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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

Isaiah 64.

(2015)

The Bible not only reveals God's eternal plans purposes and promises

But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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Isaiah 64.

Topics.

- No one has heard or perceived a God who acts for those who wait for Him.
- Our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment our iniquities take us away.
- LORD, we are the clay, you are our potter; we are the work of your hand.
- God's holy cities and Zion are a wilderness and Jerusalem desolation.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION: Isaiah is the exciting story of the Old Testament and the New Testament compacted into one book. It covers the wonder and splendour of Bible prophecy and echoes of the Lord Jesus Christ resound throughout Isaiah's visions and his messages. It teaches history as it affects God's people and constantly points to a future age when righteousness, justice, joy and peace will be established on earth. Isaiah prophesied about 740–700 B.C. He lived during the decline of Israel in the shadow of the powerful Assyrian Empire. He spoke the word of God to a people who were "deaf and blind" (Isaiah 6:10) who refused to listen to his warnings of looming disaster.

Isaiah warned the people of Judah's that their sin would bring God's judgment (i.e., seventy-years captivity) and declared that God is sovereign and would use Cyrus the Persian to return the people from exile. He spoke also of a servant and man of sorrows who would be wounded for our transgressions faithfully accomplishing God's purposes of salvation (Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12). The final chapters give a beautiful description of a new creation in which Christ will rule as King, judging the wicked and establishing God's Kingdom on earth. Following are four points that will help the reader understand the book of Isaiah as they travel through it: -

1. The history of Israel and Judah. At this time in the story Assyria has taken the ten tribes of Israel in the land of Samaria into captivity and marched up to Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) to destroy it, but failed. Later in the story Babylon attacks Jerusalem and conquers the city and takes the people of Judah into captivity. After this victory Babylon conquers Assyria which resulted in Israel and Judah being brought under the submission of Babylonian rule and the tribes being brought together during the seventy year Babylonian captivity.
2. Many of Isaiah's visions are written as though they have already taken place, but a majority of these visions are predicting future events that are about to happen during Isaiah's generation while others will come to pass in a future age. Though these visions are of future events Isaiah speaks them in the present tense, because he spoke them as they came to his mind and as he saw the events unfolding before him. They are often spoken in this manner because of the certainty of it and because God had ordained them and revealed them to his prophets who spoke them to His people so they must come to pass, because God cannot lie.(Titus 1:2).
3. Though Isaiah is primarily speaking to Judah (the two tribes at Jerusalem) much of what he says applies to Israel (the ten tribes in Samaria) because both Judah and Israel are in the same corrupt spiritual condition.
4. All the promises to Israel are now in Christ. God's promises to Israel now include the Jews and the Gentiles. This is because under the New Covenant God is building an entirely new nation made up of Jews and Gentiles of which Christ is the head. In this new nation that God is creating in the Lord Jesus Christ Jews have no advantage over Gentiles since all are one in Christ Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote: Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus they have been brought to God by the blood of Christ. Jesus has made Jews and Gentiles both one by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances so that Jesus might create in himself one new man (i.e., one nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles). In Jesus both Jews and Gentiles are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:1-22).

The practical application of what this means, is that all the future and eternal promises God made to Israel through Isaiah also apply to Gentiles who by faith belong to Christ.

No One has Heard or Perceived a God who Acts for those who Wait for Him.

Isaiah 64:1-4 ----- ¹Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— ²as when fire kindles brushwood (As when the melting fire burneth in the KJV) and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! ³When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.

When fire (the melting fire burns in the KJV) kindles brushwood: (v2) the book of Hebrews states, "Our God is a consuming fire," (Heb. 12:29) and fire in the Scriptures is often used as a symbol of the LORD'S consuming wrath. The picture presented here is of a fire raging through a forest and reducing it to brushwood, stubble and twigs. The symbolism is that God's wrath would consume Israel's enemies as a fire consumes a forest.

The fire causes water to boil: (v2) carries a similar idea, fire not only melts solid metals and reduces them to liquids, but also boils water and boiling water is reduced to steam and steam becomes a vapour that is carried away by the wind. The idea is that God's wrath would bring such destruction upon Israel's enemies that they would be as melted metals and as a vapour in the wind.

At this time Jerusalem is destroyed, God's His holy cities are a deserted, Mount Zion has become a wilderness, Israel's houses have been burned by fire and all their pleasant places have become ruins (v10). These verses apply primarily to the two tribes of Judah at Jerusalem, but the message also applies to ten tribes of Israel in the land of Samaria since both Judah and Israel were guilty of the same sins and both were invaded and taken captive. (Israel was taken captive to Assyria and Judah was taken captive to Babylon).

Isaiah here is praying that God would appear to Israel's enemies with the same majestic power that He did at Mount Sinai.

- Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. (Exodus 19:18).

