

CHAPTER 64

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 64

The prayer of the church is continued in this chapter; in which she prays for some visible display of the power and presence of God, as in times past, (^{2360b}Isaiah 64:1-3), and the rather, since unheard of and unseen things were prepared by the Lord for his people; and it was his usual way to meet those that were truly religious, (^{2360b}Isaiah 64:4,5), and she acknowledges her sins and transgressions; the imperfections of her own righteousness, and remissness in duty, (^{2360b}Isaiah 64:5-7), pleads relation to God, and implores his mercy, (^{2360b}Isaiah 64:8,9), represents the desolate condition of Judea, Zion, Jerusalem, and the temple, and entreats divine commiseration, (^{2360b}Isaiah 64:10-12).

Ver. 1. *O that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, &c.*] Before, the church prayed that the Lord would look down from heaven and behold, (^{2360b}Isaiah 63:15), now that he would open the heavens, and descend from thence; not by change of place, for he fills heaven and earth with his presence; but by some visible display of his power, in destroying her enemies, and delivering her from them. Some take this to be a prayer for the first coming of Christ from heaven to earth, by his incarnation, in order to redeem and save his people; and others that it is for his second coming to judgment, to take vengeance on his adversaries, when his wrath will burn like fire; but rather it is for his spiritual coming, to avenge his church and people on antichrist, and the antichristian states. She had seen him, as a triumphant conqueror, stained with the blood of his enemies; and now she prays for the accomplishment of what she had seen in vision and prophecy:

that the mountains might flow down at thy presence; kings and princes of the earth, and kingdoms and states governed by them, compared to mountains for their seeming firmness and stability; yet these will melt like wax, and flow like water, tremble and disappear at the presence of the King of kings, when he comes forth in his great wrath against them; as it is explained in the next verse,

that the nations may tremble at thy presence; (see ^{<6661>}Revelation 16:20). Here ends the sixty third chapter in the Targum.

Ver. 2. *As when the melting fire burneth*, &c.] Or, “the fire of melting”^{f1244}; a strong vehement fire, as Kimchi, such as is used under a furnace for melting metals; though Deuteronomy Dieu thinks a slow gentle fire is intended, such as is sufficient to keep the liquor boiling; which he concludes from the use of the word in the Arabic language, which, according to an Arabic lexicographer^{f1245} he quotes, so signifies; and to the same purpose Hottinger^{f1246}, by the help of the Arabic language, interprets the word of a small low noise, the hissing of a boiling pot; though, as Vitringa observes, could it be granted, which can not, that a slow fire raises great bubbles in water, such as when it boils; yet the fire, with which God consumes his enemies, in a figurative sense, is represented as most vehement and noisy. It seems much better, with R. Jonah, quoted by Kimchi, to understand it of “dry stubble”, which makes a great blaze and noise, and causes water to boil and rise up in bubbles; and with this agree some other versions, which render it by “bavins”^{f1247}, dry sticks and branches of trees; which being kindled,

the fire causeth the waters to boil; as the fire, under the pot, causes the waters to boil in it; the church here prays that the wrath of God might break forth upon his and her enemies, like fire that melts metals, and boils water. The figures used seem to denote the fierceness and vehemency of it. The Targum is,

“as when thou sendest thine anger as fire in the days of Elijah, the sea was melted, the fire licked up the water;”

as if the allusion was to the affair in (^{<1188>}1 Kings 18:38 ^{<1110>}2 Kings 1:10-14), but rather the allusion is, as Kimchi and others think, to the fire that burnt on Mount Sinai, when the Lord descended on it, and the cloud which flowed with water, as the above writer supposes, and which both together caused the smoke:

to make thy name known to thine adversaries; his terrible name, in the destruction of them; his power and his glory:

that the nations may tremble at thy presence; as Sinai trembled when the Lord was on it; and as the antichristian states will when Christ appears, and the vials of his wrath will be poured out; and the Lord’s people will be delivered, and the Jews particularly converted.

