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

Isaiah 63.

(2015)

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But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

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Isaiah 63.

Topics.

- I have trodden the winepress alone, no one was with me.
- I trampled down people in my anger; I poured out lifeblood on the earth.
- The LORD said, "Surely they are my people," and He became their Saviour.
- In His love He redeemed them and carried them all the days of old.
- The LORD remembered Moses who put the Holy Spirit in the midst of Israel.
- Look down from heaven, your beautiful habitation, for you are our Father.
- We are like those you never ruled our adversaries destroyed your sanctuary.

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.

I have trodden the Winepress alone, No One was with Me.

Isaiah 63:1-4 ----- ¹It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." ²Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? ³"I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. ⁴For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.

Before even trying to interpret these verses we need to understand that Israel so grossly sinned and rebelled against the LORD that they grieved His Holy Spirit and because of this the LORD became Israel's enemy and fought against them. The following verse shows that the focus of this chapter is the LORD Himself fighting against Israel.

- They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. (v10).

Sins that permeated the land of Judah, Israel and Jerusalem: 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.

Why is your apparel red? (v2) workers that tread out wine, begin their day by climbing into a large round wooden vat to tread out the juice of rich red grapes, after doing this for a few hours they are going to be looking like they are covered in blood. God is asking the people of Israel, "Why does their nation look like workers treading out grapes" (looking like they are covered in blood). He then says to them that He is mighty to save, meaning that there is no limit to His power to deliver them, except their wickedness. Their own unbelief, rebellion and worship of foreign gods were the only thing that limited God from protecting, delivering and saving them.

Their lifeblood splattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel: (v3) even though God used Assyria to invade Israel and Babylon to invade Judah and to take them captive and destroy Jerusalem the LORD says, "He alone did it." From a human perspective Assyria and Babylon were mighty and powerful nations, but from a heavenly perspective simply pawns in the hands of God's judgment that He used to bring His judgment against the people of Israel and Judah.

It was because the LORD used Babylon and Assyria to bring His judgment upon the people of Judah and Israel that God said the blood of His people has splattered His garments. God is picturing Himself as being in the battle fighting against His own people. He is using biblical lofty language to shine a spotlight upon the horrific and tragic end result that Israel's gross sin and wickedness lead to.

During Israel's seventy year captivity in Babylon God had time to mould them as a master potter moulds a piece of useless clay into something people put on their mantel piece to admire. Israel went into Babylonian captivity as two rebellious nations full of gross sin and came out as one nation faithful to the LORD their God and excited to return to Jerusalem and rebuild His House.

The day of vengeance was in my heart: (v4) God had sent many prophets to warn Israel and Judah to turn from their rebellion and gross sins and return to the LORD, but they did not listen, therefore God was forced to bring his hand of judgment down on them. Israel and Judah were on a rapid path to eternal destruction, God's goal was to bring them back to Himself and their promised eternal inheritance. This He achieved during their seventy years under the authority, oppression and rule of the Empire of Babylon.

I trampled Down People in my Anger; I poured out Lifeblood on the Earth.

Isaiah 63:5-6 ----- ⁵I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. ⁶I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."

God searched for a man amongst the population of Israel to help Him deliver the nation from the destructive path they were on and turn them back to the right way, but He could not find anyone amongst them. How tragic? God says, He was shocked (appalled) when He could not find even one man.

I poured out their lifeblood on the earth (v6) refers to God using Assyria and Babylon to defeat Israel in war and take them captive. God is pictured as walking over the land trampling down the people of Israel, it would not be wrong to say that in this vision Assyria and Babylon were the feet of the LORD.

The LORD said, "Surely they are my people," And He became their Saviour.

Isaiah 63:7-8 ----- ⁷I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Saviour.

The King James Bible says: -

- I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. ⁸For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.

Isaiah is grieved at what he sees happening to Israel and Judah so to encourage himself he says that he will reflect on the loving-kindness of the LORD, (v7) God's loving-kindness here would embrace: -

- God miraculously delivering Israel from the bondage of Egypt.
- God opening the Red Sea and deliver Israel from their enemies.
- God's forgiveness, mercies and goodness toward them.
- The multitude of God's blessings and His promised eternal inheritance.
- God's abundant love grace, redemption and salvation that He blessed them with.
- God's longsuffering, forgiveness, justification, adoption and His promise of eternal life.

Isaiah re-accounts all these blessing to comfort himself and no doubt to put the goodness of God in remembrance of the people of Israel.

