

ISAIAH — LESSON TWENTY FOUR

ISAIAH 63 - 64:7

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

Vengeance, Mercy, and a Prayer

In their day, Israel and Edom stood for opposite positions religiously. Israel was the symbol of Jehovah worship, representing the one true God. Edom, its brother nation, stood as a symbol of opposition to Jehovah and the true religion. Because it opposed and hated Israel, it also opposed and hated Israel's God. Because of this hatred for Israel and its God, Edom must be judged and brought to an end (see ch. 34; Obad.; Mal. 1:2-5). No specific time is given for this judgment; the vision simply reveals what Jehovah will ultimately do to the nation.

Vv. 1-6 – Jehovah's Vengeance on His Enemies

Isaiah begins by asking who it is that comes from Edom wearing **dyed (red) garments from Bozrah**.¹ He is a dignified person, **glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength**. The answer comes: **I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save**. It is Jehovah. He speaks in righteousness; in the zeal of his holiness threatening judgment to the oppressors, and promising salvation to the oppressed; and what he threatens and promises, he carries out with mighty power. It is God from whose mouth of righteousness (Isa. 45:23) the consolation of redemption proceeds,

1. Bozrah is considered by some to have been Edom's capital, at least at some point in time. Others are not so certain.

and whose holy omnipotent arm (Isa. 52:10; 59:16) carries out the act of redemption (1).

Jehovah's answer produces another question: **Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winevat** (2)?

The second question leads to a second answer: **³I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with me: yea, I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in my wrath; and their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment. ⁴For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. ⁵And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my wrath, it upheld me. ⁶And I trod down the peoples in mine anger, and made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.** His garments are red because he had in fact trod the winepress. He trod it alone because there was no man to help. He trod them in anger and wrath and their blood stained his garments. The day of vengeance was in his heart and the year of his redeemed had come.² He has cut down Edom and other nations as well as one cuts grapes from the vine and tossed them into the winepress where judgment was administered. No one helped; no help was needed. He used his own strong arm to pour out their lifeblood upon the earth (3-6).

Vv. 7-9 – Jehovah's Enduring Love for His People

Jehovah has assured the people of salvation through the Servant (52:13-53:12; he has urged Zion to prepare for a great influx of new citizens (54:1-3); the glory of Zion has been foretold (chs. 60-62); and the judgment of the heathen has been guaranteed (63:1-6). It is now time to count blessings and offer praise to Jehovah (vv. 7-9), to remember Jehovah's mercies of old (vv. 10-14) and to pray (63:15-64:12).

2. Some take "day" and "year" to signify the length (figurative or literal) of the periods of vengeance and redemption; however, that is most likely reading too much into that which is no more than using two different words for sake of variety.

While Isaiah uses the personal pronoun “I,” he is probably acting as spokesperson for the faithful remnant of his day. He begins by “mentioning” or “recounting”³ Jehovah’s loving-kindness. Given the definition of the Hebrew word translated “mention” in the ASV, it is likely that Isaiah was doing more than just reciting history. He is “causing to remember” Jehovah’s acts of tenderness that emanated from his everlasting love in order to set the stage for calling upon his hearers to praise Jehovah according to all the many good things he has done for the house of Israel (7).

Given the foundation that Isaiah has laid in v. 7, *i.e.*, a heavily repetitive assertion of the goodness of God, what follows is not to be read as a memory of Israel’s rebellion, or of God’s punishment, but of the way God has demonstrated the fundamental beneficence of his character in all his treatment of Israel. In many ways this is the dominant feature of the entire Old Testament. When Gentile writers (from Marcion⁴ onward) look at the Old Testament and see a god of wrath, the Old Testament writers say to us

3. Hiph. 1. cause to remember, remind, c. acc. pers. 2. cause to be remembered, keep in remembrance, c. acc. rei, a person’s name; of’y, causing his name to be remembered, by some token. 3. mention, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.