Ver. 3. *When thou didst terrible things, which we looked not for, thou camest down, &c.*] Referring to the wonderful things God did in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness, and particularly at Mount Sinai, things that were unexpected, and not looked for; then the Lord came down, and made visible displays of his power and presence, especially on Mount Sinai; (see ^{<1918>}Exodus 19:18):

the mountains flowed down at thy presence; not Sinai only, but others also; Kimchi says Seir and Paran; (^{<1084>}Judges 5:4,5 ^{<1870>}Psalms 68:7,8 ^{<1870>}Habakkuk 3:3,6).

Ver. 4. *For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, &c.*] Not only the things unexpected, undesired, and undeserved, had been done for the Lord's people of old; but there were other things, unheard of and unseen, which God, in his secret counsels, had prepared for them; and for which reason his appearance in his providential dispensations was the more to be desired and entreated. The Apostle Paul has cited this passage in (^{<1110>}1 Corinthians 2:9) and applied it to Gospel times, and to evangelical truths, which are not discoverable by the light of nature; had there not been a revelation from God, the ears of men had never heard them, nor the eyes of men ever seen them:

neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides thee; and though there is a revelation made, yet, unless God gives men eyes to see, and ears to hear, divine truths will remain unknown to them; and those who have knowledge of them, it is but imperfect; perfect knowledge of them is reserved to another state. These are mysteries and, though revealed, remain so; the modes of them being unknown, or the manner how they are is inscrutable; such as the mode of each Person's subsisting in the Trinity; and how the two natures, human and divine, are united in the person of Christ. Moreover, under the Old Testament dispensation, these things were not so clearly revealed as now; they were the fellowship of the mystery hid in God, the treasure of Gospel truths hid in the field of the Scriptures; they were wrapped up in the dark figures and shadows of the ceremonial law, and expressed in obscure prophecies; they were kept secret since the beginning of the world, from ages and generations past, and, not so made known, as now, to the holy apostles and prophets; a more full and clear knowledge of them was reserved to Gospel times. This may also include the blessings of grace, more peculiarly prepared and provided for the church of Christ under the Gospel dispensation, especially in the latter part

of it, as the promise of the Spirit; more spiritual light and knowledge; peace in abundance, and such as passeth all understanding; and particularly what will be enjoyed in the personal reign of Christ, described in so pompous a manner, (~~600~~ Revelation 20:1-21:27) and it may be applied to the glories of the future state, which are such as the eye of man has never seen, nor his ear heard; and, as the apostle adds, have not entered into the heart of man to conceive of; and, as Jarchi paraphrases the words here,

“the eye of any prophet hath not seen what God will do for him that waits for him, except thine eyes, thou, O God;”

having cited a passage of their Rabbins out of the Talmud^{f1248}, which interprets the words of the world to come,

“all the prophets say, they all of them prophesied only of the days of the Messiah; but as to the world to come, eye hath not seen, &c.”

Some read the words, “neither has the eye seen God besides thee who will do for him that waiteth for him”^{f1249}; that is, none besides thee, O Christ, who lay in the bosom of the Father, and was privy to all, (~~400~~ John 1:18): what

he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him; the apostle quotes it, “for them that love him”; which describes the same persons; for those that wait for the Lord love him, and those that love him will wait for him; as Old Testament saints did for the first coming of Christ, and as New Testament saints now wait on him, in the ministry of his word and ordinances, for his spiritual presence, and also are waiting for his second coming, and for the ultimate glory; and for such persons unseen and unheard of things are prepared in the counsels and purposes of God, and in the covenant of his grace; Christ, and all things with him; the Gospel, and the truths of it, ordained before the world was; and all the blessings of grace and glory. The Targum is,

“and since the world was, ear hath not heard the voice of mighty deeds, nor hearkened to the speech of trembling; nor hath eye seen, what thy people saw, the Shechinah of the glory of the Lord, for there is none besides thee, what thou wilt do to thy people, the righteous, who were of old, who wait for thy salvation.”

