



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# Isaiah's Intercessory Prayer for the Nation of Israel (63:7-64:12)

- In this section, Isaiah moves from *exhorting* and *teaching* the nation of Israel, to *praying* for them.
- And what a prayer it is!
- There are a number of great intercessory prayers recorded in Scripture:
  - Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Gen 18:16-33)
  - Moses' intercession for Israel after the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32:31-32)
  - The great prayers of Ezra and Daniel (Ezra 10; Daniel 9)
  - Our LORD's high-priestly prayer in which he interceded for us all (John 17)
- Isaiah's prayer in Isaiah 63:7-64:12 is not as well known, but it has the same stamp of greatness.

# Isaiah's Intercessory Prayer for the Nation of Israel (63:7-64:12)

- This prayer can be divided into *six* sections:
  - The LORD's Past Gracious Acts Towards Israel (63:7–9)
  - Israel's Rebellion in the Face of Grace (63:10-14)
  - Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)
  - An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)
  - A Confession of Sin (64:5b–7)
  - The Entreaty of the Helpless (64:8–12)

# The LORD's Past Gracious Acts Towards Israel (63:7-9)

*63:7 I will tell of the faithful acts of the LORD, of the LORD's praiseworthy deeds. I will tell about all the LORD did for us, the many good things he did for the family of Israel, because of his compassion and great faithfulness. <sup>8</sup> He said, "Certainly they will be my people, children who are not disloyal." He became their deliverer. <sup>9</sup> Through all that they suffered, he suffered too. The [angel] sent from his very presence delivered them. In his love and mercy he [redeemed] them; he lifted them up and carried them throughout ancient times.*

# The LORD's Past Gracious Acts Towards Israel (63:7-9)

- In 63:7-9 Isaiah ***begins*** his prayer by rehearsing the gracious acts the LORD has done for Israel in the past.
- He focuses ***primarily*** here on the elements of God's character that were revealed in the ***Exodus*** events.
- His “***compassion***” and “***great faithfulness***” (63:7) were revealed, as were his “***love and mercy***” (63:9).
- He is One who does “***good things***” (63:7) in saving and redeeming (63:9) his people.
- But the Exodus events ***also*** reveal the ***rebellious character*** of God's people.
- After ***all*** that God had done for them, the Israelites still turned ***against*** him.

# Israel's Rebellion in the Face of Grace (63:10-14)

*63:10 But they rebelled and [grieved] his Holy Spirit, so he turned into an enemy and fought against them. 11 His people remembered the ancient times. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea, along with the shepherd of his flock? Where is the one who placed his Holy Spirit among them, 12 the one who made his majestic power available to Moses, who divided the water before them, gaining for himself a lasting reputation, 13 who led them through the deep water? Like a horse running through the wilderness they did not stumble. 14 As an animal that goes down into a valley to graze, so the Spirit of the LORD granted them rest. In this way you guided your people, gaining for yourself an honored reputation.*

# Israel's Rebellion in the Face of Grace (63:10-14)

- Notice Isaiah does not describe their rebellion in *legal* or *political* terms.
- That is, he does not say that they *broke* their *covenant* or they *disobeyed* their *King*.
- Instead he says, they “*grieved [God's] Holy Spirit*” (63:10).
- That is the language of *personal relationship*, for the “*Holy Spirit*” is God's personal presence among his people.
- He goes on to say that the “*Spirit of the LORD*” gave “*rest*” to the people (63:14).
- Clearly the “*Spirit*” here is a way of speaking about God's personal involvement with his people.
- This idea is *reinforced* when it talks about how the LORD “*lifted them up and carried them*” (Isaiah 63:9).

# Israel's Rebellion in the Face of Grace (63:10-14)

- All this makes their *rebellion* against God all the more *unthinkable*.
- It's not just a *king* or a *judge* who has been disobeyed.
- Rather, it is a *Father's* love, care, and concern that has been treated as worthless.
- As a result their Lover became their "*enemy*" (63:10).
- Love and personal relationship do not invalidate the law of cause and effect.

# Israel's Rebellion in the Face of Grace (63:10-14)

- But if the Exodus events illustrate both the undeserved grace of God and the shocking rebellion of the people, they also illustrate the *longsuffering* nature of God towards his people.
- For in spite of the rebellion of the first generation in the desert, God did not abandon his people.
- Although he would have been justified in wiping them off the face of the earth in response to their repeated breaking of the covenant, he did not do so.