4. Marcion was a prominent heretic of the second century. His birth date is unknown. He died around 160 AD. He was a native of Sinope in Pontus, where his father was said to have been bishop and to have excommunicated his son from the church for immorality. In subsequent years he was reportedly a wealthy shipowner. Around 140 he arrived in Rome, where he became a disciple of the heretic Cerdo. In the next few years he worked out a theological system of his own and soon outshone his teacher. From Rome he organized the propagation of his views. He was successful in gaining a large following throughout the empire. This group became a major threat to the Christian faith and provoked a wide response among Christian scholars who refuted the wrong notions of Marcionism. At the heart of Marcion’s theology is a dualistic notion of God. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New are not the same. The God of the Old Testament is the cause of the world and of evil. He is legal-minded, violent, vindictive. The religion of this God is oriented around laws and demands. The God of Jesus Christ, however, is the opposite. He is the forgiving and saving God. He is “unknown” except that he is revealed in Jesus. And in Jesus he is revealed as pure love and mercy. The religion of this God is oriented around love. It is the purpose of Jesus and his love to overthrow the God of the Old Testament and the religion of law.

in astonishment, “Oh no, it’s not surprising that God would have gotten angry with us. What is surprising is that he ever cared about us at all, and that he then continued to love us and care for us when we senselessly rejected him. What has the Hebrew experience taught them about God, first and last? He is a God of unfailing kindness, grace, mercy, and love. Circumstances may change, our rebellions may even make him our enemy. But the kindness of God never changes; and when we recount all that God has done in our experience, it will end up in praise for who he is (see Rom. 5:8).

Those great deeds were highlighted by the deliverance from Egypt when he claimed them as his people and walked among them as their God (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:13). Given his loving-kindness, great goodness, and abundant mercies shown to his people, he said, **Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me.** God’s action followed: **And so he became their Savior** (8).

As their Savior, **in all their affliction he was afflicted.** “And his [Jehovah’s] soul was grieved for the misery of Israel” (Judges 10:16). Throughout Israel’s history the Lord was concerned with and shared the people’s suffering, just as the Savior is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). **And the angel of his presence⁵ saved them.** The word translated “angel” may also be rendered “messenger” or “representative”; the word translated “presence” literally means “face.” Jehovah promises Moses, “My presence [face] shall go with thee” (Exod. 33:14). Thus, the “angel” is the representative of Jehovah’s face or presence that went with Israel. Inasmuch Christ accompanied Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:4), and is “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4, 6; Col. 1:15) and “the effulgence⁶ of his glory” (Heb. 1:3), this

5. “The angel of his presence” is a phrase that occurs only here in scripture.

6. **ἀπαύγασμα, τος** *n*: shining, either in the sense of radiance from a source or the reflection of a source of light — ‘radiance, reflection.’ ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης ‘who is the reflection of (God’s) glory’ or ‘who is the radiance of (God’s) glory’ He 1:3.

It is impossible to determine whether ἀπαύγασμα should be interpreted in an active sense and therefore ‘radiance,’ or in a passive sense and therefore as ‘reflection.’ If the meaning is ‘radiance,’ then one may translate this phrase in He 1:3 as ‘he shines with God’s glory’ or even ‘God’s glory shines through him.’ If one understands the meaning of ἀπαύγασμα as being ‘reflection,’ then one

representative of Jehovah's presence probably is the Word of God that became flesh (John 1:14), the preincarnate Messiah. Moved by love and pity, Jehovah redeemed them and bore them and carried them all the days of old. Isaiah and the remnant praise Jehovah and give him glory for Israel's redemption and providential care through history (v. 9).

Vv. 10-14 – The People's Response: Rebellion

Jehovah had been gracious to Israel and had urged them to hear the voice of the Messenger whom he would send. Additionally he had warned them of punishment if they rebelled against him (Ex. 23:21). In spite of promise and warning, they did not heed and rebelled against Jehovah from the beginning, grieving his holy Spirit and bringing him sorrow and pain (cf. Psa. 78:40; 106:43). Therefore, instead of being to them what he wished to be, Jehovah became their enemy and gave them up just as he did the antediluvian world (Gen. 6:6-7).