Ver. 5. *Thou meetest him that rejoiceth*, &c.] Not in a carnal way, nor in a sinful manner, nor in a hypocritical one, or in vain boastings, all such rejoicing is evil: but in the Lord, in the person of Christ; in the greatness, glory, and fullness of his person; at the promise, and in the view, of his coming in the flesh, as Abraham did; in the grace of God displayed in him, and in hope of the glory of God by him; such a frame of spirit is agreeable to the Lord:

and worketh righteousness; a truly gracious soul is not idle, but works; not in his own strength, nor for life, or anything but what is just and right; no man indeed can work out a perfect righteousness, nor should men attempt to work out one for justification before God; but should lay hold by faith on the righteousness of Christ, which is the evangelical and best way of working righteousness; and such do works of righteousness in faith, which is doing them in the best manner, and the course of life of such is righteous; and these are regarded by the Lord, especially such who rejoice to work righteousness, or do it, in a cheerful joyful manner, which perhaps is the sense of the words: now such the Lord “meeteth”, or has been used to meet, in former ages, in all generations, even in a way of love, grace, and mercy; and prevents them with the blessings of his goodness; indulges them with communion with himself through his Son, typified by the mercyseat; and at the throne of his grace, and in his house and ordinances. The Jewish commentators understand this phrase in a different manner. R. Jonah and Jarchi interpret it of God’s meeting the righteous, and removing them out of the world by death, according to (^{<1025>}1 Kings 2:25) and Aben Ezra of his receiving their prayers and intercessions for others, according to (^{<237B>}Isaiah 47:3). Kimchi joins both senses together,

“the righteous, who were doing thy commandments with joy, are not now in the world, to stand in the gap for us.”

Those that remember thee in thy ways; they remember there is a God, and worship him; the perfections of his nature, and adore them; his works of providence, and admire them; and his blessings of grace and goodness, and are thankful for them: they remember him “in [his] ways”; in the ways of his providence, which are unsearchable, and past finding out; in the ways of his grace and mercy, so the Targum; or “for” or “because”^{f1250} of these, and praise his name; and in the ways of his commandments, which they observe.

Behold, thou art wroth, and we have sinned; or because we have sinned^{f1251}; as for us, we have sinned, and justly incurred the displeasure of God; and it is no wonder he hides his face from us, and does not meet us, as he has been used to meet his people formerly. The people of God sin, and this is taken notice of by him, and resented; and which is the cause of all their afflictions, in which the Lord appears to be “wroth” with them; not that he is properly so, for afflictions to them are not in vindictive wrath; but he seems to be wroth with them, he carries it towards them as if he was, when he chastises them, and hides his face from them. In those is continuance, and we shall be saved: or “in these we have been of old”^{f1252}; that is, in these sins; we are old sinners, sinners in Adam, sinners from our birth, and so in these sins is continuance: saints indeed do not continue in a course of sin, yet sin continues in them, and they are continually sinning in thought, word, or deed; yet nevertheless there is salvation from all their sins in Christ, in whom they shall be saved: or there is continuance in works of righteousness, and in the cheerful performance of them; the principle of well doing continues in believers, which is the grace of God, and spiritual strength, by which they do well; and through the grace of Christ they persevere in faith and holiness, and, persevering herein, shall be saved. Or rather there is continuance in the ways of God, in the ways of his grace and mercy; in them there is constancy, perpetuity, and eternity, as the word signifies; his love is an everlasting love; his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, and endures for ever; he is unchangeable in his grace and promises, and hence his people shall not be consumed in their sins by his wrath, but shall be everlastingly saved; which is entirely owing to his permanent and immutable grace, and not to their works of righteousness, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 6. *But we are all as an unclean thing, &c.*] Or “we have been”^{f1253}; so all men are in a state of nature: man was made pure and holy, but by sinning became impure; and this impurity is propagated by natural generation, and belongs to all, none are free from it; and there is no cleansing from it but by the grace of God and blood of Christ: all are not sensible of it; some are, as the church here was, and owns it, and the universality of it, and compares herself and members to an “unclean thing”, on account of it; so men, defiled with sin, are compared to unclean creatures, dogs, and swine, and to unclean persons; to such as are covered with loathsome diseases, and particularly to leprous persons, and who may be chiefly intended here; they being defiled and defiling, loathsome and

