

## Lesson 43 Isaiah 63:7-65:16

### Introduction

We have arrived at the last third of the third book of Isaiah, and we're moving from the vision of a glorious future to the messy reality of the present and the human struggle to believe in that glorious Kingdom, to believe there is a way forward through sin and darkness, to believe that God will keep His promises.

Motyer and Oswalt both divide the Book of the Conqueror into three main sections. We have seen how the parallel visions of the Divine Warrior create the boundary markers for those three sections. Motyer includes the two Divine Warrior passages as the beginning and ending of our middle section, while Oswalt views the Divine Warrior passages as the end of the first section and beginning of the third section.

<b>Isaiah</b>		
"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."		
<b>The Marks of Servanthood: Divine Character</b> 56-66		
<b>The Ideal and the Actual: The Needs and the Sins of the Lord's People</b> 56:1-59:13	<b>The Coming of the Anointed Conqueror</b> 59:14-63:6	<b>Prayer and Response: Steps to the New Heaven and New Earth</b> 63:7-66:24
		<div style="width: 45%;"><b>The Prayer of a Remembrancer</b> 63:7-64:12</div> <div style="width: 45%;"><b>Sure Promises: the Final Reckoning and the New Jerusalem</b> 65:1-66:24</div>

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<b>Isaiah</b>		
"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."		
<b>The Marks of Servanthood: Divine Character</b> 56-66		
<b>Human Inability</b> 56:1-59:21	<b>The Lord Has Glorified You</b> 60:1-62:12	<b>Divine Ability</b> 63:1-66:24
		<div style="width: 45%;"><b>Israel's Faithlessness; the Lord's Faithfulness</b> 63:1-65:16</div> <div style="width: 45%;"><b>The Final Judgment</b> 65:17-66:24</div>

John Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah* (Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998).

That's a reminder that, though commentators often see similar structure in Isaiah, the weaving of themes through the text makes it difficult to delineate that structure precisely or with certainty. There is a lot of overlap. There are often multiple ways to organize the text, and we just have to choose one.

Scholars have big-picture agreement that chapters 60-62 should be recognized as a hopeful middle to the Book of the Conqueror. This is the section we have just completed that gives us a repeated vision of God establishing a glorified Zion. As often happens in Biblical literature, that glorious vision is given in the middle of the book, rather than we might do it, we might put it at the very end of the book. So now, in the final third of the Book of the Conqueror, we are returning from that hopeful future to the mess of the present. As we build back towards the climatic end in chapter 66, we are reminded of two tensions: the tension between present mess and future glory, and the tension between the favorable year of the Lord and the coming day of vengeance.

Motyer and Oswalt both divide this final third of the Book of the Conqueror into two sections. Motyer's first section is made up solely of the prayer in 63:7-64:12. Oswalt extends his first section to include the Lord's response to that prayer. I like how Oswalt has kept prayer and response together, so I will go with his structure for this lesson. That means we are going to cover a lot of text, so that we can see the bigger picture of prayer-response, spending time on some but not all of the details.

The presence of a prayer following the middle section creates a parallel with the prayer that came before the middle section. There is this pattern: prayer, Divine Warrior, glorious hope, Divine Warrior, prayer. The first prayer was a straight-out confession. There was no complaint, no supplication, no praise, no thanksgiving, simply a deep, heartfelt admission of sin and hopelessness. And here a bit of that confession, just as a reminder, 59:11-13.

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| <p><sup>11</sup> All of us growl like bears,<br/>We hope for justice, but there is none,</p> <p><sup>12</sup> For our transgressions are multiplied before You,<br/>For our transgressions are with us,</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Transgressing and denying the LORD,<br/>Speaking oppression and revolt,</p> | <p>And moan sadly like doves;<br/>For salvation, but it is far from us.</p> <p>And our sins testify against us;<br/>And we know our iniquities:<br/>And turning away from our God,<br/>Conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words.</p> |
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Following that prayer, God dressed Himself as a Divine Warrior, clothed in salvation and righteousness, determined to provide for His people what they could not provide for themselves: justice, righteousness, salvation. Chapters 60-62 followed with God's commitment to establishing the ideal society of a glorified Zion. A mysterious conqueror appeared in four songs, each appearance tied to the future vision of God's people. In the third song, he was clothed as though for a wedding, establishing his bride Israel in a new covenant relationship and giving her a new covenant name, "Holy," "Redeemed," "Sought out," and "Not forsaken."

