

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 63:7-64:12

Topic

Isaiah illustrates God's involvement with nations as a potter working with impressionable clay.

Title

"One ClayNation, Under God, Impressionable, With Synergy & Atonement For All."

**What is the everyday object Biblical archaeology most depends upon?
Pottery.**

David Chapman, Professor of Biblical Archaeology, writes, "Archaeologists get very excited about pottery as very few people elsewhere in the world do because it's one of our main ways of dating."

The potter & the clay is a biblical illustration.

Psalms, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, and the Revelation make use of the illustration. *And of course, Isaiah.*

Isaiah appeals to the potter working with clay four times, including once in our text: "We are the clay, and You our Potter; And all we are the work of Your hand" (64:8).

The long passage in Jeremiah provides the interpretation of the illustration. "Look, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent

of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it" (18:6-10).

- In the finish of chapter sixty-three we will see that the nation of Israel did "evil in [God's] sight so that it [did] not obey [God's] voice." God therefore relented "concerning the good with which [He] said [He] would benefit it."
- Then, suddenly, Isaiah's vision is of Israel in the future. We are with the remnant of Jews who have survived the Time of Jacob's Trouble. Jesus is about to return to Earth to save Israel. *They repent!* God "Relent[s] of the disaster that [He] thought to bring upon [Israel]."

I'll organize my comments around two attention-getting points: **#1 If Your Nation Is Unrighteous, Then God Will Relent Concerning The Good With Which He Said He Would Benefit It**, and **#2 If Your Nation Is Repentant, God Will Relent Of The Disaster That He Thought To Bring Upon It**.

#1 - If Your Nation Is Unrighteous, Then God Will Relent Concerning The Good With Which He Said He Would Benefit It (63:7-12)

National unrighteousness is characteristic of Israel's history. Read the Book of Judges if you don't believe me.

Isaiah starts by reminding his audience that the LORD would rather be blessing them.

Isa 63:7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.

Isa 63:8 For He said, "Surely they are My people, Children who will not lie." So He became their Savior.

In the OT Book of Deuteronomy we read, "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 'Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the

faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments' " (7:7-9).

Despite the difficulties they might face, and the consequences of their sin, God would remain faithful to the covenants He had made to their ancestors.

Aren't there worse things than lying? The word for "lie" can be translated, *deceit* or *deceitfulness*. Think of your kids. Lying is sin; deceitfulness is on another level. It is evil.

Isa 63:9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old.

The "Angel" is none other than Jesus in a pre-incarnate appearance. When He so appears, we call it a *Theophany* or a *Christophany*.

The event descriptions seem to generally fit their time in Egypt, followed by their Exodus out of Egypt. Their Savior fully identified with them, redeemed them, and was their protector.

Isa 63:10 But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, And He fought against them.

It isn't a fight to destroy Israel. This match is a struggle *with* Israel to bring them to repentance. R. Kent Hughes calls it, "The grip of God's relentless grace."

The Jews "grieved His Spirit." In the NT letter the apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus, he said, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (4:30-32).

The wilderness wandering of the Jews was the quintessential example of bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. From the moment the Hebrews refused to enter the land of the giants until that generation died, they were grumblers & mumblers.

By those same behaviors **we** grieve the Holy Spirit Who indwells us. We're told, "Do not."

- Sometimes we say, I CAN'T *not* do them."

- God says you CAN *not* do them.

Sin obviously grieves a Person with the first name "Holy." I think what most grieves the Holy Spirit is a disbelief that He is your Helper, your Counselor, your Teacher. Of course you are weak, frail, prone to wander. Go to God, not the world, for grace.

Isa 63:11 Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying:
"Where is He who brought them up out of the sea With the shepherd of His flock?
Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them,

Isa 63:12 Who led them by the right hand of Moses, With His glorious arm, Dividing
the water before them To make for Himself an everlasting name,

Isa 63:13 Who led them through the deep, As a horse in the wilderness, That they
might not stumble?"

Isa 63:14 As a beast goes down into the valley, And the Spirit of the LORD causes him
to rest, So You lead Your people, To make Yourself a glorious name.

Through Moses, the LORD shepherded His nation, with the intent of pasturing them in
the plenty of the Promised Land.

Isa 63:15 Look down from Heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious.
Where are Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies
toward me? Are they restrained?

The "me" is the nation of Israel. The 7th century Jews were struggling with the
problem of their suffering. "Where is God when it hurts?" "Why, God? "Why me?" His
abundant love, expressed in His "mercies," seem "restrained."