abominable, their disease spreading and continuing, and incurable by physicians; hence they were separated from the company of men; and the words may be rendered, “as an unclean person”^{f1254}, as such were by the law: or we are, in our own sense and apprehension of things; and this may respect not only the impurity of nature, but a general corruption in doctrine and manners among the professors of religion; such as was in the Jewish church about the time of Christ’s coming.

And all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; which is to be understood not of the righteousness of some persons in the church, which lay in outward rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices, which were no righteousness before God, and could not take away sin; and were indeed on many accounts, as they were performed, loathsome and abominable; (see ^{<3111>}Isaiah 1:11-14), or of others that lay in outward legal duties and works of the law, which were not done from right principles, as well as not perfect; and so, because of the impurity, imperfection, pride, and vanity, that appeared in them, were abominable to the Lord: but of the righteousnesses of the church herself; not of the righteousness of Christ, which was made hers by imputation; for this is not rags, but a robe, the best robe, and wedding garment; much less filthy, but pure and spotless, beautiful and glorious, as well as a proper covering; but then, though this is the church’s, and all true believers’, by gift, by imputation and application, yet its is properly Christ’s and is in him, and is opposed to their own righteousness; which is what is intended here, even the best of it; such works of righteousness as are done by them in the best manner; they are “rags”, not whole, but imperfect, not fit to appear in before God, and by which they cannot be justified in his sight; they are “filthy” ones, being attended with imperfection and sin; and these conversation garments need continual washing in the blood of Jesus; this is the language not of a natural man, or of a Pharisee, but of a sensible sinner, a truly gracious soul. The words may be rendered, “as a menstruous cloth”^{f1255}, as some; or “as a garment of spoil or prey”^{f1256}, as Aben Ezra, rolled in blood, either in war, or by a beast of prey; or as a foul plaster or cloth taken off a sore, with purulent matter on it^{f1257}, as others; or any other impure and nauseous thing. Hottinger^{f1258} thinks the word has some affinity with the Arabic **dd**], which signifies “running water”, such as the water of a fountain or well; so that the sense may be, that the church’s righteousness was like a cloth, so polluted and spotted that it could not be washed out clean but with clear and running water; and, in every sense in which it may be taken,

it serves to set forth the impurity and imperfection of the best righteousness of men, and to show that their works are not the cause of salvation, the church had an assurance of in the preceding verse:

and we all do fade as a leaf; or “fall”^{f1259} as one; as leaves in autumn: this is to be understood of a great part, and perhaps of the greater part, of the visible members of the church; not of true believers and real members, for these are rooted in the love of God, and in Christ, and have the root of the matter in them, the true grace of God; and therefore, though they meet with many blustering storms, yet do not cast their leaf of profession; indeed there may be, as there often are, decays and declensions in them; but rather this is to be interpreted of carnal professors, with which, at this time, the church abounded, who had no true grace in them; and so dropped their profession, and became like trees whose fruit withered, were without fruit; or like trees, in the fall of the year, which are without fruit, and shed their leaves, (^{<6112>}Jude 1:12):

and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away; as a leaf falling from the tree is carried away with the wind, which it is not able to withstand; so formal and carnal professors are carried away, through their sins, with the wind of persecution, and apostatize: or rather for their sins the Jews were carried captive, as before, to Babylon; so now by the Romans into various countries, where they are dispersed at this day; to which this passage may have some respect. “Iniquities” are put for the punishment of them; so the Targum,

“and, because of our sins, as the wind we are taken away.”