In the fourth song, which is also the second Divine Warrior passage in 63:1-6, the arm of the Lord removed His wedding garments to don a warrior's apparel. He initiated the day of vengeance, stomping like grapes the enemies of His people. The conqueror vanquished sin and evil, securing salvation and righteousness for his glorious bride, who He purifies.

We find ourselves now returning from that future vision to Judah's screwed-up present. This generation is still the generation of lying lips and sinful heart for whom the prophet made confession in chapter 59. This generation is the generation of Manasseh to whom God will say, "enough is enough." This generation is not going to experience the glorious vision, neither will coming future generations for a long time. First comes exile. Israel will fall to Babylon. The people will be forsaken. The land will be made desolate.

Watchers were established at the ramparts after the third Song of the Conquer to remind God of the promised future. Even more, to remind God's people that God keeps that desired future present in His mind even as he takes His people through the darkness of the present.

This prayer now may be understood as a prayer of the watchers. Motyer calls it, "the prayer of the remembrancer," the one appointed to remind the Lord. I like that idea, though with a caveat. I follow Oswalt in interpreting the watchers reminding God as angels in his heavenly court. I do not understand them reminding God with the tone of a lament. But then, I do believe human are joined in to watch and to remind God. We pray too, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." We are looking forward to that glorious vision, and we are enjoining God to bring it about.

The prayer we are getting ready to consider is a very human prayer. It's full of lament over Judah's present and coming future status. Isaiah prays as though the Babylonian exile has happened. The human watcher longs for the glorious hope announced in chapters 60-62, but becomes hopeless in his present reality. The first part of the prayer creates a theological foundation for the request. The second part of the prayer pleads with God in an accusatory lament. God is at fault. After the prayer is completed, Isaiah gives us a response from God. We'll start with the first part of the prayer, the theological foundation for complaint and request. This is Isaiah 63:7-14.

### **A Prayer of Lament (63:7–65:1)**

*Remembering the character of God in action for Israel (63:7-14)*

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| <p><sup>7</sup> I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses<br/>of the LORD,<br/>According to all that the LORD has granted us,<br/>Which He has granted them according to His<br/>compassion</p> <p><sup>8</sup> For He said, "Surely, they are My people,<br/>So He became their Savior.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> In all their affliction He was afflicted,<br/>In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them,</p> | <p>the praises of the LORD,<br/>And the great goodness toward the house of Israel,<br/>And according to the abundance of His<br/>lovingkindnesses.</p> <p>Sons who will not deal falsely."<br/>And the angel of His presence saved them;<br/>And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.</p> |
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| <p><sup>10</sup> But they rebelled and grieved<br/>Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy,</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses.<br/>Where is He who brought them up out of the sea<br/>Where is He who put in their midst of them,<br/>But he recalled the days of yore,</p> <p><sup>12</sup> Who led at the right hand of Moses,<br/>Who divided the waters before them</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Who led them through the depths?</p> <p><sup>14</sup> As the cattle which go down into the valley,<br/>So You led Your people,</p> | <p>His Holy Spirit;<br/>He fought against them.</p> <p>with the shepherds of His flock?<br/>His Holy Spirit<br/>drawing His people out from the water:<br/>with His glorious arm,<br/>to make for Himself an everlasting name,<br/>Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not<br/>stumble;<br/>The Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.<br/>To make for Yourself a glorious name.</p> |
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The prayer begins and ends with the name of God. The name of God communicates His nature. And we are reminded of His commitment to see that name glorified.

