

Isaiah – Chapter 64

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Theme: Captive Israel reminded God of His might, goodness, mercy, relationship, worship to save them.

Outline:

- 1-3 Petition for God to Powerfully Rescue Israel
- 4-5 Reminder to God of Covenant Commitments
- 6-7 Confession to God of the Nation's Sinfulness
- 8-9 Appeal to God Based on Their Relationship
- 10-12 Appeal to God Based on Disrupted Worship

Preparatory Reading: Isaiah chapters 57, 58, 59; Daniel 9.

Related Links:

- 1. [Exposition of Isaiah 57 \(Great Mercy\)](#).
- 2. [Exposition of Isaiah 58 \(Ritual Religion\)](#).
- 3. [Exposition of Isaiah 59 \(Mighty Savior\)](#).
- 4. [Daniel 9 \(Confess\)](#).
- 5. [Five Phases of Salvation \(Divide\)](#).
- 6. [God's Distinguishing Love](#).
- 7. [Author of Confusion \(Bible\)](#).

Introduction:

- A. This chapter and 63 are strongly connected to each other but separate from those before and after.
 - 1. The earlier chapter 62 is last of a three-chapter list of great gospel blessings on the Jewish church.
 - 2. The following chapters, 65-66, are God's indictment of the wicked and His promises for the elect.
 - 3. This new section has different content, style, question-answer, and previous section ended neatly.
 - 4. After seeing God as their deliverer, the two chapters before you are reflection and prayer for mercy.
 - 5. Chapter 64 is nothing more than a continuation of the prayer and complaint that began back in 63.
- B. The setting and timing of this chapter is after the ruin of Jerusalem and during the captivity in Babylon.
 - 1. The temple was burned, trodden down, and Jerusalem was a desolation (Isaiah 63:18; 64:10-11).
 - 2. Edom as a profane enemy deserving vengeance fits, for wicked cruelty at that event (Ps 137:7-9).
 - 3. God saw it as fratricide – murder of an innocent brother and theft of his possessions in the time of his chastening calamity (Am 1:11-12; Ob 1:10-14; Lam 4:21-22; Ezek 25:12-14; 35:5-6; 36:1-7).
 - 4. God cursed them to utter destruction, which began with Nebuchadnezzar (Isaiah 34:5-17; Jer 27:1-11; 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11-12; Obadiah 1:1-21; Mal 1:1-5).

5. Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled the first stage, but it was a process, like Babylon (Jer 25:8-10,21,29-31).
 6. Judas Maccabees beat them, and so did John Hyrcanus, and Trajan eliminated them in 105 A.D.
 7. Knowing the setting and timing helps appreciate their review of past mercies and plaintive praying.
 8. Their desperate condition in Babylon and great need for God to favor them again is quite poignant.
- C. Reviewing, confessing, complaining, and begging praying of these two chapters have good lessons.
1. Knowing the setting and timing helps appreciate their review of past mercies and plaintive praying.
 2. Their desperate condition in Babylon and great need for God to favor them again is quite poignant.
 3. May each reader reach beyond grasping the bare history to embrace and practice godly repentance.
- D. Isaiah's intercessory prayer for Israel in this chapter sheds light on praying – appealing to four things.
1. First, they appealed to the historical event of God's power for His own name at Sinai (Is 64:1-3).
 2. Second, they appealed to the continuing covenant commitment God had for them (Isaiah 64:4-7).
 3. Third, they appealed to the relationship they had with God as their Father and Potter (Is 64:8-9).
 4. Fourth, they appealed to a lack of worship due to a burned temple and desolate city (Is 64:10-12).

SUGGESTION

This chapter is the second of two chapters with one theme.

You should thoroughly read the extensive notes for Isaiah 63.

Petition for God to Powerfully Rescue Israel – Verses 1-3

1 Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence,

- A. Here is the first appeal to God in Israel's prayer – by experience of His glorious power.
- B. Recall the final appeal of Isaiah 63; we are thine; reprobates have destroyed thy temple.
- C. The captive church in Babylon, by Isaiah in prophecy, begged for God to show Himself.
- D. When you know the God of Psalm 18 and Isaiah 63:1-6, you are able to pray like this.
- E. Mountains are the most stable thing you know, but God can melt them like at Mt. Sinai.

2 As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!

- A. Recall the final appeal of Isaiah 63; we are thine; reprobates have destroyed thy temple.
- B. Part of that final appeal was what God had done to get Himself a name (Is 63:14,16,19).
 1. The Babylonians, who had destroyed the temple and slaughtered Jews, were not His.
 2. Israel wanted Babylon to get acquainted with GOD Jehovah and His glorious name.
 3. Since Babylon had burned God's temple down, it was time to burn Babylon down.
- C. Having reviewed God's works in Egypt (Is 63:11-14), they wanted Babylon to know.

