offerings were made. But we are told they brought two types of offerings, and Cain’s was rejected while Abel’s was accepted.

The brief account in Genesis 4, tells us two very important things about worship: First, God acknowledges worship. We do not know whether God spoke to the brothers prior to this point. But on this day, God spoke (Genesis 4:6) and acted when they worshiped (Genesis 4:4–5). God made this time holy for them. Second, God is the focal point of worship. Scripture does not mention an altar or any words spoken by these men. We do not know what prayers they might have offered. But we are told what God did; His action was a vital part of worship. In the same way, God is very much involved in our worship and delights in the inner love and devotion of our hearts.

**Background:** Only God would dare to recruit a person for ministry by telling him he would be ineffective, but it’s exactly what happened to Isaiah. When God called Isaiah into the prophetic ministry, He told him as a result of his message, the people would harden their hearts, plug their ears, shut their eyes, and not understand with their hearts (Isaiah 6:10). Given the hopelessness of the situation, the perplexed prophet asked God, Lord, how long will this go on? God replied, “*Until their towns are empty, their houses are deserted, and the whole country is a wasteland; until the LORD has sent everyone away, and the entire land of Israel lies deserted.*” (Isaiah 6:11–12, NLT).

Years later, Isaiah told the northern kingdom of Israel; whose capital was Samaria, its fate was set. *“For the Lord will send a mighty army against it. Like a mighty hailstorm and a torrential rain, they will burst upon it like a surging flood and smash it to the ground”* (Isaiah 28:2, NLT). The Assyrians would destroy Israel and take her inhabitants into captivity.”

The destruction of Israel should have encouraged the Kingdom of Judah (Southern Israel), to repent. However, Judah was rightfully afraid of the Assyrians; instead of trusting the Lord to protect them, they entered an alliance with Egypt. God told them, “I will cancel the bargain you made to cheat death and overturn your deal to dodge the grave” (Isaiah 28:18, NLT). He refers to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, as *Ariel* (Isaiah 29:1). This was a symbolic name that meant, *“altar of burnt offering”* referring to the altar at the Temple entrance. The name implied the fate of the city: “Jerusalem will become what Ariel means—an altar covered with blood” (Isaiah 29: 2, NLT).

The prophet foretold the Assyrian army would surround the city and besiege it. The situation would appear to be hopeless; then suddenly, their ruthless enemies would be driven away. God Himself, not the Egyptians, would strike the Assyrians and deliver the wayward people from complete destruction. Despite this miraculous intervention, the Judeans would still not turn their hearts to God. The people would remain rebellious, their worship remained superficial and their leaders would continue to place their trust in things other than God.

## I. In Depth

**1. Warning to the Rebellious (Isaiah 29:9–12)** During the time of Isaiah’s ministry, many of Judah’s citizens were drunk; not from the cup of wine but rather the cup of rebellion. God gave them Levites as priests to teach them, prophets to warn them, and seers who foretold their destruction if they continued their sinful ways. Just as alcohol dulls the mind to reason; the nation’s prosperity and seeking personal pleasures had dulled their spiritual sensitivity to God. Again and again, God reached out and called out to His wayward people, and again and again they rejected Him.

A few years earlier, God raised up the Assyrians to invade and destroy the northern nation of Israel. Now Isaiah was prophesying God would use the Assyrians to besiege Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:1–4). Unlike Israel, God would not allow the Assyrians to destroy Judah, His purpose was to warn them and to demonstrate His awesome power to preserve and protect them. When things appeared at their worst, God would intervene and destroy their enemies.

“This was the final straw. Instead of using the Holy Spirit to soften the people’s heart to His word, God sent *“the spirit of deep sleep”* (Isaiah 29:10) to make them even more

insensitive to His calling. The people who had closed their spiritual eyes would become spiritually blind. The prophets would continue to speak, but the people would not understand. The political and religious rulers would continue to govern, no one would seek God's direction. God's judgment against these rebellious people was to turn them over to their own hearts. There are consequences for rejecting God. That is why our Lord warns us: "Don't harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah" (from Psalm 95:8, NLT).

**2. Warning to the Religious (Isaiah 29:13–14)** A lot of what appears as worship is nothing more than lip service. This is not new; it was also true of the ancient Judeans who worshiped in the Temple. *"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."* (Isaiah 29:13, NLT).

The Judeans claimed to be children of God, but they lived their lives in disobedience. Their religious ceremonies were just going through the motions. They prayed with their mouths and sang with their lips, but their hearts were far from God. They were "Insincere." They knew how to conduct themselves in the Temple. Like some of us, they knew when to sing, when to sit, when to stand, and the appropriate time to cut loose with a hearty "Amen." But this was nothing but learned cold behavior.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus would quote this passage from Isaiah to rebuke the people of His day (Mark 7:6–7), "and it still holds true for many people today. We go to church and go through the motions. There is no passion in our praise and no warmth in our worship, because during the week there has been no obedience in our observance.

According to Jesus, *"A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart"* (from Luke 6:45, NLT). Even though the people of Judah were faithful in their religious practices, their everyday lives revealed the emptiness of their worship. They were spiritually "superficial, their worship was worthless and God passed judgment on them. The wisdom of heaven ceased to flow (see James 3:15–17), and God withheld spiritual understanding.

It is so very easy to allow our personal relationship with Christ to degenerate into a righteous ritual. We find ourselves going to church and going through the motions. True heartfelt worship begins with obedience, is sustained by daily communion, and bursts forth in an outpouring of praise.

**3. Warning to Rulers (Isaiah 29:15–16a)** The leaders of Judah sought advice from everyone but God. In their arrogance, they refused to accept God’s protection and instead trusted in a secret alliance with Egypt (2 Kings 18:21). They thought they were scheming in secret, but Isaiah revealed to them that God was aware of their plans. In truth, they were not revolting against Assyria; they were rebelling against God, who was using the Assyrians to accomplish His will. How could they possibly think they knew better than God or that their plans were superior to His? They were dumber than a lump of clay. Clay does not question the hands that shape it nor does the created thing think of itself as higher than its creator. However, that’s exactly what the Judean rulers did. They doubted God’s ability and trusted their plans over His. Their arrogance would bring them to the brink of disaster before God intervened to save them (2 Kings 18:13–19:37).

The three greatest threats to our spiritual health are rebellion, empty religion, and arrogance. When we truly worship God, we submit our lives to His truth, cultivate a vibrant relationship “with Him, and humble ourselves to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

## **II. Take Aways**

## **III. Closing Prayer**



## **Our Read-Ahead for: 18 June 2023**

### **Meaningless Worship**

**Monday:** Fruitless Worship (**Isaiah 1:10-17**)

**Tuesday:** Worshipping Our Own Achievements (**Isaiah 2:5-17**)

**Wednesday:** Lives Untouched by Religious Observances (**Isaiah 58:1-7**)

**Thursday:** Refusing to Listen (**Jeremiah 13:1-11**)

**Friday:** Tuning Out God (**Zechariah 7:8-14**)

**Saturday:** Receiving the Word (**Luke 8:9-15**)

**Sunday:** Hearts Far from God (**Isaiah 29:9-16**)