The word, "name," does not actually appear at the beginning of the passage. Instead, we get references to the attributes God used when He communicated His name to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7. God spoke His name in the context of Israel's sin with the golden calf. The renewal of covenant after that great sin is only possible because of who God is. At the same time, because of who God is, sin must be punished. Here is that communication of God's name in Exodus 34:6-9.

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD passed by in front of [Moses] and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; <sup>7</sup> who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

The watcher mentions God's lovingkindness and compassion, and he talks about His redemption at the beginning of our present prayer in verses 7-9.

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| <p><sup>7</sup> I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses<br/>of the LORD,<br/>According to all that the LORD has granted us,<br/>Which He has granted them according to His<br/>compassion</p> <p><sup>8</sup> For He said, "Surely, they are My people,<br/>So He became their Savior.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> In all their affliction He was afflicted,<br/>In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them,</p> | <p>the praises of the LORD,<br/>And the great goodness toward the house of Israel,<br/>And according to the abundance of His<br/>lovingkindnesses.<br/>Sons who will not deal falsely."<br/>And the angel of His presence saved them;<br/>And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.</p> |
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That name of God from Exodus 34:6 is being echoed here. God took the initiative with Israel. He was moved by His own character of love and compassion. He entered faithfully into covenant with them and treated them as "Sons who will not deal falsely." Verse 9 says that God was "afflicted in all their affliction." Any parent can understand how the struggles of their children creates real pain for themselves. God is hurt by the outward oppression of His own. This pain is real for God. We know it is real. Later he is going to go to the cross to save us.

He did not come to die for His people at this point in time, but He does make Himself known to them. The text tells us God revealed His presence - verse 9, "the angel of his presence saved them." We are probably supposed to understand "angel of presence" as a reference to theophany, God's physical manifestation of Himself, as in the fire on the bush, or the pillars of fire and smoke. God may have also manifested His presence in human form. The captain of hosts who appears to Joshua and the fourth figure in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: these may be manifestations of God in human form. God is committed to Israel. He has entered into their affliction because of His love and mercy. He has lifted His people up in His arms and carried them. That's an Exodus reference.

The statement that God considered, “Surely they are Sons who will not deal falsely,” begs the question, “What happens if they do deal falsely?” If His love and compassion is initiated in covenant to a people who is expected to be faithful, what happens when they’re not faithful? And they are not going to be faithful. Verse 10,

<sup>10</sup> But they rebelled and grieved   His Holy Spirit;  
          Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them.

The people God called to be faithful sons and daughters rebelled at Mt. Sinai, complained through the desert and continued on in a long narrative of turning from God, with faithfulness coming only from an intermittent remnant. Their rebellion is a persistent reality through the generations, exemplified by the sin at Sinai.

Rebellion is a serious word in Isaiah. Oswalt characterizes it as “the most heinous of all sins in Isaiah’s mind.”<sup>1</sup> The word translated in the English comes from two synonymous word groups in the Hebrew. The first instance of filial rebellion appears in the very first poetic verse of the book, in Isaiah 1:2b,

Sons I have reared and brought up,   But they have revolted against Me.

The last instance comes in the very last verse, Isaiah 66:24a.

Then they will go forth and see   the corpses of the men who rebelled against me.

An example in the middle of Isaiah connects rebellion and family relationship, in Isaiah 30:9.

<sup>9</sup> For this is a rebellious people,   false sons,  
Sons who refuse to listen   To the instruction of the LORD;

The watcher who prays here emphasizes the emotional effect rebellion has on God.