1. Note the exclamation point ending the two-verse sentence. Can you shout praise?
 2. The Babylonians had mocked Israel and their religion (Psalm 137:1-9; Dan 3:1-30).
 3. Now it was time for some comeuppance. Israel wanted the evil Chaldeans terrified.
- D. The simile here, the similitude, is a very hot fire that can melt metal or boil the water.
1. The hardest things we know are metals, but sufficient heat can cause them to melt.
 2. The effect of heat on water is profound in that the perfectly still liquid turns to steam.
 3. If you are not familiar with such terms for our God, read elsewhere (Nahum 1:2-6).

3 When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.

- A. Recall the final appeal of Isaiah 63; we are thine; reprobates have destroyed thy temple.
- B. What Israel asked God for, to terrify their haughty captors, He had done to Israel before.
1. They could not believe what happened at Sinai, like a blast furnace (Exodus 19:18).
 2. The Bible says even Moses, who had seen some things, was terrified (Heb 12:21).
 3. It was a terrifying memorial for them to not forget His fire (Deut 4:9-12,24,32-36).
 4. God had surprised Israel with the display at Sinai – they did not ask for such a thing.
 5. In fact, they begged Moses for God to end the show and talk to him on the mount.
- C. But good came out of Sinai – a covenant of law with unprecedented promises of favor.

Reminder to God of Covenant Commitments – Verses 4-5

4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.

- A. Here is the second appeal to God in Israel's prayer – by constant covenant commitment.
- B. Very different from their request for jealous fury, Israel reminded God of His goodness.
1. But the historical event is still the exodus out of Egypt and all God had done there.
 2. The language is too similar to both Moses and Isaiah (Deut 4:32-36; Is 63:11-14).
 3. How can such terrible events be good for Israel? For it obtained freedom from Egypt.
 4. Furthermore, the voice from the mountain included the most wonderful law ever.
 5. In context with this very event, Israel become a wonder of the world (Deut 4:6-8).
 6. There is a transition here from the terrifying to the beneficial based on the next verse.
 7. The law of Moses, apart from not justifying men, was incredible by every measure.
 8. Think about the feast days with 10% of income, a year of release, a jubilee, etc., etc.
 9. No national situation ever existed with such promises (Lev 26:1-13; Deut 28:1-14).
- C. Paul used this verse in a positive way for the future blessings of salvation (I Cor 2:9).

5 Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.

- A. This verse must be related to the introduction of Moses' law in the previous two verses.
 - 1. See three parts here – reward for righteousness; anger for sin; mercy for salvation.
 - 2. These are the terms of Moses' covenant and law with the children of Israel at Sinai.
 - 3. Commentators think this verse nonsensical and impossible to interpret. See below.
- B. If you want to understand these section, beginning here, you will read Daniel 9 well.
 - 1. You must understand the law of Moses and its promise of national ruin for iniquity.
 - 2. You must understand how Daniel confessed the terrible sins of many generations.
 - 3. He included himself in the confession, for it was a matter of their national history.
 - 4. Even though he was not guilty of the sins, he prayed as an intercessor for the nation.
 - 5. Isaiah here did the same thing, though by prophecy for what Daniel did at the time.
 - 6. They raised no righteousness at all, for they were confessing the nation's great sins.
 - 7. They raised no repentance at all (yet), for they were confessing for the unrepentant.
- C. Very different from the request for jealous fury (Is 64:1-3), Israel knew God's goodness.
 - 1. Consider how the law of Moses promised incredible blessings for the Israelites only.
 - 2. What were the conditions? That they obey and serve Him with gladness of heart.
 - 3. For those Israelites that remembered God and followed His ways, there was glory.
 - 4. Blessings promised to Israel for obedience were fabulous (Le 26:1-13; De 28:1-14).
- D. But! Behold! God was wroth with Israel, for they had sinned over many generations.
 - 1. The opposite part of Moses' law had cursed them out of their land and into Babylon.
 - 2. The nation had sinned over many generations accumulating enough for destruction.
 - 3. Ten tribes were scattered all over the place; a small remnant of two were in Babylon.
 - 4. Daniel prayed an expanded version of these verses about the dire national situation.
 - 5. The covenant at Sinai was not judgment out of the land for one generation's sins.
 - 6. The issue that had come to destroy Israel was many abominable sins of many years.
- E. In what is continuance? There are several options, but one fits the context and prayer.
 - 1. If they continued in sin, then they would not be delivered, but Isaiah sees salvation.
 - 2. If they continued in righteousness, they would be saved, but they were not righteous.
 - 3. Then what is left – God's fair system of Moses' law – all covenant rules still applied.
 - 4. They would be saved by God's covenant mercy that He could never fully abrogate.
 - 5. The generation in Babylon, including Daniel, had repented as God promised to work.
 - 6. What is *those* in continuance? The demonstrative pronoun is for the law (Is 63:4-5).
 - 7. The rules and terms of God's covenant with Israel had not failed and would save.
- F. The next verse, one of great repudiation and repentance, begins with a contrasting