Ver. 7. *And there is none that calleth upon thy name*, &c.] Upon the Lord himself, who is gracious and merciful, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, and all sufficient, a God hearing and answering prayer, and the Father of his people; all which should engage to call upon him: or, “there is none that prays in thy name”, as the Targum; none that prays to God in the name of his Son, the only Mediator between God and men; he is the way of access to the Father; his name is to be used and made mention of in prayer; acceptance is only through him, and all favours are conveyed by him; (see ^{<6143>}John 14:13,14 16:23,24), not that there were absolutely none at all that prayed to God, and called upon or in his name, but comparatively they were very few; for that there were some it is certain, since this very complaint is made in a prayer; but the number of such was small, especially that prayed in faith, in sincerity, with fervency and

importunity; and, when this is the case, it is an argument and evidence of great declension:

that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; to exercise faith on God, as their covenant God; to lay hold on the covenant itself, the blessings and promises of it, and plead them with God: or to pray unto him, which is a wrestling with him, when faith lays hold upon God, and will not let him go without the blessing; and is an entreaty of him not to depart when he seems to be about it; or a detaining of him, as the disciples detained Christ, when he seemed as if he would go from them; and is also an importunate desire that he would return when he is departed; and an earnest request not to strike when his hand is lifted up: faith in prayer does, as it were, take hold of the hands of God, and will not suffer him to strike his children; just as a friend lays hold on a father's hand when he is about to give his child a blow with it for his correction; and such is the amazing condescension of God, that he suffers himself to be held after this manner; (see ^{<1326>}Genesis 32:26) (^{<1320>}Exodus 32:10,11 ^{<1328>}Luke 24:28 29), now, to "stir up" a man's self to this is to make diligent use of the means in seeking the Lord; particularly a frequent use of the gift of prayer, and a stirring of that up; a calling upon a man's soul, and all within him, to engage therein; to which are opposed slothfulness, &c. cold, lukewarm, negligent performance of duty, which is here complained of; there were none, or at least but few, that stirred up or "aroused"^{f1260} themselves. God's professing people are sometimes asleep; and though it is high time to awake out of sleep, yet no one arouses himself or others.

For thou hast hid thy face from us: or removed the face of thy Shechinah, or divine Majesty from us, as the Targum; being provoked by such a conduct towards him, as before expressed: for it may be rendered, "therefore thou hast hid"; &c.; or "though", or "when",^{f1261} this was the case, yet no man sought his face and favour, or entreated he would return again:

and hast consumed us because of our iniquities; by the sword, famine, pestilence, and captivity.

Ver. 8. *But now, O Lord, thou art our father*, &c.] Notwithstanding all that we have done against thee, and thou hast done to us, the relation of a father continues; thou art our Father by creation and adoption; as he was in a particular manner to the Jews, to whom belonged the adoption; and

therefore this relation is pleaded, that mercy might be shown them; and so the Targum,

“and thou, Lord, thy mercies towards us “are” many (or let them be many) as a father towards “his” children.”

We are the clay, and thou our potter: respecting their original formation out of the dust of the earth; and so expressing humility in themselves, and yet ascribing greatness to God, who had curiously formed them, as the potter out of the clay forms vessels for various uses: it may respect their formation as a body politic and ecclesiastic, which arose from small beginnings, under the power and providence of God; (see ¹⁵³⁶Deuteronomy 32:6):

and we all are the work of thy hand; and therefore regard us, and destroy us not; as men do not usually destroy their own works: these relations to God, and circumstances in which they were as creatures, and as a body civil and ecclesiastic, are used as arguments for mercy and favour.

