

First Sunday in Advent

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD WILL BE LIFTED UP

Isaiah 2:1-5

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Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2In days to come

*the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.*

3Many peoples shall come and say,

*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."*

*For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

*4He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

*5O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!*

DIAGNOSIS: There Is No God in Israel

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Doing Evil*

Isaiah was the Lord's prophet in very difficult times. A certain man would be named king, but then that king would do evil in the sight of the Lord. That man would be killed and another named king, who would do evil in the sight of the Lord. The faithful city that was full of justice is now full of murderers (Isa. 1:21). Her princes are companions of thieves (Isa. 1:23). Everyone loves a bribe. They do not defend the orphan and the widow's cause does not come before them (Isa. 1:23). Their land is fled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands (Isa. 2:8), and they are full of diviners and soothsayers (Isa. 2:6).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Worshipping Idols*

But what is wrong with using one's abilities and wealth and using them to earn a living? If another is not as smart or is weaker, then they just need to try harder and should not complain that others take half their earnings, leaving them hardly enough money to buy bread. Is it not good economics to make a profit? Before one can say that refusing to defend the orphan is wrong, even wrong to God, one must first have a law that says ignoring an orphan is wrong. Though God has taught his people not to steal and not to kill, the people seem to have forgotten what they were taught. With all the soothsayers and diviners, even God was forgotten. King Ahaziah fell and was injured, so he sent people to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron to inquire if he would recover from his injury (2 Kings 1:2). Before they could get there, they were stopped by a prophet who asked them, and thus asked King Ahaziah, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub,

the god of Ekron?”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Punishment of War and Exile and Death*

As other gods were trusted more than the God of Jacob, all around the reading from Isaiah 2:1-5 are the law's consequences of distrusting God and trusting idols—the biggest and most prevalent reason for the law's accusations and then condemnations. “Their land is filled with idols (Isa. 2:8). “I will turn my hand against you” (Isa. 1:25). “I will pour out my wrath on my enemies” (Isa. 1:24), and those enemies are the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

PROGNOSIS: God Will Be in Charge

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Raise Up the Mountain of the Lord*

The solution to having no god in Israel, or not acknowledging or trusting the God of Israel, is that the mountain of the Lord's house shall become the highest mountain (Isa. 2:2) so that all can see it and not forget the God of Israel. [See writer's note below.]

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Lord Will Teach His Ways*

God promises his people that all the nations shall stream to God's house and that many peoples shall come and want to go to the house of the Lord (Isa. 2:2-3). The people will no longer forget or not know that there is a God in Israel.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Lord Will Arbitrate for the Orphan and Widow*

To the problems of ignoring the orphan and the widow, to the problems of oppression, and to the problems of idolatry, the solution is that instruction shall go out of Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3). People will be instructed in the law and know what are the

right things to do before God and to one another, especially the weak, the orphan and widows. Even more, God will be the judge and be the arbitrator for many peoples, including the orphan and widows ((Isa. 2:4). And to end the great difficulties caused by the repeated wars, to allow crops to grow and people to enjoy their families, God shall rule and decide the disagreements between the nations (Isa. 2:4). With God judging, there will be peace, and swords will be beat into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and they shall not learn war anymore.

Writer's note: This analysis is a Tracking of the Text. What are our idols? Who do we look to help us in our needs? How do we ignore the orphan and the widow, that is, who are being oppressed and not listened to when they cry out for justice?

There is promise here, and people got to trust the promise made to them by God. People are accounted right with God by their faith in God's promises. But those promises were made to the people back from their exile, back from God's punishment for their oppression and idolatry. The promises in Isaiah 2 were only for the people of Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1). However, their problems were repeated king after king, and returned to again even after the exile. So people under the law, who failed to keep the law, a solution of punishment and a giving of instruction again was not a cure for believing there was no god in Israel.

The Grounding of the Text must come from the Gospel reading, where Jesus' promise is that he will come for all people. His promise is for all who hear him. He will have the new creation where there is no more death, where his love is given to the widow and orphan, where mercy rules instead of law and punishment. He is the one raised on a hill, but a hill that can only be seen by those who actually pass by, and those who passed by Jesus on that hill on a cross mocked him. Jesus by his death

and rising is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4) and gives us his Holy Spirit to replace instruction, for the Spirit will speak to all people of Jesus' way of forgiveness and mercy and love for one another.

When Luther lectured on Isaiah, he used this passage to say that the mountain of the Lord is Jesus' spiritual kingdom; that people will flow to the church because of the church's proclamation of salvation and the benefits of Jesus' forgiveness. People will come and their work will be to hear the Gospel because we constantly fall and so need to hear Jesus' promise of forgiveness again and again. Luther said that the ways of the Lord (Isa. 2:3) are the works of the Lord, and the Lord's works, the works he does in all of us to destroy the works of the devil, sin, death, sadness, fear, trembling, and all evils, then also our daily lapses; and He works the opposite in us: hope, righteousness, patience, joy, peace, etc. (Luther's Works, volume 26, pp. 26-33).