

## EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #93

Isaiah 64:1-12

There is no doctrine that is more in conflict with this world than the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. People look at poverty and persecutions and various disasters like hurricanes, fires, tornadoes, and floods and will even go so far as to question the existence of God. Furthermore, when we look at this world we see that it is an ungodly place in which sin and evil abound. As a result people question the sovereignty of God.

Standing against the philosophies and opinions of the views of this world is the inspired Word of God. When you look into the inspired Word of God, what you see is that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the sovereignty of God over everything. God is sovereign over all creation - angels, nature, and humans.

One of my favorite chapters in Proverbs is Proverbs 16. It is a chapter that elevates the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign over what a person says (16:1); He is sovereign over everything, including that which is evil (16:4); He is sovereign over a person's steps in life (16:9).

I am totally and completely convinced that everything that hits us, including the worst possible things we can imagine, fall under the umbrella of the sovereignty of God. **God can prevent anything, God can permit anything, and God can do anything.** In fact, Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

But there are times when our ways don't please the Lord. The fact is, sometimes the reason why God sovereignly permits our world to fall apart is because of our sin and rebellion against Him. We refuse to turn to God and we persist in our state of rebellion. That is the story right now for Israel.

If you don't like the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God, you will not like **Isaiah 64**. Because this entire chapter and prayer is based on Isaiah's grasp of God's sovereignty. In this chapter, Isaiah turns to the sovereign God and asks for His sovereign help. Israel had been in a spiritual drought for a long time and **Isaiah 64** reveals what Isaiah did:

**ISAIAH PRAYS AN INCREDIBLE PRAYER THAT GOD WILL BE MERCIFUL TO ISRAEL AND HELP HER IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT HE IS SOVEREIGN IN EVERYTHING.**

I truly believe that one of the most God-honoring things we can do is pray to God. When we pray and ask God for help, we assume that He is a sovereign God who can help, and that is what Isaiah does here.

There have been plenty of times since Isaiah prayed this prayer when it has been applicable.

In fact, it is certainly applicable for Israel right now. However, this prayer will especially become significant during the final 3½ years of the Tribulation which is known as the time of Jacob's trouble. This chapter is not written to us, but it is very applicable.

Now the ingredients of this prayer are both fascinating and important. What we may observe right now is that the prayer to this date has not been answered. However, there will come a day when it will be answered. There are **four main ingredients** to this amazing prayer:

**INGREDIENT #1** – Isaiah prays that God would come down and do powerful physical things so His name would be made known to the nations. **64:1-4**

In order for God to do anything for Israel or for us, He must “come down” from His high and holy habitation (63:15). He must come a long way down - as far as the distance from heaven to earth. When God does anything in regard to us, it is a major step-down.

From the days of Isaiah to our own time, the nations and adversaries of God have never seen God physically intervene and do spectacular things for those who wait on Him. But we know there is coming a day when that will all change. Just as fire makes water boil, God will make nations tremble (**verse 2**). We know that the heavens and the mountains will display the awesome power of God during the Tribulation, especially just prior to when Jesus Christ returns (Matthew 24:29-31). Isaiah longs for the Lord to return and prays for it. People right with God long for the Lord to return and take over the world. It is their aspiration just as it was with Isaiah.

According to **verse 3**, God has done some powerful things for Israel in the past and He will again do awesome things for His people that they never expected in the future. The reason Isaiah wants God to do these things is so that He may make His name known to all the nations.

I want us to consider for a moment the theology of **verse 4**. From of old they have not heard, they have not perceived, they have not seen God. This text clearly shows us how far man fell when he sinned against God. He didn't just slip up and stumble; he was dead in any relationship with God. There was not a man on this earth ever born who sought God (Romans 3:11). God chose Abraham, the father of the Jews, when he was living in an idolatrous land, and Abraham was not looking for God at all. Any time any person wants to hear from God and perceive things of God, it is God who did it. In fact, Paul quoted this very verse in making this very point (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

Augustine the famed theologian said that when man sinned, he started a depravity that makes it impossible for him to stop sinning. When Adam used his will to sin, he lost his will and himself. Augustine said that when he was questioned about “free will” he said “yes,” man has a free will, a will free from righteousness and enslaved to sin (James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 210). When Adam and Eve sinned, they ran away from God not to God. From the early days of Genesis, the story of man is the same - sinful man does not hear, does not perceive, and does not see. If man is to have any connection to God it will be due to God's grace. **Now what is so tragic about verse 4 is that Isaiah is talking about Israel, the nation of God.** Isaiah is not talking about heathen nations here; he is talking about the fact that Israel had so wandered from God that they could not see, perceive, or hear anything from God.