Isaiah sees the devastating defeat of Israel and the mockery no doubt of their victorious enemies. It would appear to Israel's adversaries that Israel's God is weak and powerless they would credit the gods of Assyria and Babylon with the victory. Isaiah deeply desired that God would do some amazing miracle similar to His appearance to Moses on Mount Sinai, to put fear and terror into Israel's enemies, and no doubt to prove to them Israel's God is mighty in power and greater than the gods of Assyria and Babylon.

Later in history God not only tells Assyria and Babylon that it was Him who gave them the victory over Judah and Israel and that they were nations He used to bring judgment on His rebellious and corrupt people, but also uses Media Persia to bring His judgment upon Assyria and Babylon for oppressing His people while they were in captivity.

Our Righteous Deeds are like a Polluted Garment our Iniquities Take us Away.

Isaiah 64:5-7 ----- ⁵You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? ⁶We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment (are as filthy rags in the KJV). We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ⁷There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

In (v1) Isaiah stated that God loves those who love doing righteousness, yet in (v6) He says that all the righteous deeds Israel was doing was like a filthy garment to God. This is because even though they were outwardly keeping the religious ceremonial laws, their feast days, sacrifices, offerings and the Sabbath, it was all in vain, meaning God will count them as nothing.

This is because their daily lifestyle was corrupt they cheated the innocent out of justice, offered no help to the needy and oppressed the poor for their own gain. The fruits of the Spirit are more important to God than doing or keeping traditional outward acts of religious ceremonial rites. How tragic that God could not find anyone in Israel who sought after Him.

Sins of Israel: Isaiah says that, "Israel's righteous deeds are like a polluted and unclean garment," (v6) (are as filthy rags in the KJV). The enormous wickedness of Israel's sins becomes very clear when a light is shone upon the Hebrew meanings of the words, unclean, filthy and rags.

Unclean: comes from the Hebrew word (*tame'*) it literally means foul, polluted and defiled in a religious sense.

Filthy: comes from the Hebrew word (*'ed*) it literally means to set a period and refers to the menstrual flux (as periodical) and carries the idea of soiling and making filthy.

Rags: comes from the Hebrew word (*beqed*) it literally means a covering (i.e. clothing), and carries the idea of treachery.

Isaiah is saying that before God the people of Israel had become treacherous and so polluted and defiled that they were as a soiled menstrual cloth fit for nothing, but to be cast out in the rubbish. Following is a list of sins that permeated the land of Judah, Israel and Jerusalem throughout their generations. Unrestrained these sins eventually became like a contagious virus running rampant throughout the land of Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. They defiled God's Holy name and their own land by their lifestyle, deeds and actions. They committed gross idolatry and Baal altars were set up throughout their land.

They worshipped the goddess of love and fertility (her worship was sexually indecent). Worse than this they worshipped Moloch and sacrificed their sons to him in the Hinnom valley. They worshipped a golden calf at a religious centre at Dan and at a religious centre at Bethel. Altars were set up in the temple court for planetary worship and the worship of the host of heaven (i.e., the sun, moon and stars) and worship of idols and altars had been built under shady trees on their hills throughout their land.

Added to this innocent people were killed and cheated out of justice, leaders oppressed others for their own selfish gain and drunkenness, violence, robbery and gross sensuality was rampant. The rich cheated the innocent out of justice, and showed no sense of responsibility towards the poor and instead of relieving their economic distress they devised new means of depriving them of their property. Is it any wonder the LORD compares Israel's ways to the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity? (Ezek. 36:17) and poured out His wrath upon Judah, Israel and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The lesson for today: by wicked behaviour Israel defiled the name of God which resulted in the surrounding nations mocking and despising God. This shines a light on the following truth: the behaviour of everyone who confesses the name of God

and Christ His Son will determine to some extent whether outsiders are drawn to God or to despise Him. We are not witnesses to the Lord only when we are sharing our faith with another person our entire life is a witness to our faith and of God it can be a good witness or a bad witness.

God has hidden His face: (v7) means that He has withdrawn His favour from His people Israel.

The Lord has made Israel to melt in the hand of their iniquities: (v7) refers to their captivity in Assyria and Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem.

All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment: (v6) when God's people delight to do outward religious deeds; dress themselves in religious garments; strictly attend church and every Bible class; adhere to ceremonial rites and holy days and keep every religious customs and tradition on Sunday. But on every other day of the week give God no thought and do as they please and care not how their behaviour and speech reflects on the honour of God and the good name of Jesus.

Then all their religious efforts and works count for nothing if outside of doing them they deliberately live a lifestyle that brings dishonour to God's name and a bad testimony to the good name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though Israel did and lived as they pleased, they believed they were righteous and had not forsaken the laws of God, because they adhered to the outward religious practises of Israel. They delighted to draw near to God (Isaiah 58:2), but only on their terms, they were happy to keep their outward religious customs, providing they could live as they pleased.

It is interesting to notice that most cults are heavily laden with ritual and outward religious practises. This is because they believe they are made righteous regardless of what they say or how they live their lives as long as they adhere to their outward religious practises.