For he said, "Surely they are my people," (v8) when he chose them as His unique people, and made a covenant with the early fathers and brought them out of Egypt. There is no other nation on earth that has history with their God as Israel does. Their history with the LORD their God goes back to the beginning of time no other nation or religion can claim such miracles and wonders or history no matter what god they may believe in.

The following verses show that the United Kingdom of Israel has always been God's special and unique nation unlike any other nation, of them God said: -

- Israel was his son who he called out of Egypt and he loved them when they were a child (Hosea 11:1).
- He gave birth to Israel and carried them from the womb even to their old age. (Isaiah 46:3-4).
- Israel is his allotted heritage (Deut. 32:9) and the apple of his eye (Deut. 32:10).
- Israel is a people holy to him (Deut. 7:6) and his treasured possession (Deut. 14:2).

The LORD has not spoken this way with any other nation, but God has not only spoken of Israel differently, but always dealt with them differently to any other nation: -

- To Israel God gave the Ten Commandments and showed his great power. (Exodus 20:1-17).
- To Israel God declared his word, statutes and his rules. (Rom. 9:4)
- To Israel God gave the prophets, the worship and the promises. (Rom. 3:4)
- To Israel belonged the covenant, the adoption, the patriarchs and the glory. (Rom. 3:5)
- To Israel the oracles of God were entrusted. (Rom. 3:2)
- The people of Israel are the offspring of Abraham the father of faith. (Rom. 9:7)
- From Israel's race came the Christ the Saviour of the world. (Rom. 9:5)

- God declared his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation (Psalm 147:19-20).

The LORD has not given any other nation such great privileges. These are the many reasons the Jews (especially the religious leaders of Jesus generation) considered themselves to be the holy race with God and the Gentile nations to be the unclean race without God.

The thermometer of God's prophecy: it is true that Israel has been and still is a special nation to God, but since Christ death and resurrection salvation for both Jews and Gentiles is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless Israel remains a clear sign of where we are in prophecy concerning Christ's return. It could be said that they are the thermometer of God's prophecy much like the mercury on a natural thermometer measures the heat of the day and moves up the vertical red line warning us of impending danger when the heat of the sun is reaching temperatures that are dangerous for the good health of the skin and our well-being.

Likewise Israel can be seen as the mercury of Bible prophecy in the sense that world events that come upon the nation of Israel (especially Jerusalem) are signs that give us some insight as to how close we are to that glorious breathtaking and world changing day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory. But God's focus during our present age for eternal salvation is upon creating a new nation in Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. This new nation is also called a new creation in Christ, the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the church and the Kingdom of God.

Israel's love for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob cannot be doubted. When their Messiah does return in glory and the LORD pours upon them a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy when they look on him whom they had pierced, not only will the entire nation weep over the horrific crime they committed against him (Zech. 12:9-14), but the entire world and its oppressive systems of global finance and trade will be changed and its corrupt governments will be replaced for the better. For further information concerning the new nation God is building in Christ, see the title:

- The Commonwealth of Israel, at the end of this chapter.

The LORD'S statement, "they are my people," carries the idea that though they are unworthy of the LORD, yet He cannot but look upon them as His people. Israel had covenanted with the LORD to be His people and He had covenanted with them to be their God. It was on the foundation of this covenant that God favoured them with His love and the blessings of His grace and goodness.

Children who will not deal falsely: (v8) (that will not lie in KJV) the following verse clearly show that this is not spoken as though God was ignorant of the fact that Israel would rebel and turn against Him: -

- The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. (Deut. 31:16).

Parents tend to think that children who they have treated with kindness and care will not abuse their kindness as they grow. Likewise God thinks the best of His children even though He was aware they would do otherwise.

He is speaking within Himself according to human attitudes of thought of what He might naturally have expected and hoped for, as the result of their covenant with Him and His love, kindness and goodness toward them. This highlights the enormity of their stubbornness and perversity in their rebellion against the LORD.

NOTE: the LORD is willing to hope well of His people as parents do of their children. However He does not forget, but neither does He hold resentment or bitterness in His heart they are foreign entities to Him. God not only chooses to take Israel's past rebellion and cast it into the darkness of the bottom of the ocean and fill His mind afresh toward them, but also grants them a new and fresh beginning. This same principal applies to all who return to the LORD in honest heartfelt repentance.

The LORD became their Saviour: (v8) (was their Saviour in KJV) (v8) when there was none to deliver or uphold them He alone became their Saviour and saved them in all their distress. The idea is that He chose them and in choosing them He became their deliverer and saviour in the following two ways: -

1. The literal Saviour in this mortal world (i.e., from the warriors of Egypt in the Red sea and from enemies in the wilderness and the land of Canaan etc.).
2. The spiritual Saviour from sin and death, as He is of all the faithful in Christ even though they do not perfectly attain to the just expectations God calls them to.