There is an exegetical point here concerning the identity of the **holy Spirit**. Does it refer to Jehovah himself, to his temper or disposition, or to the Holy Spirit as a person? The *angel of Jehovah* is a personal being distinguished from Jehovah (v. 9). Likewise, the *holy Spirit* is here distinguished from Jehovah. He can experience grief (cf. Eph. 4:30), a characteristic peculiar to a person. This leads to the conclusion that Isaiah is speaking of the *Holy Spirit* as a person in this passage. If so, in these verses we have Jehovah (the Father), the angel of Jehovah (the Son), and the Holy Spirit. The rebellion of the people is rebellion against the total Godhead (10).

In v. 11 another exegetical issue is raised. The ASV text reads: "**Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people.**" The ASV margin reads: "**Then his people remembered the ancient days of Moses.**" Which shall we follow? Five questions follow:

1) **Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?** This question seems to confirm the margin's reading. Is the question being asked by

may often say 'God's glory shines back from him.'

the faithful few or by the people as a whole? It seems to be more in keeping with the context to view the nation as the questioner, although some scholars think that the prophet is speaking for the faithful few. **Out of the sea** refers to crossing of the Red Sea (cf. Psa. 106:9). **The shepherds of his flock** are Moses and Aaron. If the marginal reading, “shepherd,” that is supported by some ancient manuscripts is adopted, it is a reference to Moses only. Since only Moses is referenced in the context, the singular is preferable.

2) Where is he that put his holy Spirit in the midst of them? This is a probable reference to Jehovah’s giving his Spirit to the seventy elders in the wilderness (cf. Num. 11:17, 25, 29; Hag. 2:5). The Spirit here, as in v. 10, **is the third person of the Trinity.**

3) Where is he . . . that caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? This question points back to Jehovah’s leading and strengthening Moses from the time of deliverance out of Egypt to arrival at the border of Canaan. **His glorious arm** is the mighty power God exhibited in the deliverance from Egypt and the care of his people in the wilderness as he stood by Moses throughout.

4) Where is he . . . that divided the waters before them to make himself an everlasting name? This question pertains to the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. Where is he who exercised that great power when he led Israel out of Egypt, thus making for himself **an everlasting name** both among the nations then and among all peoples since?

5) Where is he . . . that led them through the depths, as a horse in the wilderness, so that they stumbled not? But for having been led by his glorious power through the depths of the waters they would have drowned like the Egyptians. In crossing the sea Israel was as surefooted as a horse traveling on a smooth desert waste where it does not stumble – the crossing was without mishap to the people and their stock.

A final illustration completes the picture. As cattle that have been grazing on the rugged slopes of a mountain go down into the valley for water and rest, so **the Spirit of**

Jehovah caused them to rest in Canaan at their journey's end. By his great strength and mighty power Jehovah led his people through all these trials, making his name more glorious.

These questions must have left Israel wondering. Why did God so gloriously deliver then and not now?

Vv. 15-19; 64 – An Impassioned Prayer for Mercy and Help

The people have looked back at the love, mercy and power of Jehovah in the deliverance from Egypt. They have looked at their own condition. That comparison leads them to cry unto God in prayer for help. They call upon Jehovah to **Look down from heaven and behold from the habitation of [his] holiness and ... glory** their present condition where his **zeal** and **mighty** acts seem to be absent. There is no zeal against our enemies or the accompanying exercise of mighty power against them (cf. 26:11; 42:13; 59:17). Why are **the yearning of [his] heart** and **[his] compassions ... restrained toward me?** Though they did not recognize it then and though we do not recognize it now, there is always a purpose in chastening (15).

Israel further pleads their cause. After all, God is their Father, the one who brought their nation into existence. That Abraham and Israel do not know them does not mean that they now reject the people, or claim no relation to them. It means that descent from the patriarchs cannot help them. Although Abraham and Jacob were their physical progenitors, Jehovah is their spiritual Father and true Redeemer. It is to Jehovah that they must appeal (16).

A first reading of this verse seems to suggest that God is somehow responsible for their condition, a thought that has already been denied (59:1-2). Man alone is responsible for his sins. The thought actually hearkens back to 6:10, the charge given to Isaiah at his call. If the people hearken to Jehovah, it will be well, but if they do not, they will become completely hardened. They did not hearken; therefore, that which should have turned them to Jehovah hardened them. The plea is for God to return for

the sake of Israel, whom he has chosen to be his servants, lest the tribes become extinct in the land (17).