<sup>10</sup> But they rebelled and grieved   His Holy Spirit;

We’re getting another aspect of God’s nature here. As New Covenant believers we are used to referring to the third Person of the Godhead as, the Holy Spirit. Both terms, “holy,” and, “Spirit,” stand out. The word, “holy,” is important to Isaiah. One of his favorite terms for God is, “the holy One of Israel.” Isaiah experienced God in the vision of chapter 6 as “holy, holy, holy,” and that never leaves him. It carries through the whole book. Rebellion is a rejection of God’s love as Heavenly Father. It is also a rejection of God’s moral nature as holy. The sons refuse to be good, refuse to be truthful, refuse to be wholesome, and caring, and kind. By the assertion of their own will, they choose corruption, greed, lust, oppression, selfishness, spiritual perversion, falsehood, whatever is necessary to fill the desires of an unholy heart. They have rebelled against the Holy Spirit, and that grieves God.

The use of the term, “Spirit,” also stands out here. This sounds very much like the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in fact, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (4:30).” Grieving is not a trait associated with impersonal force. The Spirit here is personal. And when we look at the context of the whole prayer, it’s not just the Spirit. Isaiah refers to God as “Father.” He also refers to the incarnate manifestation of God as, “the angel of presence,” and as, “the arm of the Lord,” and now we get him referring to the Holy Spirit who can be grieved. This feels trinitarian. And it is not the first time Isaiah has felt trinitarian. Remember than child’s name in 9:6 - he was to be named, “Mighty God.” He was also to be named, “Eternal Father,” “Prince of Peace,” and, “Wonderful Counselor.” In a prayer emphasizing the name – the nature – of God, this is really interesting.

Back to God’s grief. God grieves knowing that He must respond to sin with justice. Verse 10b,

          Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them.

This is the problem. Can God’s compassion maintain the bond with His people if His holiness requires that He respond with force to their rebellion?

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<sup>1</sup> J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chs 40-66*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998) 607.

The beginning of verse 11 is not clear. 11a could be God remembering, or it could be God's people remembering. But however we interpret 11a, 11b through 13 fits with the people remembering: remembering God's past action. Here I will interpret it as the people remembering.

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| <p><sup>11</sup> Then His people remembered the days of old,<br/>Where is He who brought them up out of the sea<br/>Where is He who put in their midst of them,</p> | <p>of Moses. <sup>2</sup><br/>with the shepherds of His flock?<br/>His Holy Spirit</p> |
| <p><sup>12</sup> Who led at the right hand of Moses,<br/>Who divided the waters before them</p>   | <p>with His glorious arm,<br/>to make for Himself an everlasting name,</p>             |
| <p><sup>13</sup> Who led them through the depths?</p>   | <p>Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not<br/>stumble;</p>                     |

Where is He now? Where is God? The prayer began remembering the name of God. Because of His compassion and lovingkindness, God took the initiative to save His people, to lift up and carry. The image of God lifting up and carrying Israel is connected now in these verses both to Moses and to Israel. The name Moses means, "one drawn out." The princess of Egypt drew him out of the Nile, lifting him up, carrying him. In the Exodus the whole nation Israel was lifted up and carried, drawn out from the Red sea by God's miraculous intervention. That concrete instance of salvation through the Red Sea then characterizes God's ongoing grace to carry Israel through the desert to the promise land, and then to continue carrying Israel as His own beloved child. The Holy Spirit in the midst of them reminds us that God did not reject Israel after the rebellion of the golden calf. He allowed Moses to go ahead with the construction of the Tabernacle and, in the last paragraph of the book of Exodus, He manifested His glory physically in the Tabernacle. "He put in their midst of them his Holy Spirit." So, in the past God has been able to make a way to continue in fellowship with a sinful people. So now this Psalmist, he is lamenting, "Where are the great acts of the past? Where are you, God? Are you no longer with us?"

Verse 14 sums up this reflection on God's character and action for His people.

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| <p><sup>14</sup> As the cattle which go down into the valley,<br/>So You led Your people,</p> | <p>The Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.<br/>To make for Yourself a glorious name.</p> |
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This is who you are. This is what you have done. Where are you now? Your wrath burned before? Can you overcome that wrath now?