God's gifts of righteousness and salvation are not imparted to Israel according to their self-effort or good works if this was the case then they would not be gifts of free grace. All God's gifts flow from His sovereign mercy, His pure grace and His free unmerited love, because even our best works are tainted with some form of sin.

In His Love He Redeemed them and Carried them all the Days of Old.

Isaiah 63:9-10 ----- ⁹In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.

The expression, "In all their affliction he was afflicted," (v9) carries the idea that when Israel is afflicted God is afflicted, when Israel is grieved, God is grieved, this idea is in harmony with the following verses: -

- I will bring to an end in Moab, declares the LORD, him who offers sacrifice in the high place and makes offerings to his god. ³⁶Therefore my heart moans for Moab like a flute, and my heart moans like a flute for the men of Kir-hareseth. (Jer. 48:35-36).
- Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezek. 18:23).
- I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live. (Ezek. 18:32).
- Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek. 33:11).

These verses not only shine a spotlight upon the truth that God has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked and deeply grieves over their death, but also shine a spotlight upon the truth that He earnestly desires that all would repent of their wicked ways and be saved to eternal life.

With this truth in mind ponder for a moment how grieved God must have been to see the children he chose and redeemed not only fall so far away from Him, but also become so corrupt that being a God of justice He was forced to bring punishment upon them.

It could be likened to an earthly father and judge who raised his son in love only to see him in later years become such a criminal that he as a judge of justice is forced to imprison him to uphold the law and protect others from being influenced by his wrong doing.

The Angel of his presence saved them: (v9) refers to the Angel of the LORD who goes before the armies of Israel to give them victory over their enemies and who delivers and protects them from dangers. Here we have a picture of God looking upon the Hebrews in bondage to Egypt with great love and pity and from that love not only redeemed and saved them, but also carried them through the wilderness.

They responded to His kindness not with the honour and praise due to him, but by rebelling against Him and entering into gross wickedness and thereby deeply grieving His Holy Spirit. In response to their evil practise He became their enemy and fought against them.

The LORD used Assyria to overthrow the ten tribes of Israel in the land of Samaria and take the people captive and used Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon to burn the city of Jerusalem and take the inhabitants captive for seventy years. Those that survived the Assyrian and Babylonian invasion were scattered amongst the surrounding nations so that Israel, was no longer recognisable as a nation. How tragic it is when the LORD'S people make themselves His enemy.

The LORD remembered Moses who put the Holy Spirit in the Midst of Israel.

Isaiah 63:11-14 ----- ¹¹Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit. ¹²who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, ¹³who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. ¹⁴Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

God's glorious arm: (v12) the glorious arm of the LORD in this context refers to God's power that He poured out upon Moses during the ten plaques of the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea.

Who led them through the depths? (v13) refers to Israel marching through the Red Sea.

Like a horse in the desert: (v13) refers to Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.

Like livestock that go down into the valley: (v14) this is a picture of sheep peacefully grazing in a lush green valley and signifies God's care for His people in the wilderness.

To make for yourself a glorious name: (v14) the reason God called Israel to be His unique nation amongst all nations of the world; guided them by His power; led them by His Holy Spirit and poured His power out upon them was to make for Himself a glorious name amongst the nations.

In the previous verses God was looking for a man to help him turn Israel from their rebellion and wicked ways. Here God reflects on the humbleness and integrity of Moses and how he led God's people before the LORD and seems to wonder, where are men like Moses amongst Israel? Sadly the LORD cannot find one, they all seek their own way how disappointed God must have been.

The purpose for Isaiah's question, "Who gave Moses the power to part the Red Sea and deliver Israel from their enemies and who was it that kept them in the wilderness?" Was to remind Israel that God has the power to deliver them from their enemies and take care of them as He did in days gone by (providing they remain faithful to the covenant).

Look down from Heaven, Your Beautiful Habitation, For You are Our Father.

Isaiah 63:15-16 ----- ¹⁵Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me (Isaiah and Israel). ¹⁶For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel (i.e., Jacob also a father of Israel) does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

This prayer of Isaiah's continues through to the end of this chapter and continues through the entire next chapter. The answer to it begins at (Isaiah 65:1). Some call this prayer the prayer and petition of the faithful in captivity.

