

Handout: Isaiah Lesson 11

They hate the man who teaches justice at the city gate and detest anyone who declares the truth ... That is why anyone prudent keeps silent now, since the time is evil.

Amos 5:10, 12

Isaiah's "woe" against Jerusalem in 29:1-16 includes three elements:

1. God's ordained siege of Jerusalem
2. God's spiritual judgment of Jerusalem
3. God's woe against the bold and confident

The symbolic name "Ariel" designates Jerusalem in Isaiah 29:1, 2 (twice), 7 and 33:7 ~ *Look, Ariel is lamenting in the streets, the ambassadors of peace are weeping bitterly.*

The Hebrew word has been explained in several ways:

1. It has been suggested that the word means "lion of God."
2. It has been suggested that it is to be read Uru-el, meaning "foundation of God."
3. It may be related to the Hebrew word ari'eyl, which designates the upper part of God's holy sacrificial altar or altar hearth as it is used by Ezekiel in 43:15 for the part of the altar upon which the sacrificial victims were burnt.

The accusation of hypocritical religion in 29:13 is the same accusation that God made through Isaiah in 1:10-20, and made by God through the prophets Amos (4:4-5; 5:21-24) and Hosea (6:4-6). It was also a false expression of devotion that the prophet Samuel warned against as an affront to God (1 Sam 15:22-23). Their lack of sincerity in the rituals of worship was symptomatic of a deeper spiritual issue:

1. Their words of praise belied their true intentions (29:13a).
2. Their worship focused only on traditions without nurturing a relationship with God (29:13b).

29:13 ~ and reverence for me, as far as they are concerning, is nothing but human commandment, a lesson memorized...

This is a familiar accusation those outside the Catholic faith often make, that Catholics are only following man-made laws and rituals to show reverence for God. Such an attitude is only an excuse and an exercise of their own faulty understanding of Sacred Scripture in the Old and New Testaments.

In chapters 30-31 Isaiah focuses on the sin of foreign alliances. There were two problems with the covenant people making foreign alliances:

1. The people were not placing their trust in Yahweh to protect them. In making their own plans, they were rejecting God's plans.
2. Alliances with foreign nations involved covenant treaties that called on the gods of both nations to judge whoever violated the treaty. Therefore, forming any alliance with a pagan nation required the leaders of God's people to recognize the existence of false gods. The exchange of ambassadors also ran the risk of introducing false gods into the Holy Land and making marriage alliances with pagans (as in the case of Ahab and Jezebel).

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In 30:18-33 Isaiah tells the people that God is planning a great day of restoration that will feature three aspects:

1. God will hear His people's cry of distress and will respond in forgiveness, teaching His people to know Him (30:18-22).
2. He will bring them great blessings (30:23-26).
3. He will defend them against their enemies, displaying His power to the nations (30:27-33).

There are three hopeful promises that Isaiah makes to the covenant people in response to their cry of distress in 30:18-22:

1. God longs to be gracious to His people when they cry out to Him and He will answer them (verses 18-19).
2. The purpose of their suffering was to turn the people back to Him so He can again become their teacher and guide their steps (verses 20-21).
3. Then they will realize the worthlessness of their false idols and will throw them away (verse 22).

In chapter 32 Isaiah mentions two characteristics of a righteous nation:

1. Just/righteous leadership
2. A rejuvenated society that is able to rightly discern between justice and injustice and between righteousness and evil

Isaiah uses four similes to describe the blessings of righteous leadership in 32:2:

1. Like a shelter from the wild
2. [Like] a refuge from the storm
3. Like streams on arid ground (streams in the desert)
4. Like the shade of a solid rock in a desolate land

A rejuvenated society is Isaiah's second important feature of the righteous kingdom God will bring about. The former negative aspects of society will be replaced by right judgment. Isaiah uses four parallels or contrasts in describing God's blessings to a rejuvenated society:

1. The closed eyes of God's visionaries will be opened.
2. The ears of hearers will hear.
3. The hearts of those who were impulsive will become discerning.
4. The tongues of those who stammer will become coherent (people and leaders will become clear speaking).