A look at the many renderings and interpretations that are given to vv. 18-19 indicates that at least one thing is clear – they are difficult verses. The original Hebrew contains no object for the verb **possessed**. What is it that the people possessed? Three possibilities are the land, the mountain, or the sanctuary. Since each is a possibility, certainty is impossible and dogmatism is inappropriate. All things considered, **land** seems to be the best choice. Some object that it cannot be the land because Israel possessed the promised land for a long time. Delitzsch argues that it can be considered a short time because the passing of time compresses past periods. While that may be correct, Haley has a better explanation. He observes that early in Israel's history Jehovah had said that when they "have been long in the land" and have fully corrupted themselves with idolatry, "ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land" that you go over the Jordan to possess (Deut. 4:25-26). The land was greatly corrupted by Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18). Thereafter there was only one good king (Josiah), who attempted to reform Israel, but failed. Josiah was followed by four evil kings, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian exile. These facts, Haley suggests, could be the fulfillment of Isaiah's words that **thy people possessed it but a little while**, or for a short time. Oswalt says that there is a combination of the three possibilities. He observes that it is unclear whether the people possessed something (land, sanctuary, mountain) for a short time but lost it to adversaries who then trampled the sanctuary; or whether the enemies of the people dispossessed the people, and in so doing trampled the sanctuary. He concludes that the latter seems more likely because it requires the least change⁷ in the Masoretic text. Oswalt concludes that the sense of the phrase is that during the brief time that the holy people were dispossessed, their adversaries trampled God's sanctuary (the temple was in a state of ruin). The significance of the phrase in the context is that it is "almost ironic" because chapter 62 closed on a high note calling the people "the Holy People" and Zion "Sought Out." He

7. Theologians who need to justify their long and expensive education would use the term "emanation" instead of "change."

views Isaiah asking, “Now what about your holy people?” The reality, he argues, is that the people or not so much “redeemed” as they are “dispossessed,” and if they are restored to the land at this point they cannot say that they possess the land because they are vassals of Persia. Young departs from his propensity to discuss the smallest point at great length and, after discussing a related problem, says simply, “On the other hand, it is quite natural to take *people* as subject; and if this is done⁸ some object such as *the land* (Delitzsch) should be understood” (18).

God’s people once more are expressing the thought that God has forgotten them and that, even though they had been called by Jehovah’s name, they were no better off than those over whom he had never ruled. This demonstrates not only an ignoring of God’s promises that he had not and would not forget them, it also ignores that fact that God is creator of all and governs all, including the nations that have never been blessed by wearing his name and being his special people.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

A FERVENT PRAYER

Vv. 1-7 – Prayer for Jehovah’s Presence and Action

The prayer that began at 63:15 continues through this chapter. 63:15 called upon God to look down from heaven and behold. That call is here repeated. The prayer is for God to **rend the heavens** behind which he has hidden himself⁹ and to **come down**. The plea seems to ask that he come down as he did at Mt. Sinai when the earth quaked at

8. The related problem was a discussion of whether *enemies* or *people* should be the subject of the verb *possessed*. Thus, he saw a problem with the subject of the verb as well as with its object.

9. God “dwells in the thick darkness” (2 Chron. 6:1). “Thick clouds are a covering to him” as he “walketh in the circuit of heaven” (Job 22:14).

his presence (Exod. 19:11, 18-20).¹⁰ The mountains represent that which is most firm and solid and strong upon the face of the earth. If even they **tremble** and **quake** at God's presence, how great his power must be and who can abide him? They had apparently forgotten the fear that terrorized them on that occasion (Exod. 20:18-21; Deut. 5:25-27). More importantly, they had refused to listen to him at Sinai. Would they listen to him now (1-3)?