From this theological foundation the prayer is now going to turn now to the lament, to the crying out, to the complaint, to the supplication. These lament elements do not follow one after the other. They are all mixed up. The passage does, sort of, divide into three questions rising out of the grief-stricken heart and mind of the watcher. These are those three questions. (1) Why did you cause us to stray? (2) Can we even be saved? (3) Will you not act?

The first question comes out as an accusation in 63:15-19.

*Why did you cause us to stray? (63:15-19)*

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| <p><sup>15</sup> Look down from heaven and see<br/>Where are Your zeal and Your mighty deeds?</p> | <p>from Your holy and glorious habitation;<br/>The stirrings of Your heart and Your compassion<br/>are restrained toward me.</p> |
| <p><sup>16</sup> For You are our Father, though Abraham<br/>does not know us</p>                  | <p>And Israel does not recognize us.</p>   |

<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019) 2012. Alter translates Moses as a verb in 11a, "But he recalled the days of yore, drawing His people out from the water." Alter comments, "The Hebrew mosheh 'amo should not be construed as 'Moses his people,' which would make little sense. Instead, mosheh is used as a verb here, the verb with which the name of Moses is etymologized. This usage is clear because of the next line, 'Where is He Who brought them up from the sea.' The poet interprets the Moses story as he invokes the miracle at the Sea of Reeds: the infant Moses drawn from the water prefigures Israel saved from the waters"

You, O LORD, are our Father,  
<sup>17</sup> Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways  
Return for the sake of Your servants,  
<sup>18</sup> Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary  
for a little while,  
<sup>19</sup> We have become like those over whom You  
have never ruled,

Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.  
And harden our heart from fearing You?  
the tribes of Your heritage.  
Our adversaries have trodden it down.  
Like those who were not called by Your name.

The watcher cries to God, "Look from your holy and glorious habitation, look and see! Where are your mighty deeds and compassion?" We've just summarized God's compassionate character and His glorious deeds for Israel from the Exodus on. Why is that all in the past and not breaking in to affect our present?

There is an ironic twist in verse 16. In Isaiah 1:3, after being called, "a rebellious son," Judah is depicted as worse than ox or donkey, not knowing or understanding the Lord. Here it is not Judah who does not understand God, but Abraham and Israel who do not recognize Judah. The prayer readily admits that Judah's sin has marred the family resemblance so much that the forefathers would not recognize this present generation. In spite of that, the watcher relies on Judah's ancient relationship with God, calling Him, "Father," and, "Redeemer;" you're still our Father.

But then in verse 17, the watcher makes a complaint, and this is where it starts to sound like an accusation.

<sup>17</sup> Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways  
Return for the sake of Your servants,

And harden our heart from fearing You?  
the tribes of Your heritage.

That's a bold thing to say to God, "Why do you cause us to stray?" You do not hear any admission of human responsibility there. And yet, even though it does seem unrepentant and accusatory, the complaint makes sense when we survey the Biblical theology of predestination. If God could harden Pharaoh's heart against letting Israel go, might we not wonder that He has been hardening wayward Israel's heart? That even seems to be the message God communicated to Isaiah in 6:10 when he called Isaiah and instructed him to,

Render the hearts of this people insensitive,  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
Understand with their hearts,

Their ears dull, And their eyes dim,  
Hear with their ears,  
And return and be healed.

The problem is not only that God does sometimes harden a person's heart. The Bible also teaches the necessity of God softening hearts. Jesus declared in John 6:65, "No one can come to me unless it has been granted him by the Father." We've probably all wondered why God has not done more to bring people we love to faith in Him. This complaint from the watcher bubbles up out of a soul anguished by the lostness of the people. "Why have you not softened our hearts O Lord? Why do you harden us in our sin?"

It is in verses 18-19 that we get the context of the prayer. We realize this prayer is the prayer of one who has looked ahead to the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

<sup>18</sup> Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary  
for a little while,

Our adversaries have trodden it down.

The Temple is gone.

<sup>19</sup> We have become like those over whom You  
have never ruled,

Like those who were not called by Your name.