Ver. 9. *Be not wrath very sore, O Lord, &c.*] They knew not how to deprecate the displeasure of God entirely; having sinned so greatly against him, they were sensible they deserved his wrath; but entreat it might not be hot and very vehement, and carried to the highest pitch, which would be intolerable:

neither remember iniquity for ever; to afflict and punish for it, but forgive it, for not to remember sin is to forgive it; and not inflict the deserved punishment of it, but take off and remove the effects of divine displeasure, which as yet continued, and had a long time, as this petition suggests; and therefore suits better with the present long captivity of the Jews than their seventy years' captivity in Babylon.

Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people; look upon all our troubles and distresses, and upon us under them, with an eye of pity and compassion; and consider that we are thy people, not only by creation, but by covenant and profession; even everyone of us; or we are all the people thou hast, the Jews looking upon themselves to be the special and peculiar people of God, and the Gentiles as having no claim to such a relation; this is the pure spirit of Judaism. The Targum is,

“lo, it is manifest before thee that we are all of us thy people.”

Ver. 10. *Thy holy cities are a wilderness*, &c.] Meaning either Zion, the city of David, and Jerusalem; the one called the upper, the other the lower city; now uninhabited, and a mere wilderness: or else the other cities of Judea, in which were formerly synagogues for religious service, and in which dwelt many godly families where the worship of God was kept up; but now a desert, at least quite devoid of true religion and godliness.

Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation; which are either explanative of the holy cities in the preceding clauses, or are mentioned as distinct from them; the account proceeding from the lesser to the metropolitan cities, which fared no better than they did, but equally lay desolate; and which fulfilled the prophecy in (~~382~~ Micah 3:12) and was the case of those cities, at the destruction of them by Titus; and to this day are in a ruinous condition in the hands of the Turks.

Ver. 11. *Our holy and our beautiful house*, &c.] Meaning the temple, the house of God, as Aben Ezra: called “holy”, because dedicated to holy uses; where the holy sacrifices were offered up, the holy service of God performed; and where the holy God granted his presence, and where were the symbols of it: and “beautiful”, in its building, as the first temple was that was built by Solomon; but here the second temple is meant, built by Zerubbabel, which being repaired and beautified by Herod, was a very beautiful building; and the Jews say^{f1262}, that

“he who has not seen the building of Herod has never seen a beautiful building;”

or it may be rendered, “the house of our holiness, and of our glory”^{f1263}; where their holy services were performed, and which was the glory of their nation, and on which they gloried and boasted:

where our fathers praised thee: with psalms and songs; the singers in the temple, as Aben Ezra; and the priests and all the people also, who, by their various services, as well as songs, gave praise and glory to God in this place; they do not mention their own services and praises, which they had been very negligent of, or not sincerely performed; but their fathers, which had been acceptable to the Lord, and therefore would bear mentioning when theirs would not: now this place, in which the glory of God and the interest of his people were concerned,

is burnt up with fire; this is true, as Kimchi observes, both of the first and second temple; the first was burnt with fire by Nebuchadnezzar king of

Babylon, (²⁶¹³Jeremiah 52:13), and the second by the Romans under Titus the man emperor, as Josephus^{f1264} relates:

and all our pleasant things are laid waste; their pleasant land, and pleasant cities, and especially Jerusalem, the palaces of their princes and nobles, and all the riches and grandeur of them, the temple, and all the rich vessels and utensils in it.

Ver. 12. *Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord?* &c.] From delivering us out of our troubles and miseries, and taking vengeance on our enemies, and showing thy zeal for thine own glory; or, as Kimchi paraphrases it,

“how canst thou contain thyself for these things, and not have mercy?”

how canst thou bear to see Judea, and all its cities, a wilderness; Jerusalem, and the temple of it, in ruins?

wilt thou hold thy peace? or, “be silent”; and not plead thine own cause, and the cause of thy people?

and afflict us very sore? exceedingly, even to extremity; or for ever, as the Targum, thinking it long, as well as heavy. Jerom observes, that the Jews say these words in their synagogues every day; which show that they look upon this prophecy to respect their present case.