Confession to God of the Nation's Sinfulness – Verses 6-7

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

- A. If you want to understand these four verses, beginning here, you will read Daniel 9 well.
 - 1. You must understand the law of Moses and its promise of national ruin for iniquity.
 - 2. You must understand how Daniel confessed the terrible sins of many generations.
 - 3. He included himself in the confession, for it was a matter of their national history.
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 - 5. Isaiah here did the same thing, though by prophecy for what Daniel did at the time.
 - 6. They raised no righteousness at all, for they were confessing the nation's great sins.
 - 7. They raised no repentance at all (yet), for they were confessing for the unrepentant.
- B. Who and what was Isaiah describing? He was declaring Israel's generational iniquities.
 - 1. These words cannot apply literally to Isaiah. He was not at all sinful as here stated.
 - 2. These words cannot apply literally to Israel; the generation in Babylon were better.
 - 3. These words cannot apply to those calling on His name, for they said they were not!
 - 4. Like Daniel in his intercessory prayer, they confessed the abominations of the nation.
 - 5. The nation was captive in Babylon, and God had obviously hid His face from them.
 - 6. The nation had such an iniquitous character that God had consumed them in wrath.
 - 7. Captivity in a foreign land was not by Daniel's generation, but many generations.
 - 8. Daniel included the plural kings and princes, for he prayed for previous generations.
- C. The small remnant of the nation was not in Babylon due to their sins or that generation.
 - 1. God did not wake up one day in a bad mood and decide to send Judah into captivity.
 - 2. He had warned by His prophets over and over, and Israel had long continued to rebel.
 - 3. Thus, once the sin is understood – many generations – then the pray can be grasped.
 - 4. To completely understand this verse, see the notes for verses above (Isaiah 64:4-6).
 - 5. The remnant in Babylon was holy e.g. Daniel, Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc.
- D. This verse should not be used to pretend you are humble by mocking any righteous acts.
 - 1. Children are taught this verse at early ages, but they nor their parents understand it.
 - 2. There is a legal sense in which our righteousness is not good enough, but not here.
 - 3. The sense of this passage is the abominable wickedness of Israel over generations.
 - 4. The righteousnesses of the nation – their ceremonial rituals – were menstrual rags.
 - 5. Such righteousness had been and will be condemned by Jehovah (Is 58:1-7; 66:1-4).
 - 6. But the good deeds He works in us are His good pleasures (Phil 2:12-13; Eph 2:10).
 - 7. God's children can be righteous, do righteousness, and should do so (Psalm 15:1-5).
- E. David and Paul gloried in righteousnesses before God, and they were best of the best.

1. David knew God favored and blessed him due to his righteousness (Ps 18:20-24).
 2. What will you do with his testimony? Deny it? Pretend it does not exist? Pervert it?
 3. David taught God rewarded righteousness; he said so over and over (Ps 112:1-10).
 4. Paul said he was an apostle for faithfulness and did it best (I Tim 1:12; I Cor 15:10).
 5. Paul knew heaven was sure and taught it for others (II Tim 4:7-8; I Tim 6:17-19).
 6. The evidence of eternal life is our righteousnesses (Matt 25:31-46; II Peter 1:5-11).
- F. Stop telling us about the legal righteousness of Christ that you must have for approval.
1. You confuse apples with oranges for a bad motive – pride in humility (Col 2:20-23).
 2. The legal righteousness of Christ is glorious, but find it in Isaiah 53, not Isaiah 64.
 3. You are a Bible-denier, every time you pretend to be humble but show your pride.
 4. Your denial of any righteousness is part of your self-righteousness that God hates.
 5. Pride and self-righteousness in false humility are worse than declaring obedience.
 6. Should we rip Nehemiah out of the Bible for asking God to remember his goodness?
 7. Should we rip Hezekiah any way we can for asking God to save him for goodness?