# Israel's Rebellion in the Face of Grace (63:10-14)

- Given God's initial grace and his continuing patience, what will happen in the future?
- Can God provide a new Moses who will be make the LORD's "*majestic power available*" (63:12) for a fallen people?
- Will the LORD deliver them from their persistent rebellion and grieving of the "*Holy Spirit*"?

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

63:15 *Look down from heaven and take notice, from your holy, majestic palace! Where are your zeal and power? Do not hold back your tender compassion!*<sup>16</sup> *For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, LORD, are our father; you have been called our [Redeemer] from ancient times.*<sup>17</sup> *Why, LORD, do you make us stray from your ways and make our minds stubborn so that we do not obey you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance!*<sup>18</sup> *For a short time your special nation possessed a land, but then our adversaries knocked down your holy sanctuary.*<sup>19</sup> *We existed from ancient times, but you did not rule over them; they were not your subjects.*

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

- The author has just recounted the glorious deeds of the *past* and now requests similar acts from God in the *present*.
- He entreats the LORD to look down from heaven and see the plight of his children.
- He asks: “*Where are your zeal and power? Do not hold back your tender compassion!*”
- The LORD’s *lack of action* in the present causes Isaiah to ask if, perhaps, the LORD has become *indifferent* to the plight of his people!

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

- Isaiah twice references an intimate father-son relationship between God and his “*servants*” among the people of Israel.
- He says this, even though their forefathers, “*Abraham*” and “*Israel*” (Jacob), would not have recognized them because of their disobedience: “*though Abraham does not know us and Israel [Jacob] does not recognize us*”
- He goes on to claim the same promises that were given to the patriarchs: “*you have been called our [Redeemer] from ancient times*”. (cf. Gen 48:16)

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

- Both of the questions asked in 63:17 imply that God has **hardened** their hearts and **caused** them to disobey him: “*Why, LORD, do you make us stray from your ways and make our minds stubborn so that we do not obey you?*”
- Isaiah believes so strongly in **divine sovereignty** that he sees every action as being under God’s sovereign control.
- God can indeed harden hearts, as noted in 6:9–11, but he does so only for the greater purpose of bringing glory to himself

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

- For example, Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring greater glory to God when he delivered his people from Egypt.
- God's ways are high above our ways (55:9), but they are always right and for the ultimate benefit of his people.
- Thus, the author appeals to God to once again come to their aid, for they are his *“servants”* and *“the tribes of [his] inheritance”*.

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

- Isaiah continues his appeal based upon the LORD's love for his "*holy sanctuary*", which Israel possessed for only a little while before it was destroyed by their enemies in 586 BC.
- Isaiah then makes an appeal based on the LORD's love for his *people*, whose special relationship with the LORD has been from "*from ancient times*"

# Israel's Present Distress (63:15-19)

- Israel's enemies have *never* had the special relationship with the LORD that Israel had ("*you did not rule over them; they were not your subjects*").
- One would have expected God to react in fury when his holy temple was trampled, yet Isaiah sees no evidence of the LORD stepping in to correct the problem.
- According to this final lament, the LORD *appears* to be *abandoning* his people.

# An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)

64:1 *If only you would tear apart the [heavens] and come down! The mountains would tremble before you!* <sup>2</sup> *As when fire ignites dry wood or fire makes water boil, let your adversaries know who you are, and may the nations shake at your presence!* <sup>3</sup> *When you performed awesome deeds that took us by surprise, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.* <sup>4</sup> *Since ancient times no one has heard or perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who intervenes for those who wait for him.* <sup>5a</sup> *You assist those who delight in doing what is right, who observe your commandments.*

# An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)

- This section begins with a cry for direct divine intervention.
- Will the LORD not once again make an appearance as he did on Mt. Sinai, for the purpose of blessing his chosen people and destroying their enemies?
- Will there not again be a sudden, powerful revelation of God's power, which now seems to be concealed in heaven?
- In 63:15 God was commanded to "*look down from heaven*".
- Here the heavens are viewed as an ***obstacle*** to the LORD's return, and so Isaiah expresses a passionate desire that the LORD would "*tear apart the heavens and come down*" to intervene in the affairs of His people.
- Were God to come down, the mountains would, no doubt, "*tremble before [him]*" as Mt. Sinai did at time of the Exodus. (Ex. 19:18)