A personal testimony: some years ago a Christian man told me that when he was a teenager he was in a church in which the elders required the men to wear black trousers; a long sleeve white shirt; a tie and a black jacket even in the hot summer months. He said even though he thought it was ridiculous it was good for him, because he could do as he pleased during the week and as long as he turned up on Sunday in his black trousers and jacket, his long sleeved white shirt and tie he was accepted as a holy and righteous man able to perform all the duties the church required during the service.

Now here is the foolishness of this type of religion, if a man who did do all the right things before God during the week and did bring a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ turned up in a coloured short sleeved summer shirt, no tie or jacket and dress shorts with shoes and long socks, these elders would not only believe he was lowering God's Holy standard, but would also disqualify him from doing any duty in the church. This is the stupidity of judging peoples heart and salvation by outward things especially clothing.

O LORD, we are the Clay, you are our Potter; we are the Work of Your Hand.

Isaiah 64:8 -----⁸But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

The LORD uses secular nations, kings, and people to achieve His plans and purposes, sometimes to bless and other times to bring judgment. In the Old Testament God used Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon as His servant, (Jer. 25:9) to bring judgment on Israel.

God sent prophet after prophet to warn Judah and Israel of impending doom if they did not change their wicked ways, but they set their hearts diamond hard against the word of God's prophets (Zech. 7:12).

The LORD through the faithful prophets told them to surrender themselves to the King of Babylon and God would nurture them while in Babylonian captivity and deliver them. But they continued to rebel against the word of the LORD and turned to other gods and entered into gross sin so the LORD used Nebuchadnezzar King of

Babylon (who He called His servant (Jer. 25:9) to bring the curses of the covenant upon them. The curses of the covenant are found in (Deut. 28:15-68) and the blessing of the covenant in (Deut. 28:1-14). The fierce armies of Babylon invaded the land of Judah, laid their farm land waste, attacked Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) and pillaged the temple. Zedekiah was blinded and carried to Babylon, and the great bulk of the population was taken in chains there with him (around 587 B.C.).

Later Babylon conquered Assyria who had previously taken Israel (the ten tribes in the land of Samaria) captive. They went into captivity to the Empire of Babylon as two rebellious nations who had turned from God to idols and were even sacrificing their own children to pagan gods. They were under Babylonian rule for the next seventy years.

Archaeologists have found that at this time all of the cities of Judah were completely destroyed and that the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon was brought to an end. Observers would have said that the Hebrew nation was annihilated. Many of the other nations conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians did cease to exist, but the prophets proclaimed a better hope for the chosen people. "A remnant shall return" Isaiah had said, and in time this remnant, purged and returned, became the basis on which a new Israel would be built.

Now here is the good news: while in captivity God moulded them like a master potter moulds a beautiful clay jar, Israel and Judah went into Babylon as two unfaithful nations that had turned away from the LORD to idols and other gods. Seventy years later, Cyrus (King of Persia) who the LORD called His anointed shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) and took by His right hand (Isaiah 45:1) to conquer the Empire of Babylon gave written permission for Israel to return to Jerusalem.

Under Ezra and Nehemiah God brought Israel and Judah back to their beloved city Jerusalem as one united nation faithful to only one God, the LORD their God, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Israel never turned to idols or pagan gods again)

Multitudes of Jewish families who had been scattered throughout the nations returned to Jerusalem and the land of Israel with triumphant joy and rejoicing. When the temple of God was completed their faith was once again established and a golden time of prosperity and peace followed.

Sadly Israel as a nation never recognised their Messiah the Christ when he came, but even this was in the LORD'S sovereign will. The prophet Zechariah tells us when, the Lord returns in glory: -

- God will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn (Zech. 12:10-14).

For further information see the title: -

- The Potter and the Clay in, Various Topics (ON WEBSITE MENU).

God's Holy Cities and Zion are a Wilderness and Jerusalem Desolation.

Isaiah 64:9-12 ----- ⁹Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people. ¹⁰Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. ¹¹Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised you, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins. ¹²Will you restrain yourself at these things, O LORD? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

Isaiah sees the mourning and oppression of God's people while they are in captivity, he asks the LORD if He is going to restrain Himself and remain silent as he looks down from heaven upon the destruction of Jerusalem and sees His holy cities are deserted, Mount Zion has become a wilderness, Israel's houses have been burned and all their pleasant places have become ruins.

Isaiah is grieved as he sees the suffering and sadness of Israel and prays that God would not remember their iniquities and continue to inflict them forever, but instead remember that they are His people.

The following things all came to pass when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land of Judah

- Israel's cities and Zion became a wilderness (v10).
- Jerusalem and the House of God were both in ruin (v10).
- All Israel's homes and beautiful tourist places were also laid in ruins (v11).

It is interesting to notice: a common trait amongst those in the Bible that God inspired to proclaim His word and entrusted with great authority and responsibility was that they not only had a zeal and passion for God, but they also had a great compassion and empathy for God's suffering people and for the poor and those less fortunate. Isaiah clearly manifested all of these godly traits and attitudes.

End.