

Isaiah's Intercessory Prayer and the Lord's Response

Isaiah 64-65:16

Isaiah 64:1-7 - *"Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence, ² as fire burns brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence! ³ When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down; the mountains shook at Your presence. ⁴ For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned—in these ways we continue; and we need to be saved. ⁶ But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. ⁷ And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities."*

Background Notes

Isaiah 63:7 began Isaiah's intercessory prayer on behalf of Israel. The completion of this prayer for God's people Israel is in Isaiah 64.

Part of the prayer was a confession of sin. In verses 1-4 of chapter 65, the prophet Isaiah prayed, along with the voice of the godly in Israel, for the Lord to intervene in the nation – just as He did at Mt. Sinai when the Law was given. There the mountains quaked and the fire of the Lord burned. If God were to intervene as He did then, not only would the sins of Israel be judged, but also the surrounding foreign pagan nations would tremble before the one true God of Israel (v2).

In this prayer for divine intervention, there is a ready acknowledgement that Israel's sins and iniquities were deserving of judgment (v5-7).

Doctrinal Point (for Isaiah 64)

Isaiah's prayer had prophetic implications

Isaiah 64:8-12 - *"But now, O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. ⁹ Do not be furious, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever. Indeed, please look—we all are Your people! ¹⁰ Your holy cities are a wilderness. Zion is a wilderness, and Jerusalem a desolation. ¹¹ Our holy and beautiful temple where our fathers praised You is burned up with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste. ¹² Will You restrain Yourself because of these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?"*

There are prophetic implications in these verses. We said that this prayer was Isaiah's intercessory prayer on Israel's behalf in his day. But more specifically, it was also Isaiah's prayer on behalf of the remnant of godly people in Israel in the far future.

Remember, Isaiah wrote this prophetic book in about 700 BC, when the Assyrians were in power. But Isaiah foresaw and looked ahead to the time of the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem and the glorious Temple: "*Your holy cities are a wilderness. Zion is a wilderness, and Jerusalem a desolation. ¹¹ Our holy and beautiful temple where our fathers praised You is burned up with fire*" (v10-11).

This prayer of confession not only looked ahead to the time following the Babylonian conquest - but even looked ahead to the End Times. During the future Tribulation period, the godly remnant of restored Israel will pray this kind of prayer. So Isaiah's prayer has prophetic implications.

Practical Application

To please God, follow the "1-2 Plan" of Isaiah 64.

In verse 11 we read that God the Father addressed the Lord Jesus, saying, "*You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" Notice that this was said before the public ministry of Jesus Christ began. None of the Lord's miracles and none of His had yet taken place. And yet the Father, looking back over thirty years of our Lord's childhood and young adult life was able to say, "*This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*"

What is the "1-2 Plan"?

Step 1 is in verse 6: "*All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.*" In order to please God we must be willing to come to God **in His way**. We must admit that we are sinners. No matter how many righteous deeds we do, they will not get us into heaven. Compared to God's standards of righteous perfection, even our best actions and good deeds are like a filthy garment. To enter Heaven, we must be clothed with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ! It's a free gift when we receive Him as our personal Savior.

Step 2 is in verse 8. "*But now, O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, and You our potter.*" As Christians, in order to please God, we must submit to Him. He's the Potter and we are the clay - not the other way around! I think we'd all agree with that - but do we **live** like that? Do we really want to please God? We must follow the 1-2 plan of Isaiah 64 in order to please God.

Isaiah 65:1-7 - "*I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by My name. ² I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts. ³ A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; who sacrifice in gardens, and*

burn incense on altars of brick; ⁴ who sit among the graves, and spend the night in the tombs; who eat swine's flesh, and the broth of abominable things is in their vessels. ⁵ 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.

⁶ "Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will repay— even repay into their bosom— ⁷ your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together," says the Lord, "who have burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed Me on the hills. Therefore, I will measure their former work into their bosom."

Background Notes

"I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by My name" (v1). In this verse, what "nation" is in view in God's answer to Isaiah's intercessory prayer?

The answer to that question is found in Romans 10:20-21, where the apostle Paul quoted these verses from Isaiah. In the context of Romans 10, the "nation" of Isaiah 65:1 refers to the **Gentiles**. In Romans 10, Paul's point was that, in contrast to the nation of Israel who rejected the Lord, the Gentiles would turn to the Lord – even though they were not the chosen people! (But this does **not** mean that the Gentile church is "the New Israel"!)

Doctrinal Point (for Isaiah 65)

God's answer contains good news and bad news.

Isaiah 65:1-16 was God's answer to Isaiah's prayer on behalf of the nation. We discussed that prayer in Isaiah 63-64. God's answer contained both good news and bad news. In verses 1-7, it was bad news for the nation of Israel. They offered idolatrous sacrifices and burned incense to foreign gods (v3-7). They tried to communicate with the dead, and they ate forbidden foods (v4). Because they proudly considered themselves holier than others (v5), God would have to judge them (v6-7). However, in verses 8-12 there was some good news:

Isaiah 65:8-16 - *"Thus says the Lord: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it,' so will I do for My servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all. ⁹ I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah an heir of My mountains. My elect shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there. ¹⁰ Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for My people who have sought Me.*

¹¹ "But you are those who forsake the Lord, who forget My holy mountain, who prepare a table for Gad, and who furnish a drink offering for Meni. ¹² Therefore I will number you for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer. When I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight." ¹³ "Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry. Behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty. Behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed. ¹⁴ Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and wail for grief of spirit. ¹⁵ You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen, for the Lord God will slay you, and call His servants by another name; ¹⁶ so that he who

blesse himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth. And he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth, because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My eyes”.

Who are “My servants” mentioned in these verses? Is it the present-day Church? No. They are the “*descendants of Jacob*” and “*heirs of Judah*” (v9)! Clearly, these servants of the Lord are a remnant of godly Jews, both in Isaiah’s day - and in the Last Days. These godly Jews and restored Israel will inherit the literal land of Israel (v9-10). As servants of the Lord, they will be in great contrast to those who practice idolatry. “Meni” and “Gad” (v11) were pagan deities. Idolaters will be judged (v11-12).

Did this description of Israel’s idolatry apply only for Isaiah’s day – or also to the future? It will also apply in the future. From prophetic Scriptures we know that idolatry will return to Israel in the Last Days, with the worship of antichrist. According to Matthew 12:45, the Lord Jesus said that their last state will be worst than the first: “*And the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.*”

In Isaiah 65:13-16, there’s further good news for a remnant of godly Jews - and further bad news for unbelieving Israel. Again these verses look beyond the godly Jews of Isaiah’s day to the godly remnant of restored Israel in the Last Days. However, some of the Jewish people will not become believers, and there will still be an unbelieving secular state of Israel in the Last Days. God’s answer contains good news and bad news.

Practical Application

Don’t let your name become a negative byword!

Isaiah 65:15 - *‘You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen; for the Lord God will slay you, and call His servants by another name.’*

The idea here is that while the godly remnant will have a new name, the name of unbelieving Israel will be a negative “byword” – a notorious catchphrase - even a curse. If that is true of a nation, could it also be true of an individual? Of course it could!

How do you want your name to be remembered when you die? Will you be remembered as a “partially obedient” servant? As a hoarding materialist? As a compromising Christian? How we’re living now in this life will determine how we’ll be remembered. Don’t let your name become a negative byword!