All your protection has been removed. Following the complaint of verse 17, verse 19 can come across also as an accusation. "It is like you never ruled us, God. Like we were never associated with You or called by Your name!" I am not sure if the watcher is accusing God for the state of the chosen people. He is describing Judah as utterly forsaken. Which is going to raise the question of whether this Judah can even be saved?

That's the question we get now in the central section of the lament. The one praying questions whether salvation is possible. In English Bibles, this question comes in 64:1-7. In Bibles following the Hebrew numbering, this passage is 63:19b through 64:6.

Here is that passage with its question, is there any hope for the rebellious people?

*Can we be saved? (64:1-7)*

- <sup>1</sup> Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence—  
<sup>2</sup> As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—  
To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence!  
<sup>3</sup> When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.  
<sup>4</sup> For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear,  
Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.  
<sup>5</sup> You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways.  
Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time;  
And shall we be saved?  
<sup>6</sup> For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;  
And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
<sup>7</sup> There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You;  
For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.

“Oh that you would come down!” Come down to do what? “To make your name known to your adversaries.” Come down, Lord, to execute the day of vengeance on all those who have taken up arms against your people! This request is tied up with God’s name. It’s not, “make your name compassionate to your adversaries,” but, “make your name justice known to your adversaries.” And the adversaries are not first envisioned as rebellious Judah. That comes at the end. First, they are envisioned as Judah’s enemies.

That’s the plea. God has acted powerfully for Israel in the past. And not even that distant past. We can just go back to when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrians. And God sent off Sennacherib. God has acted. God, come! Do something! But verse 5 is the problem.

- <sup>5</sup> You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways.  
Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time;  
And shall we be saved?

It is true that God meets those who delight in Him, who remember His ways by doing them. And that is how we began the prayer. God sought out faithful sons and daughters. But Israel sinned. And here it’s, “We continued in them a long time.” So God became her enemy. So now the watcher asks, “Is it even possible that we should be saved?” He describes the state of his generation.

- <sup>6</sup> For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;  
And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
<sup>7</sup> There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You;  
For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.

God has handed them over to their sin. Judah has no hope of salvation if God only saves the faithful. Even her righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. No one moves towards God, no one calls on His name, or tries to take hold of Him. And so God has turned away. In their rebellion they turned from God and so, God turned from them. God gives them over into their own iniquities. Judah wants vengeance on God’s adversaries, but how is that going to work for Judah if she has become the adversary?

We can still detect a complaint in the lament. On the one hand, human sin is the problem. We are like filthy garments. Human will is the problem. We do not call on God. We do not seek Him or try to take hold of Him. But God is also the problem. He hides His face. He delivers us over to our own sin.

The final section of the prayer implores God, “Will you not act?” Isaiah 64:8-12,





God's response, that we are getting ready to look at, provides that new perspective. He begins by correct the watcher's understanding of His own actions. It is not true that God did great acts in the past and then turned away from Israel when Israel stumbled. God has pursued Israel all along. He also corrects the watcher's wrong assumption that all of Israel is lost. There is a remnant. There is always a remnant. So we are going to take this response according to those two corrections. Correction number 1: God is ready to save. That is in 65:1-7. And correction number 2: God is faithful to His remnant. That's in 8-17. We start with 1-7, God's readiness to save.

### God's Response (65:1-16)

*God's readiness to save (1-7)*

<sup>1</sup> "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I said, 'Here am I, here am I,'	I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. To a nation which did not call on My name. to a rebellious people, following their own thoughts, to My face, and burning incense on bricks; and spend the night in secret places; And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots. do not come near me, for I am holier than you! A fire that burns all the day.
<sup>2</sup> "I have spread out My hands all day long Who walk in the way which is not good,	
<sup>3</sup> A people who continually provoke Me Offering sacrifices in gardens	
<sup>4</sup> Who sit among graves Who eat swine's flesh,	
<sup>5</sup> "Who say, 'Keep to yourself, These are smoke in My nostrils,	I will not keep silent, I will even repay into their bosom, says the LORD.
<sup>6</sup> "Behold, it is written before Me, but I will repay;	
<sup>7</sup> Both their own iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers together," "Because they have burned incense on the mountains Therefore I will measure their former work	And scorned Me on the hills, into their bosom."