Look down from heaven: (v15) (upon those in captivity) God sees everywhere and everything, but he is said to look down from heaven, because it is the habitation of His holiness and of His glory and of His throne whereon he reigns in majesty to behold His people with an eye of love, compassion, grace and mercy to preserve and protect them, to communicate to them, to support them under their afflictions, and to deliver them out of them.

The implication is that God had withdrawn to the recesses of His heavenly palace, and ceased to manifest His care and pity for His once-favoured nation and now they desire him to return, look down, and to remember his former mercies and bless them in their present calamities and trials as he had done in ancient times and return to them and glorify His name. The seventy year Babylonian captivity and the deliverance of the Jews from it were the beginning of the events of this prayer being fulfilled.

Where is, your zeal and your might? (v15) Israel is in captivity and there is no outward manifestation of God's interest for their welfare as there was in times past. Isaiah on behalf of the people of Israel is asking the LORD "Where is His zeal," for His great name, and for His own glory? What has become of that love for His people that in years gone by did not allow them suffer or to be wronged by their enemies? Are His mercies and His great acts that He did for His people withheld to be exercised no more?

Bowels: the stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me: (15) (the sounding of thy bowels and of your mercies toward me, are they restrained in KJV). The word bowels comes from the Hebrew word (*me'ah*) it literally refers to the intestines, the abdomen or the belly. Figuratively it carries the idea of the inner part or the heart as the seat of the emotions of compassion and the affections of the mind. It denotes tender concern and can refer to any strong compassionate and caring emotion of the mind.

The expression, "the sounding of your bowels," refers to those sympathizing sighs and compassionate groans that proceed from the inner most being when they are affected by the thought of deep grief, compassion and pity and to the inner noisy rumblings stirred up by strong passions such as fear and love commonly called yearnings of the belly. The meaning is, where is your former compassion and mercies which you formerly showed for your people in distress? Why do you lay a restraint upon yourself that your bowels (i.e., compassion, pity and mercy) are not moved towards us?

You are our Father, though Abraham and Israel does not know us: (v16) Isaiah tells the LORD that even though Abraham and Jacob (the fathers of Israel) would not recognise Israel, because they have forsaken the LORD; are divided into two nations (Judah the two tribes and Israel the ten tribes); are in captivity to Babylon; Jerusalem and the Temple of God lies in ruin and their land lays waste and barren of its people.

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.

However though their earthy fathers Abraham and Jacob would not recognise them their heavenly Father does and even though He is fully aware of their state He will not disown them or break His relationship to them, but will continue to be their Father and Redeemer and their gracious and merciful King.

We are like those You never Ruled our Adversaries Destroyed your Sanctuary.

Isaiah 63:17-19 ----- ¹⁷O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. ¹⁸Your holy people held possession for a little while; our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name.

How amazing is this, Israel and Judah follow the way of the flesh and enter into gross wickedness; worship pagan gods and adopt their pagan practise of sacrificing their children to foreign gods and then wonder why their heart is hardened toward God.

It matters not how strictly a believer adheres to ceremonial rites and keeps holy days and religious customs and traditions or how much they pray and sing songs of praise if they chose to follow the ways of the flesh, self, ego and pride and live a lifestyle that brings dishonour to God and to the good name of the Lord Jesus Christ then God will harden their heart and withdraw His favour and blessing. It would be equally true to say that they by their own hypocrisy and pretence of religion harden their own heart.

The practical lesson: if a person is in rebellion to God and prays for the LORD to bring them back, they may not like the path God has to take them on to achieve the answer to their prayer. To answer Israel's and Judah's prayer God had to take Israel into captivity to Assyria and Judah into captivity to Babylon and destroy Jerusalem and His own Temple, but the end result was one united nation faithful to the LORD their God destined for eternal glory and everlasting happiness.

The following verses show that at this time Israel is in captivity to Babylon: -

- Our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary (v18) Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and his armies did this.
- We have become like those over whom you have never ruled (v19) there is no other time in Israel's history other than their seventy years in captivity that these words would be more manifestly true. All their cities were in ruin, the land barren of inhabitants and they were under the oppression, authority and rule of Babylon a nation that worshipped idols and pagan gods. Truly at this time they looked like all other secular nations that are not called by the LORD'S name. (v18).

A great tragedy: and tragic testimony for God's chosen people, they had become like any other secular nation who has never been called by the name of the LORD and what enormous grief for God to see His children who He called His treasured possession in such a sad, corrupt and sorrowful state.

NOTE: this prayer continues through the entire following chapter and covers the destruction of Jerusalem; the Temple of God; Israel's cities and their houses and land.

End.