

"I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me! I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation which did not call on My name!" (Isaiah 65:1, NASV)

"I revealed Myself to those who didn't even ask to know Me; those who did not seek Me found Me! I said to a nation that did not call on My name, 'Here I am! Here I am! I will help you!" (Isaiah 65:1, Passion Version)

Last week's lesson on Isaiah 64 continued with Isaiah's passionate intercessory prayer to God for Israel, as he (figuratively speaking!) "stormed the gates of heaven"! Pleading with God to "tear open the heavenly realm," and this time not just to "look down from His glorious habitation in heaven" (to see the desperate conditions of His people), but to actually "come down," and do something about it! "That the mountains might quake at Your presence...and that Your name would be made known to Your adversaries"! Pleading with Him to come down to the Mount of Zion," just as He had on Mt. Sinai "in the days of old" (check Exodus 19!)...when He did some "awesome things" for His people--things that had never been heard of before, or even dreamed of, when the mountains quaked, and the lightning flashed, as He came down to meet on the top of the mountain with Moses!

"You act in behalf of the one who waits for you, and meet with him who rejoices in doing righteousness, and remembers You in Your ways," Isaiah reminds God! "But, behold, You showed Your anger, for we have sinned, and have continued in them a long time" (Isaiah acknowledges)! "And (so) how shall we be saved? For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment! And we wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away! There is no one who calls on Your name...for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities!" Wow!

Then Isaiah (in verses 8-12, in what can only be described as a desperate plea for God's mercy and grace)--having brought to mind His promises--poured out his heart to the Lord on behalf of Israel: "But now, O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You are the potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, nor remember our iniquities forever! Behold, look now, all of us are Your people!" And look! "Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation! Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised You, has been burned by fire; and all of precious things have become a ruin! Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O Lord? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?" Wow!

And that's how our lesson on Isaiah 64 ended last week--with everything hanging in the balance!

So how would God respond to Isaiah's passionate, intercessory prayer, we wondered, as we grappled with last night's lesson on Isaiah 65!

The bottom line, as we quickly noted, was that God would not "keep silent"! And "He would repay"! (And, as a backdrop to the lesson, we were taken back, by Rod Turk, to

Exodus 34:6-7, to see how God revealed Himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and responded, under similar circumstances, when He declared: "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations!")

And with that we began our lesson on Isaiah 65, with God declaring that "He permitted Himself to be sought by those who did not ask for Him...and to be found by those who did not seek Him..."! He said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation which did not call on His name"! Who's He speaking of? The people of Israel? Or, the nations of Gentiles? One would think, based on the verses that precede and follow this passage, that it was the nation of Israel! But, interestingly, the apostle Paul, in Romans 10:20 applies it to the Gentiles, people to whom God had responded before they called")!

But it also appears clearly applied as well to the "rebellious people" of Israel...to whom God said "He had spread out His hands to them all day long...a people who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts; a people who continually provoke Me to My face, offering sacrifices (to idols!) in gardens and burning incense on bricks; who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine flesh..." And on and on! All conduct contrary to God's commands, as they followed pagan practices! (Watts notes that "sitting in the tombs and lodging between the rocks appear to be rituals of the cult of the dead, i.e., 'necromancy' in which one contacts the spirits of the dead by spending the night in cemeteries"!)

"These are smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day...and I will not keep silent, but I will repay"! The people had demanded that He speak, but they didn't realize that when He would speak He would speak "of judgment"! Paying them back, "in measure for their sin," Constable notes! (But apparently not "beyond measure"! And so, there's the answer we've been waiting for to Isaiah's questions in Isaiah 64:12!)

But, in accordance with His promise to Abraham, in Genesis 18:23-33, the Lord proceeds (in verse 8) to explain that even though He would "destroy the ungodly (the "bad grapes"), He would spare the truly godly (the "good grapes," and the "new wine") among His people! The ones He now refers to as "My servants"! The "offspring of Jacob," and heirs of My mountain from Judah," to whom would be given the fertile territory of Sharon "as a pasture land for their flocks, and the valley of Achor as a resting place for their herds"!

In verses 13-14, He foretells how "His servants" will be treated in contrast with "those who forsake Him"!

And so His "chosen ones" will be blessed in the earth by "the God of truth" (presumably speaking of the coming Millennial kingdom) when, Isaiah says, "the former troubles will be forgotten"!

But there's more! God promises, in verses 17-25, that at some point (apparently following the 1,000 year Millennial kingdom), He will create "new heavens and a new earth, and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind"! And Jerusalem "will be created for rejoicing and her people for gladness! And He Himself "will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad with His people"! And God "will wipe away all tears! (MacArthur notes that Isaiah's future kingdom "will include a temporal kingdom of a thousand years (the Millennial kingdom), and an eternal kingdom of God's new creation (new heavens and a new earth), but doesn't make clear, in this passage, the relationship between the kingdom's two aspects as does later prophecy, in Revelation 20:1-21:8!) And so we turn to the book of the Revelation!

Revelation 19 ends with the Battle of Armageddon and Christ's second coming--events that mark the close of the Tribulation! Then (again according to MacArthur's rendering), "the events of Revelation 20--the binding of Satan, Christ's 1,000 year earthly kingdom, Satan's final rebellion, and the Great White Throne judgment--fit chronologically between the close of the Tribulation and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth"!

In Revelation 21:1, John (the apostle!) sees "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away and there is no longer any sea"! Then he saw "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband! And he says, "I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away! And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new"! Wow!

Isaiah sums up Isaiah 65 by declaring that the relationship between God and His people will be so close that "He will anticipate and provide for their every need! He quotes God as saying that, "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear"!

Wow! "There's a great day coming, a great day coming! There's a great day coming by and by..."!

Aren't you glad that God "permitted Himself to be sought by you"? (Or did He first seek us?)

On to Isaiah 66!

Lowell