In chapter 41:21-24 Jehovah challenged the idol-gods to speak or act – to do something – but they only brought shame to their devotees by their inability (44:9). Isaiah now says **For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God besides thee.**¹¹ From the beginning of the world no one had seen an idol-god do a single act or heard an idol-god speak a single word. Jehovah God was the only God who performed acts for **him that waiteth for him** (40:31). Before all of God's words and works, whether in delivering his people of old, in rendering judgments against the wicked, or in providing the gospel of redemption, man stands in awe of his unique being and power; there is none comparable to him (4).

V. 5 is a difficult verse. One commentator said of this verse¹² [paraphrasing] that there was no verse in Isaiah or in the Old Testament on which modern commentators had spent more ink and shed less light. For a lengthy discussion of the varying views consult Albert Barnes' commentary on Isaiah. While the text is obscure, the thought

10. When Gode appeared to David, "the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken" (Ps. 18:7). When he was seen of Elijah, "a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; and after the wind was an earthquake" (1 Kings 19:11). Micah saw the Lord "coming forth out of his place," and "the mountains were molten under him, and the valleys cleft" (Micah 1:3, 4).

11. Paul uses this language in 1 Cor. 2:9. Of Paul's use Young writes: "Paul is not speaking to give an exact quotation of this verse, but rather is using the language and varying it as he will to express his own thought concerning the newness and uniqueness of the Gospel."

12. He did not say whether he included himself among the group he described.

seems to be that Jehovah meets¹³ and aids those who rejoice in him and work righteousness. In spite of God's warning and wrath, **we sinned**. Moreover, they continued in their sin **of a long time**. They ask, in that condition **shall we be saved** (5)?

What is the effect of their sin? They have become unclean both ceremonially (legally) and morally and their righteousness is as a polluted garment.¹⁴ The condition of the people is hopeless. Their problem is their persistent sinning and their inability to do anything about it. Isaiah knew firsthand that sin brought defilement (6:5) in the presence of the absolutely Clean One. It is no accident that the section of Leviticus that follows the "Manual of Sacrifice" in chs. 1-10 is a section on the clean and unclean (chs. 11-15), which is followed in turn by the Day of Atonement (Ch. 16). Those were all object lessons designed to convey the fundamental truth that sin is not a matter of behavioral dysfunction, but an offense against the nature of creation that contaminates and destroys the human spirit just as surely as disease does the physical body. Thus, the "holy people" are not holy at all; they are as unclean as lepers (Lev. 13:44-46; see also Hag. 2:13-14). That which they call righteous acts are corrupt; they are not the sign of new life coming, but of the lack of conception, because all they do is self-serving and self-enhancing (cf. 57:12; 58:2). Including himself ("we" and "our"), Isaiah declares that the end result of their conduct is death and decay. He compares them to a dead leaf that the wind blows away. Our sins come to define us and determine the directions that our lives take. God is the giver of life, and those whose sins cut them off from him as the source will find themselves blown away. The same point is made in Psa. 1:4, using the figure of chaff. (6).

The evidence of the hopeless condition of the nation in view of its sins is that no one is even concerned enough about the situation to cry out to God for help. From 63:12 to now this is the sixth reference to the name of God. The other five have all concerned how the character of God is revealed and perceived. But now Isaiah has abandoned

13. The Hebrew word translated *Thou meetest* is translated "intercession" in 53:12 and "intercessor" in 59:16. Thus Jehovah speaks or intercedes for those who work righteousness, those who remember, pay mental attention to, his ways (cf. Prov. 3:5-8), and act in harmony with them.

14. Literally, a "menstrual cloth."

that concern. Far from the people's allowing God to demonstrate the glory of his name through them to the world, none among them is even aware enough of his glorious character to call on such a God to do something about their condition. They are so sunk in spiritual lethargy that they cannot even rouse themselves to lay hold of God.¹⁵ No one seemed to recognize the desperation of the situation, no one cared enough about it, no one knew the name of God well enough to believe that even in an hour like this he would respond with grace and mercy. There was no intercessor; there was none to intervene (cf. 59:16; 63:5) (7).

15. This interesting phrase is reminiscent of Jacob as he wrestled with the "man" at Peniel (Gen. 32:24-32). He seized hold of God, whom "the man" represents, and would not let him go because he recognized how desperate his situation was. If God did not help him all was lost. There was no other helper.