G. Campbell Morgan said one of the most depressing existences that God's people can experience is a life that does not have any evidence at all of the presence or the power of God (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, p. 211).

It is possible to be a believer and live such a carnal life that you miss seeing God do anything. That was the condition of Israel when Isaiah made this prayer to God.

**INGREDIENT #2** – Isaiah prays and acknowledges the kind of person who may move God to answer prayer. **64:5a**

F. C. Jennings said God will always hear the Intercessor who is nearest to Him, and frankly the Intercessor who is nearest to Him is His own Son and not us. However, there are **two qualities** of one who can pray and expect God to move:

**Quality #1** - This person rejoices in doing righteousness. **64:5a**

Now there is more to this than just one's attitude toward righteousness, although that is certainly stated here. But Isaiah is bringing out a very important truth, and that is, one who does righteousness will rejoice because He will see God do many blessed things.

**Quality #2** - This person remembers God and all of God's ways. **64:5b**

When God is blessing it is so easy to forget that it was God who blessed. That happened to Israel. She would have moments when God was blessing her and she would forget about the God who did it.

God is willing to meet with any person who rejoices in righteousness and remembers God in every context and situation of life. God may be moved by one who is captivated by Him and His Word. Isaiah was this kind of man and he was praying to move God.

If we expect God to hear and answer our prayers, we must line up our thinking and lives with the righteous Word of God.

**INGREDIENT #3** – Isaiah prays and acknowledges truth about their sin. **64:5b-7**

If we are ever going to move God, we cannot dance around the sin issue. We must face it and admit it. That is exactly what Isaiah does right here. Now I want us to keep in mind that **when Isaiah prays this prayer, he is not admitting these things about an unsaved nation but about an unspiritual nation.** This was a nation that was in a covenant relationship with God. However, they certainly were not walking close to the Lord.

**Admission #1** - Isaiah admits the reason why God is angry is because of their sin. **64:5b**

Israel has not just slipped up in sin; she has been in sin for a long, long time. In fact, the end of **verse 5** acknowledges that she was so deep into sin, Isaiah wondered if Israel could even be saved.

When a person falls deep into sin, others will begin to question whether or not they are even saved. Isaiah is questioning the potential salvation of the nation Israel.

**Admission #2** - Isaiah admits that all of them have become like one unclean. **64:6a**

That word “unclean” is not pretty in Hebrew. It is a word that describes something that has become polluted and defiled to the point that it was completely impure (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p.322). John Calvin said this refers to something that is “vile and worthless” (*Isaiah*, p. 368). This is the way God saw His own people. They were a nation who were living and acting as if they had never been clean.

**Admission #3** - Isaiah admits that all of their righteous deeds look like filthy garments. **64:6b**

Here is one of the most famous verses in Isaiah.

Now the Apostle Paul describes lost humanity in these kinds of terms in Romans 3, but may I remind us that Isaiah is not speaking here about lost humanity but of a corrupt nation. Dr. Warren Wiersbe made an interesting observation when he said, “If our righteousness is filthy, what must our sins look like in His sight” (*Be Comforted*, p. 160).

It seems to me that the point Isaiah is making is that it is possible for God’s people to live such dirty lives that He views even their righteous deeds as being filthy in His sight. People may do seemingly impressive things that God views as filthy rags.

**Admission #4** - Isaiah admits that their iniquities had caused them to wither. **64:6c**

One of the indicators that people of God have lost touch with God is that they wither up and are spiritually dry. They blow away in their iniquities just like the wind blows a leaf. Dabble around in vile depravity long enough and God can cause your spiritual life to wither up and you will accomplish nothing. That is what He has done to Israel.