7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

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1. You must understand the law of Moses and its promise of national ruin for iniquity.
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2. He had warned by His prophets over and over, and Israel had long continued to rebel.
 3. Thus, once the sin is understood – many generations – then the pray can be grasped.
 4. To completely understand this verse, see the notes for verses above (Isaiah 64:4-6).
 5. The remnant in Babylon was holy e.g. Daniel, Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc.
- D. The next verse, a verse of contrition and begging appeal, begins with a contrasting
- E. The next verse, a verse of contrition and begging appeal, also begins with a timing

Appeal to God Based on Their Relationship – Verses 8-9

8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

- A. Here is the third appeal to God in Israel's prayer – based on their relationship to Him.
- B. If you want to understand these four verses, beginning here, you will read Daniel 9.
- C. Note the disjunctive *but*. What is it doing here? There is a clear contrast with verse 7.
1. Not only is there a disjunctive *but*, there is a timing *now*, dividing past and present.
 2. They are calling upon His name ... O LORD ... even after saying none ever did so.
 3. This is just one more proof that the previous is intercessory prayer for the nation.
 4. If you read Isaiah 64:5-7 literally without any context, Israel was doomed forever.
- D. They appealed to God for their relationship to Him and His covenant to them forever.
- E. In the next verse they will ask for Him to lessen His wrath and not remember sin forever.

9 Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.

- A. Wroth = as in verse 5 above = deep anger or resentment; wrath, rage, or fury; ire.
1. God hates all sinners in anger (Psalm 5:4-6; 7:11; 11:4-6; 139:21-22; Matt 7:21-23).
 2. God also gets angry or wroth at His children when they sin (Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21).
 3. However, they are very different – one brings condemnation, the other chastening.
- B. The appeal is very clear to forgive and forget past national sins and to see repentance.
1. They wanted God to look, to behold them, to see them with a new penitent spirit.
 2. They begged God. Say the words slowly and emotionally. Grasp the contrite prayer.
- C. This appeal was primarily based on their relationship God, the next is for His worship.

Appeal to God Based on Disrupted Worship – Verses 10-12

10 Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.

- A. Here is the fourth appeal to God in Israel's prayer – based on the desire to worship Him.
1. Chapter 64 here ends just as chapter 63 ended, an appeal is made to worship of God.
 2. David and Hezekiah knew to appeal to worship for life (Ps 6:5; 30:9; Is 38:18-19).

3. God created all things for His pleasure and praise, so appeal to it for your situation.
- B. God our Father, the holy land and cities that you gave us, are all lying waste by war.
 1. Remember the great victories you gave us over the Canaanites to give us their cities.
 2. Instead of all the pagan abominations in those cities, we replaced them with holiness.
 3. Jerusalem, your city, the place of your worship on earth, is desolate by destruction.
- C. As you should often remember for this time of Israel, Jerusalem was a pile of rubble.

11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

- A. Just as chapter 63 ended, so does chapter 64. An appeal is made to the worship of God.
- B. God our Father, the holy, beautiful temple we built you, where Solomon prayed, is gone.
- C. All of our own houses, buildings, farms, and lands are also laid waste along with thine.
- D. This plaintive, poignant prayer should move your heart, and it did move God's heart.

12 Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?

- A. Just as chapter 63 ended, so does chapter 64. An appeal is made to the worship of God.
- B. Will this lack of worship, which we would love to give, get your attention to save us?
- C. Remember Hezekiah's appeal for more life – to worship and teach truth (Is 38:18-19).
- D. Effectual praying is raising those matters or arguments that will move God to intervene.

Impossibility of Interpreting Isaiah 64:5

Albert Barnes (1798-1870; Presbyterian)

His Opening Paragraph for 64:5

Thou meetest him. Perhaps there are few verses in the Bible that have given more perplexity to interpreters than this; and after all that has been done, the general impression seems to be, that it is wholly inexplicable, or without meaning — as it certainly is in our translation. Noyes says of his own translation of the last member of the verse, 'I am not satisfied with this or any other translation of the line which I have seen.' Lowth says, 'I am fully persuaded that these words as they stand at present in the Hebrew text are utterly unintelligible. There is no doubt of the meaning of each word separately, but put together they make no sense at all. I conclude, therefore, that the copy has suffered by transcribers in this place.' And after proposing an important change in the text, without any authority, he says, 'perhaps these may not be the very words of the prophet, but, however, it is better than to impose upon him what makes no sense at all, as they generally do who pretend to render such corrupted passages.'