It is interesting to me that God does not mention here. He doesn't mention the accusation that He is responsible for hardening the heart of His people. God ignores the issue of His sovereignty in bringing human beings to repentance. I do not know why God does that. I have a guess.

God's sovereignty makes an easy target for us in our despair. We naturally lash out at God when we feel helpless or guilty. God ignores the charge as a parent might ignore hateful words from a hurting child. His silence seems to communicate, "I am sovereign, but that is not the problem here. Let's not get caught up in why I do what I do. Leave that to me. I will tell you what you have done, and I want you to focus on your part in the problem."

What God does here first is that God rejects the charge He has hidden from His people. Quite to the contrary, God is the one in pursuit. "I permitted myself to be found by those who did not seek me." "I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people."

Second, God rejects the charge of silence. The truth is, it might go better for us if God did remain silent, because when He speaks, He is going to announce the verdict of His holy justice. "I will not keep silent, but I will repay." God's silence has not reflected a lack of compassion. Rather, God's silence is compassion, a slowness to be angry in our rebellion.

And, of course, God has not been silent. That's why He called Isaiah. And this entire prophecy is God's willingness to speak truth to this generation. Speaking now, God promises to repay both the iniquities of the current generation and the iniquities of their fathers. And that is in keeping with His Exodus 34:6-7 name, the name the watcher brought up in the first verses of his prayer. Exodus 34:7 states,

[I am the Lord your God] who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.

God, who is slow to anger, will at some point call a society to account, both for their sins and the sins of their fathers. That does not mean that the children pay for the sins of their fathers. The children pay for their own sins. The fathers pay for their sins. It does mean that the consequences of sin build up in a society, having effect from one generation to the next. And God will address that.

The charge here is rebellion, the charge brought up in the prayer. The emphasis is on spiritual rebellion specifically. The people are described as those who provoke God to His face,

Offering sacrifices in gardens	and burning incense on bricks;
<sup>4</sup> Who sit among graves	and spend the night in secret places;
Who eat swine's flesh,	And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots.
<sup>5</sup> "Who say, 'Keep to yourself,	do not come near me, for I am holier than you!"
These are smoke in My nostrils,	A fire that burns all the day.

The people have committed spiritual adultery, turning away from and rejecting God. That is the state of their rebellion. No one can argue the injustice of their position. The spurning of God's long pursuit of them has finally resulted in this just, overdue verdict.

I will measure their former work into their bosom.

Now, It sounds as though all members of society will experience the wrathful judgment of God. That's the way the watcher prayed as though the calamity fallen on Judah signaled condemnation of the whole. And that's why it's natural to lament, to grief. We don't make fine distinctions. Our emotion causes us to speak in absolutes. "Everything is terrible!" "You hate us!" "No one can be saved!" God corrects that perspective. There is a remnant of faithful servants and God is going to be faithful to them. We end with verses 8-16.