**Admission #5** - Isaiah admits that there is no one who calls on God anymore. **64:7a**

If only someone would realize that Israel’s situation could all be changed if she would just cry out to God. If she would acknowledge her sin and call on Jesus Christ to help her, she would be delivered. But she will not do it. James taught exactly the same principle for the Church Age, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). It is possible for believers to drift so far away from God that they do not even pray anymore.

**Admission #6** - Isaiah admits that there was no one who even desired to take hold of God. **64:7b**

The verb “take hold” is one that means to hold so fast to something that you are bound to it and stuck to it (*Ibid.*, pp. 269-270). The Hiphil stem of the verb indicates that there was no one who even moved into the direction of taking hold of and binding oneself to God. Truth is, even today Israel, generally speaking, is not interested in carefully understanding the Scriptures so she may take hold of her God.

**Admission #7** - Isaiah admits that God had hidden His face from them and delivered them to the power of their iniquities. **64:7c**

Do not miss the theology of this verse; when a child of God has plunged headlong into sin to the point that they don't even seem to want a relationship with God, God is the One hiding Himself from them, and God is the One who is not delivering them from their sin.

It is not a question of God's ability to deliver; it is that He won't deliver.

**INGREDIENT #4** – Isaiah humbly appeals to God for help. **64:8-12**

When we have sinned against God, the only hope we may have is that God will be merciful to us sinners. The only possible help we may have must come from God. Isaiah knew that and there are certain realities Isaiah mentions in this amazing prayer:

**Reality #1** - God is our Father. **64:8a**

Isaiah reminds God that even though they looked dirty and filthy, He was still their Father.

The only way to become a son or daughter of God is by faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12-13).

**Reality #2** - God is the potter and we are the clay. **64:8b**

Notice that one of the first things Isaiah does is acknowledge the sovereignty of God. God is the potter and we are the clay. Those who want to see God do great things will get alone with God and admit this and will ask God to mold them into becoming a righteous vessel of honor.

**Reality #3** - Isaiah asks God to not be angry beyond measure. **64:9a**

It is one thing to make God angry; it is another to make Him angry to the point it is "beyond measure." Isaiah knew God had a right to be angry, but He is asking God to keep His anger in check. It is scary business for God's people to anger God. In fact, the writer of Hebrews said it is a "terrifying thing" (Hebrews 10:31).

**Reality #4** - Isaiah asks God not to remember their iniquity forever. **64:9b**

The reason why Israel is not being blessed by God right now is because God still remembers her iniquity, especially how she rejected His Son, Israel's Messiah and Savior. She killed Him. God is not about to get over that quickly. Isaiah appeals to God and asks God to please not remember that forever.

**Reality #5** - Isaiah reminds God that His property is in ruins. **64:10-11**

At the time Isaiah said this, this was not the condition in Israel, but it soon would be (II Kings 25:9-10).

**(God's Property Item #1)** - The cities of Israel's land are a wilderness. **64:10a**

**(God's Property Item #2)** - Zion has become a wilderness. **64:10b**

**(God's Property Item #3)** - Jerusalem is a desolation. **64:10c**

**(God's Property Item #4)** - The Temple has been burned and is ruined. **64:11**

Now the Temple was standing and in pretty good shape when Isaiah prayed this prayer. However, about 100 years later it was ruined and frankly has never been the same since. We know, prophetically speaking, this Temple will be rebuilt during the Tribulation and it will come under great destruction of the Antichrist.

Now look carefully at Isaiah's conclusion in **verse 12**. Isaiah believed that all of these negative things had come from the hand of God. God could have stopped them but He didn't. Isaiah knew that God had the sovereign power to turn this all around, which in the final two chapters of Isaiah God says He will ultimately do.

Are we not able to look at this text and see a mirror of ourselves? Isn't it true that there are times when we as believers have wandered far away from the Word and will of God? Isn't it true that we can say with the Apostle Paul there have been times when we are wretched? Perhaps your life right now is as dry as Israel. You are not seeing God do much of anything. Your spirituality is decreasing not increasing. Turn to the Lord and cry out to Him. Ask the Sovereign God of the Bible to come down to you and give you His grace.