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BIBLE STUDY

Straightway Church of Christ, Inc.

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The Late Bishop E. Samuel Green, Establishmentarian

“FILTHY RAGS, THE POTTER AND THE CLAY”

Isaiah 64:1-12

Isaiah 64:1 "Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence,"

This is a continuation of the prayer from the last chapter. This is a request for more. They are now asking for the presence of God to manifest itself upon the earth. Because God's people were either heading for or in exile when they read the book of Isaiah, they cried out for him to tear the heavens open like a piece of cloth and come down to rescue them. They asked the Lord to act as he had acted before. They wanted mountains to quake at his presence. To "rend the heavens" would be to make an opening so that God could come down and they could go up. God did come down to man in the appearance of Jesus Christ, {God manifest in the flesh}. They get the answer to this prayer in Jesus. When the veil in the temple is rent from the top to the bottom, it opens the way to the Father.

Matthew 27:51 "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;"

1 Timothy 3:16 "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

Isaiah 64:2 "As [when] the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, [that] the nations may tremble at thy presence!"

It is an automatic thing for water to boil when it is heated greatly. It would be an automatic thing for their enemies to be afraid at the presence of God. God's presence, in the past, had been a fearful thing. God's people had feared greatly when God spoke to them from Mount Sinai. They had feared so greatly that they asked Moses to speak to God for them in the future.

Isaiah 64:3 "When thou didst terrible things [which] we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence."

This is a way of expressing things, like God separating the Red Sea with the breath of His nostrils during the exodus from Egypt. They, also, were aware of the earth shaking at the presence of God at another time. It would be nothing for the presence of God to melt a mountain.

Isaiah 64:4 "For since the beginning of the world [men] have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, [what] he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him."

Just as the mountains quaked when he performed his awesome works in the past, this is one of the keys for God's people even today. We need to remember how God has come through in our past circumstances so that we can have faith to call on him in our time of need, for he acts on behalf of the one who waits for him. To "wait" for God doesn't mean to sit and do nothing. It means to live faithfully according to the revelation of God's Word as we patiently expect him to answer in his own time and way.

I Corinthians 2:9-10

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

All of the idols, and the false gods, do nothing to help their people, but God takes care of His own, for He is a living God. He is a very present help to His own.

Isaiah 64:5 "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, [those that] remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved."

The people acknowledged the reason for God's apparent lack of intervention to prevent his land from being destroyed: we have sinned, and you were angry. Israel admits they have sinned, and they repent, and ask for forgiveness. They, also, know why God has been angry with them. God is always ready to help those who are trying to live the righteous life and look to Him for aid. They must continue in their righteousness and not turn again to idols, as they had done so many times in the past.

Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean [thing], and all our righteousnesses [are] as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

These Israelites are very much like the heathen around them. If they were depending on their own righteousness to save them, they would fall very short. Their righteousness was but filthy rags. Jesus gives all who will believe in Him, His righteousness. The Christians have taken on the righteousness of Christ, which puts us in right standing with God. No amount of worship and prayers for deliverance will help if we continue to live by our own agenda and for our own glory. Therefore, the people had to say, All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment. The prophet is saying that all your righteous acts, your acts of justice and good are just deceit, a filthy covering for your treachery. The Hebrew word for filthy is 'idim. 'Idim is a word for a cloth that is used when a woman menstruates. This harkens back to the beginning of the verse where the prophets says that the people are unclean. A woman menstruating was considered to be unclean.

Isaiah 64:7 "And [there is] none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities."

The very first step in receiving Jesus as our Saviour, is to admit our sin. This is what these Israelites have done here. In a sense, they are saying, we deserved the punishment, because of our iniquities. They are even afraid of Him not hearing them now, because He has turned His face from them. This is a lack of understanding on their part. God hears and answers prayers, especially when they, or we, are trying to repent, and receive Him as Saviour. As the old saying goes, confession is good for the soul.

Isaiah 64:8 "But now, O LORD, thou [art] our father; we [are] the clay, and thou our potter; and we all [are] the work of thy hand."

64:8-12 Because God is faithful to his promises, Israel could say, Yet Lord, you are our Father and plead once again for his help (64:8). The end of this long prayer is a good example of what it means to remind God that we as his people are frail and sinful humans, and that he needs to intervene because of what he values so much—his people and his holy land. Now, they are recognizing God as their Creator. They are saying, we are like putty in your hands. You can make us into whatever you want us to be. This is a cry, actually, for God to reshape them into a vessel of honor.

Isaiah 64:9 "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we [are] all thy people."

This is a plea to God to let them start all over again. God had rightly been angry with them over the sin in their lives. I see in this, they are asking for a new spiritual birth in Him. That is just what happens when we come to Christ. We are born again not of flesh, but of His Spirit.

Isaiah 64:10 "Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation."

This was the sad condition of these lands then. I am sad to say it is pretty well the condition of our land today, from the spiritual standpoint. Some of us are crying to the Father in the name of Jesus today for a restoration to take place in the church. Our land is sinful. If we are to survive, our nation must repent and return to the God of our fathers.

Isaiah 64:11 "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

The temple in Jerusalem had been a beautiful place. It had been a place, where they could come and meet with the presence of God. Now, this is all in disarray. This pretty much is the state of our churches today. We somehow need to get God back in the church. The church must be a beautiful place to come and commune with God. In many churches today, God is on the outside looking in. True holiness in our worship will bring Him back into our midst. Our churches need to cease being a place of entertainment and become a house of prayer and praise again.

Isaiah 64:12 "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these [things], O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?"

Finally, the people asked, Lord, after all this, will you restrain yourself? Will you keep silent and afflict us severely? This was an urgent request for God to make his power manifest to his enemies, remember his people's afflictions, and rescue them before they were beyond recovery. In all the desolation of them, as a person and in their temple, will God not come and help them?

This is the strongest of plea for the help of God in their trouble. They are asking, will God continue to afflict them, or will He forgive them, and start them again?

QUESTIONS

1. What are they asking God to do in verse 1?
2. This chapter is a continuation of what?
3. How did God manifest Himself to man soon after this?
4. What does "rend the heavens" mean?
5. When is it an automatic thing for water to boil?
6. God's presence, in the past, had been a _____ thing.
7. What did the people feel, when God spoke to them from Mount Sinai?
8. What is verse 3 expressing?
9. What Scripture, in the New Testament, is companion to Isaiah chapter 64 verse 4?
10. An idol cannot help them, but God can, because He is a _____ God.
11. What are they doing in verse 5, that might help them with God?
12. What righteousness puts them, or us, in right standing with God?
13. Why do they believe God will not hear them?
14. What is the very first step in receiving Jesus as Saviour?
15. God hears and _____ prayers.
16. What are they recognizing God as in verse 8?
17. What are they crying out for God to do for them?
18. What happens when we come to Christ?
19. What was the holy city like?
20. What had happened to the holy and beautiful house?
21. Will God help them, or continue to afflict them?