

# LESSONS

## 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: Isaiah 17: 1 – 8

1. The burden against Damascus. “Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap. 2. The cities of Aroer are forsaken; They will be for flocks which lie down, and no one will make them afraid. 3. The fortress also will cease from Ephraim, the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they will be as the glory of the children of Israel,” says the Lord of hosts. 4. “In that day it shall come to pass that the glory of Jacob will wane, and the fatness of his flesh grow lean. 5. It shall be as when the harvester gathers the grain, and reaps the heads with his arm; it shall be as he who gathers heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. 6. Yet gleanings of grapes will be left in it, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives at the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in its most fruitful branches,” says the Lord God of Israel. 7. In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. 8. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands; he will not respect what his fingers have made, nor the wooden images nor the incense altars.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: Luke 14: 25 – 33

25. Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 26. “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it – 29. lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30. saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? 31. Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32. Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson: Apocalypse Explained 585: 2, 3

In respect to man’s self it is to be known that it is nothing but evil and falsity therefrom; the voluntary self [proprium voluntarium] is evil, and the intellectual self therefrom [proprium intellectuale] is falsity. This self man derives mainly from parents, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, in a long series back, so that at length the hereditary, which is his self, is nothing but evil gradually heaped up and condensed. For every man is born into two diabolical loves, the love of self and the love of the world, from which loves all evils and all falsities therefrom pour forth as from their own fountains; and as man is born into these loves he is also born into evils of every kind. Because man, in respect to his self is such, means have been given by the Divine mercy of the Lord, by which man can be withdrawn from his self; these means are given in the

Word; and when man cooperates with these means, that is, when he thinks and speaks, wills and acts, from the Divine Word, he is kept by the Lord in things Divine, and is thus withheld from self; and when this continues there is formed with man by the Lord as it were a new self, both voluntary and intellectual, which is wholly separated from man's self; thus man becomes as it were created anew, and this is what is called his reformation and regeneration by truths from the Word, and by a life according to them.

## S E R M O N

A New Self

A Sermon by  
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In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands. Isaiah 17: 7-8

Introductory Ideas:

Each and every one of us is a unique, individual person. There is absolutely no one like you. This does not necessarily mean you are more valuable than any other person. In the sight of the Lord we are all His children. His love and mercy extends to everyone, the just and the unjust. The Lord's goal for you and everyone is to bring you to heaven.

One of the objectives of life is to discover who we really are. We must look deep down (and sometimes not so deeply) into the inner world of our heart's desires and the thoughts we entertain within our minds. Our biological family history and life experiences come together to form who we are. By means of self examination our "self" or identity may be seen. So consider a familiar question that we've heard before: why are we here?

One answer is we are here to perform heavenly uses in cooperation with the Lord so He may fashion us into angels. And to some extent we are also here to discover who we really are. It may be useful to realize that who we are, our sense of "self" can be imperfect and flawed in so many respects. So, another way to answer the question is to say that we are here so the Lord may create within us a new "self." We must allow the Lord to create within us a new "self" that supplants our old identify. Our "self" is flawed and imperfect because human nature in and of itself is corrupted in so many ways.

A New Name:

In the Word we see examples of the Lord giving people a new identity. Consider from the Heavenly Doctrine the spiritual significance of a "name." By "name" is meant the essential nature or quality of a thing (AC 145, AC 479). As regards people, by "name" is meant a person's character and the quality of the state of his life (AC 1896, AE 200). In

fact, a person's character and the quality of his life is the person. Our character and the kind of life we live are manifestations of our "self." Our "self" is the desires of our heart together with the thoughts of our mind.

Because the human "self" is flawed beyond repair, the Lord has to give us a new name; this new name is a new "self" within us. But let's turn again to the Word. The Lord said to Abram "no longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham" and "as for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name" (Genesis 17: 5, 15). The Lord also said "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it" (Revelation 2:17). The Heavenly Doctrine says that a "new name" means to become a new person created anew or regenerated by the Lord whereby a person takes on a heavenly character (AC 145, AC 2009: 5).

An important choice we must all make is whether or not to allow the Lord to give us a new name which is a new "self." Our new "self" in certain respects is a new identity based upon reception of heavenly qualities from the Lord. Our salvation depends upon our permitting the Lord to reform and regenerate us from human hereditary inclination toward evil. Our salvation depends upon our cooperation with the Lord as He gently rebuilds who we are.

Word of Isaiah the Prophet:

The prophet Isaiah has given us a prescription by which the Lord may reshape our sense of "self" and give us a new identity. Provided that we cooperate with the Lord a new, heavenly identity is possible. But there is something important a person must do on this journey toward a new identity. A man must "look to his Maker" and his "eyes" must have "respect for the Holy One of Israel." These words simply instruct a person where to set his focus. A person must direct his attention to God, the Lord.

In turning to the Lord a person must "not look to the altars" which is "the work of his own hands." A person must forsake and "not respect what his fingers have made." Therefore, a person should direct his attention to God while at the same time shift his focus away from his own "self."

The Lord has revealed the inner secrets of the Word so that darkness and ignorance may be expelled in order for His truths to then shine light on the path to heaven. So we now look deeper into the words of the prophet Isaiah.

In That Day:

We're told that "in that day a man will look to his Maker." Before a person may look to his Maker, he must first address the problem of Damascus. Damascus must "cease from being a city," and then become "a ruinous heap." "Damascus" here symbolizes making

religion to mean nothing more than the accumulation of knowledge (PP 17). In this case faith becomes champion causing a person to boast in self intelligence and disassociate from a life of charity. This kind of mind set and life must be destroyed. A sense of “self” built upon one’s own importance has to be avoided.