# An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)

- “*As when fire ignites dry wood or fire makes water boil*” – In mentioning “*fire*” in connection with the judgment of God, Isaiah uses a common figure. <sup>1</sup>
- “*fire*” is often associated with the presence of God as a symbol of his holiness (Deut 4:24; Num 11:1; 16:35; Lev 9:23-24; 10:2). <sup>2</sup>
- Whenever the LORD is present as fire, he *purifies* by *consuming* all that pollutes. <sup>2</sup>
- The Holy One of Israel, will bring *salvation* to His people but *judgment* to His enemies.
- As mountains had trembled at His presence at Sinai, so idolatrous “*nations*” who have refused to know Him will “*shake at [his] presence*”. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Young, Edward – *The Book of Isaiah Volume 3: Chapters 40–66* (pp. 492–493)

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, John L. – *A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66* – p. 569.

# An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)

- When the LORD had manifested himself in the past, his acts had been of such a distinctive nature and timing as to be *unexpected* (they “*took us by surprise*”).
- If deliverance had in the *past* come in such an unforeseen fashion, then it was not unrealistic to hope that a similar intervention might occur *again*.
- Isaiah states that at no point in history has anyone seen the kind of stunning deliverance that the LORD has repeatedly manifested in delivering those who “*wait*” on him.

# An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)

- What does it mean to “*wait*” on the LORD?.
- Isaiah tells us that those who “*wait*” on the LORD “*delight in doing what is right*” and “*observe [God's] commandments*”.
- Thus to “*wait*” on the Lord is to commit the future into God’s hands by means of living a daily life that shows that we know his ways of integrity, honesty, faithfulness, mercy, generosity, and self-denial.
- The person who does ***not*** do these things may be ***waiting*** for something, but he is not waiting for the Lord.
- What may the person who lives his or her life in this way expect? Isaiah tells us that God will “*assist*” them.

# An Appeal for the LORD's Help (64:1-5a)

- Let a person begin to live according to God's ways, joyfully "*doing what is right*", expectantly waiting for him, and sooner than we might think, he will "*assist*" us.
- If we wonder where God is in our lives, the key is to begin doing what we ***know*** to do, allowing him to manifest himself when and where he chooses.
- According to Isaiah, the lesson of sacred history is that he will "*assist*" those who wait for him in this way.

The Apostle Paul's  
Citation of  
Isaiah 64:4  
in 1 Cor 2:9

Isaiah 64:4 *For since the world began, no ear has heard, and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him! (NLT)*

1 Cor 2:1 *When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan...<sup>4</sup> my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.<sup>6</sup> Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten.<sup>7</sup> No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God-- his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.<sup>8</sup> But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord.<sup>9</sup> *That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."*<sup>10</sup> But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit...<sup>12</sup> And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. (NLT).*

# Paul's Citation of Isaiah 64:4 in 1 Cor 2:9

- At the time that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians, they had developed an unwarranted infatuation with worldly wisdom and those who espouse it.
- And in turning *to* this worldly wisdom they were in danger of turning *away from* the Gospel message that he and his fellow apostles had proclaimed to them.
- In an effort to call them *back* to the Gospel, Paul cites Isaiah 64:4 to remind them that the “eyes” and “ears” of the people of this world have not “seen” or “heard” of the message he has preached to them concerning Christ and the New Covenant – a message which was revealed to him as an Apostle by the Holy Spirit.

# Next Time

- I plan to cover *The LORD Rejects the Apostate Israelites (65:1-7)*

# Class Discussion Time

- Are there things that Isaiah does in *his* prayer that might serve as a model for *our* intercessory prayers? If so what are they?
- He prays on behalf of, even asking forgiveness for, a sinful nation that he lives in – even though he himself is not guilty of many of the things that people around him were doing.
- Isaiah openly voices the doubts and questions that God's seeming lack of action has raised in his mind: “*Where are your zeal and power?*” “*Why, LORD, do you make us stray?*” (63:15,17)
- He asks for a miraculous intervention, knowing that God is capable of making such an intervention should he choose to do so.

# Class Discussion Time

- Paul cites Isaiah 64:4 to the Corinthians as a warning for them not to be drawn away from the message of scripture by worldly philosophy and wisdom.
- What are some areas of worldly wisdom that professing Christians today are overly infatuated with causing them to turn away from scriptural teaching?