*God's faithfulness to the remnant (8-16)*

<sup>8</sup> Thus says the LORD,	And one says, 'Do not destroy it,
"As the new wine is found in the cluster,	for there is benefit in it,'
So I will act on behalf of My servants	In order not to destroy all of them.
<sup>9</sup> "I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,	And an heir of My mountains from Judah;
Even My chosen ones shall inherit it,	And My servants will dwell there.
<sup>10</sup> "Sharon will be a pasture land for flocks,	And the valley of Achor a resting place for herds,
For My people who seek Me.	
<sup>11</sup> "But you who forsake the LORD,	Who forget My holy mountain,
Who set a table for Fortune,	And who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny,
<sup>12</sup> I will destine you for the sword,	And all of you will bow down to the slaughter.
Because I called, but you did not answer;	I spoke, but you did not hear.
And you did evil in My sight	And chose that in which I did not delight."
<sup>13</sup> Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,	
"Behold, My servants will eat,	but you will be hungry.
Behold, My servants will drink,	but you will be thirsty.
Behold, My servants will rejoice,	but you will be put to shame.
<sup>14</sup> "Behold, My servants will shout joyfully	with a glad heart,
But you will cry out with a heavy heart,	And you will wail with a broken spirit.
<sup>15</sup> "You will leave your name for a curse	And the Lord GOD will slay you.
to My chosen ones,	
But My servants will be called by another name.	
<sup>16</sup> "Because he who is blessed in the earth	Will be blessed by the God of truth;
And he who swears in the earth	Will swear by the God of truth;
Because the former troubles are forgotten,	And because they are hidden from My sight!

The initial image of a grape cluster sets the tone for the second half of God's response.

<sup>8</sup>Thus says the LORD,  
“As the new wine is found in the cluster,  
So I will act on behalf of My servants  
And one says, ‘Do not destroy it,  
for there is benefit in it,’  
In order not to destroy all of them.

Judah was labeled, “stink fruit,” in chapter 5, a vine that produces worthless grapes. That may be true as a generalization but this image suggests Isaiah’s repeated claim that there is a remnant theme. There are some useful grapes in the cluster. New wine can come from it. I am reminded of Jesus’ parable about wheat and tares in the field. Pulling out every weed will damage the true grain. Though severe, God’s judgment on Judah will not be complete. Israel will survive in exile and return, and within that cluster a remnant will be saved.

As a whole, Israel has failed to be what God has invited them to be, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).” They were intended to be servants of the Most High. In the middle section of Isaiah, in the Book of the Servant, Israel’s failure to faithfully serve was highlighted. They were useless servants. Here God calls the faithful remnant, “My servants.” We cannot earn this title. The divine-human Servant stepped in and laid down His life to cover our failures. Because of His grace, we can stand up when we fall and walk faithfully with God, clothed in His righteousness. We can enter into the process of being and becoming that which He has called us to be. The rebellion of Israel does not lead to the destruction of all.

Salvation awaits the servants of the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> “I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,  
Even My chosen ones shall inherit it,  
And an heir of My mountains from Judah;  
And My servants will dwell there.

There is this continual tension between the favorable year of the Lord and the day of God’s vengeance. Judgment will come to those who continue in rebellion.

<sup>11</sup> “But you who forsake the LORD,  
Who set a table for Fortune,  
<sup>12</sup> I will destine you for the sword,  
Because I called, but you did not answer;  
And you did evil in My sight  
Who forget My holy mountain,  
And who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny,  
And all of you will bow down to the slaughter.  
I spoke, but you did not hear.  
And chose that in which I did not delight.”

God invites us to lament when we find ourselves lost, or helpless, or grieving, or afraid. Lament brings all of those emotions into conversation with God. Sometimes our emotion overflows in bitterness, or anger, or accusation against God. God can take it. But He will not leave us unchanged. As we continue walking with Him through the darkness of the valley, we eventually pass through the fog of our pain and confusion into a new perspective of His sovereign goodness.

God is not hiding. He holds out his hands all day long to a rebellious people. God is not silent. He speaks, but people refused to listen. Society will suffer the consequence of sin. God will give over the rebellious to their own dark passions and thoughts. And He will eventually bring active punishment on those who persist in their rejection of Him. Even so, God saves a remnant. There is always a remnant. He has made a way for sinful people to become His servants and He blesses them.

God’s servants will shout with a joyful heart. The rebellious will cry out with a heavy heart. They will leave their name for a curse, but God’s servants will receive a new name. The troubles we must pass through will one day be forgotten.

God will glorify His name. He is the Holy One who does not leave sin unpunished. He is the Gracious One who extends lovingkindness and truth to generations.