Then, “in that day” something wonderful can occur. By “in that day” is meant the Coming of the Lord (Lord 4). It is when “Damascus” is laid aside and put to rest that the Lord may come to a person. It is when self identity built upon one’s own sense of intelligence or importance is cast away, that the Lord may come. Then it is possible that the Lord may supplant a person’s own “self” with a new “self” beautifully shaped in a human form filled with heavenly qualities from the Lord.

Maker and Holy One of Israel:

In that day (when a person allows the Lord to come) a man will look to his Maker. The Word of the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that “the Maker to whom a man shall then look” means the Lord in relation to Divine good (AE 585:7). It is quite remarkable that once we reject our own sense of “self” dominated by the negative, hellish influences of our own invention, that the Lord may come. This shift of focus away from our own “self” and then to the Lord is important so that the Lord may come with His goodness.

A shift of focus away from our own “self” and then to the Lord is important so our “eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel.” Again we turn to the Heavenly Doctrine. A person’s “eyes” symbolizes the understanding of truth (AE 391:23). The “Holy One of Israel” is the Lord Himself in relation to Divine truth (AE 391:23). The Lord is our “Maker” because He alone “leads into the goods of life” (AE 391:23). Our own “self” inclines us toward nothing but evil and disorder. We must allow the Lord to replace this corrupted “self” with a new self. Therefore our “eyes” or understanding must respect and take heed to the Lord teachings. Then we may see our corrupted “self” for what it is and then make it possible for the Lord to lead us to a new sense of “self.”

We must turn our understanding away from our own “self” and then look to the Lord. We must turn to the “Holy One of Israel” because this Holy One is the Lord who teaches the truths of the church (AE 391:23). We must learn truths. We must at the same time shun evils and cast away bad desires from our “self.” Then there may be room for the Lord’s goodness to dwell within us. Evil and its justifying falsity ban together. When they predominate within a person, evil and falsity induce a person to cast away truth. Truth sheds light, identifying for us what good is and what evil is. Evil has aversion for truth because truth teaches what good is and the heavenly life we must live.

But when we turn away from our own “self” which we know is nothing but evil and falsity, then we make room for our “Maker” and the “Holy One of Israel.” We may open ourselves to reception of the Lord’s good (our Maker) and become more willing to allow the Lord (Holy One of Israel) to teach us. Softly and ever so gently the Lord melts the hardness of our own “self.” What was at one point in our life very important no longer

takes precedence. No longer will we be inclined to look to the “altars” and the work of our hands. No longer will we delight in the things that our “fingers have made.”

#### Altars and Work of the Hands:

Again we turn to the Word. By “altars, the work of his hands” mean worship from self-love, from which are evils of life (AE 391:23). Worship is descriptive of our life. Our loves (altars) are the driving forces directing the way we live our life. If unfortunately our loves are not good, then such is the life. As long as we allow the Lord to set the tone and provide the foundation from which we know what is good, then we may turn away from the “altars” of self love, pride, contempt, and other self gratifying attitudes.

Then the things that our “fingers have made” lose their grip upon our interests and may become insignificant. By the things a man’s “fingers have made” to which he must not look mean falsities of doctrine that are from self-intelligence (AE 585: 7). If our loves are good then we don’t need to make our own intelligence so important.

We can enjoy the delights of good loves when our own “self” is cast aside so the Lord can create within us a new self. Then as we look to the Lord to teach and lead us we can tear down the “altars” of self love. We can also tear down the things our “fingers have made” as we rely less upon our own self intelligence.

#### Forsake All:

It is “in that day” when we reject our old “self” that we make room for the Lord to come to us. He is our “Maker” the source of good. He is the “Holy One of Israel” the One who can teach us the way in which we shall live. The Lord, said “whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14: 33).

Surely the Lord does not encourage irresponsibility by suggesting that we forsake and abandon members of our family. On the other hand, we must battle against temptations. We must struggle against our old, corrupted “self.” To “forsake all” signifies that by no means do we conquer temptations and overcome our old “self” from what is our own but from the Lord alone (AC 4599: 5).

We must be willing to deprive ourselves of the old “self” that favors things like self-intelligence, merit, talking credit, or self-importance. These attributes of the old “self” hinder our willingness to receive instruction from the Lord. We must love the Lord and allow Him to create within us a new “self.” It is when we forsake all (our own self love and intelligence) that we may become a disciple who follows the Lord.

#### Concluding Ideas:

Surely our “self” or “own” without the Lord is nothing but evil and destructive in all respects. Therefore this makes it all the more important that we allow the Lord to reform and regenerate us. Our responsibility is to cooperate with the Lord in this wonderful

process, and shun evils so that “in that day [we] will look to [our] Maker, and...not look to the altars, the work of [our] hands.” Meanwhile the Lord creates within us a “new self” as He scatters and dispels unhealthy spiritual states from our souls.

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us what can happen with a person: “he is brought by continual steps out of hell up towards heaven and into heaven; this the Lord does without the man’s knowing it” (AE 1174:2). Therefore, let’s be mindful that as we continue in submission to the Lord, He is miraculously creating a new “self” within us.

When a person “thinks and speaks, wills and acts, from the Divine Word, he is kept by the Lord in things Divine, and is thus withheld from self; and when this continues there is formed with man by the Lord as it were a new self, both voluntary and intellectual, which is wholly separated from man’s self; thus man becomes as it were created anew” (AE 585:3)

*Amen.*