The answer, in their case, is all too obvious: *They were totally backslidden in sin.*

What about us? What if suffering isn't the consequence of our sin?

**Some of God's mercies are going to be severe mercies because we remain in our
unredeemed bodies that interact with an evil world system.**

Isa 63:16 Doubtless You are our Father, Though Abraham was ignorant of us, And
Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; Our Redeemer from
Everlasting is Your name.

- We might call Abraham the Founding Father of the nation of Israel.

- Israel was Abraham's grandson and the father of the twelve sons who would be the twelve tribal patriarchs of the nation of Israel.

They seem to be complaining that God formerly helped Israel, but isn't helping them now. If He really is Father & Redeemer, then prove it.

Isa 63:17 O LORD, why have You made us stray from Your ways, And hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, The tribes of Your inheritance.

A ton of ink is wasted trying to explain God 'making' a person 'stray,' and 'hardening' his or her heart.

Carefully note this: *This is what the backslidders were saying to the LORD.* These were not God's words. *It is their accusation.* It is their false accusation. God does nothing of the kind.

Isa 63:18 Your holy people have possessed it but a little while; Our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.

The glorious, promise-filled life in the land flowing with milk and honey seemed a pipe dream. In their current predicaments, *it seemed they were out of their land longer than they were ever in it!* It would worsen:

- From the destruction of the Temple in AD70 until 1948, the Jews were dispossessed.
- Even though back in their land, adversaries are *still* treading down their Temple - by not allowing them to have their Temple!

Isa 63:19 We have become like those of old, over whom You never ruled, Those who were never called by Your name.

Another accusation hurled at God - He had disowned them. Have you ever hurled that one, terrible comment, meant to hurt someone? That is what Israel did here... To God.

Israel has had a long history of unrighteousness.

It continues today. They are in their land, but in unbelief in their Messiah. In 2018 Israel passed legislation declaring that it was a Jewish nation. It is a powerful reminder that the Jews have not received Jesus as their Savior.

Is the United States a righteous nation?

No; not by any standard we might apply. I'm not talking about our *founding*, but rather our *floundering*. I'm talking about the *Father*, not the *founding fathers*.

People are asking, "Is God going to judge us?" He isn't *going to* judge us... *He IS already judging us*.

This is what judgment looks like when God gives a nation over to the sin it demands.

#2 - If Your Nation Is Repentant, God Will Relent Of The Disaster That He Thought To Bring Upon It (64:1-12)

We are transported to the future, when the 7yr Time of Jacob's Trouble is nearly ended. The antichrist's forces have surrounded the Jews holed-up in Bozrah. It is a seemingly hopeless situation. They call upon the Lord, repenting of their sin. Wouldn't you know it - *God receives them, returns, and ends their enemies*.

Isa 64:1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence -

Isa 64:2 As fire burns brushwood, As fire causes water to boil - To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence!

This is future-talk. It started in 63:1-6. "Come down" is the cry. This is the Second Coming.

Isa 64:3 When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down, The mountains shook at Your presence.

When did the Lord come down and mountains shake at His presence? **In the future!** The Lord and His prophets can speak of the future as if it is fulfilled.

Isa 64:4 For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

In 6000 years of human history there has been no god or man comparable to the uniquely prophesied and qualified God-man, Jesus Christ. All the posers ask you to

"act" *for them* - to work and sacrifice *for them*. There is only One who came as a Servant to save you. God waits, not willing any should perish.

Isa 64:5 You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned - In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved.

Isa 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

Isa 64:7 And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities.

This is a spiritual 180 from the previous chapter. You probably recognize wording here that sounds familiar. That's because the apostle Paul quotes it in the NT Book of Romans. This is the 'Roman's Road to Salvation' in its unpaved beginnings: "we have sinned... No one calls upon [God's] Name... our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."

Isa 64:8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.

There is a fact about the Potter & the clay we sometimes overlook. The illustration is ***always, only*** used of God's molding and shaping **nations**. It is *not* used of molding and shaping individuals.

This is not insignificant. Certain aggressive but disturbing theologies teach that the Master Potter makes some 'people-pottery' that will definitely be saved, AND He makes some 'people-pottery' that *cannot be saved*. If you object to that awful depiction of God, they will look at you with their cold, steely eyes and say three words they believe will render you subdued and compliant: "God is sovereign." God's sovereignty becomes like 'nuclear fire' in a game of rock- scissors - paper.

Of course God is sovereign! His sovereignty doesn't mean God can behave in ways that are contrary to His nature. If something would be immoral for us to do, *how much more terrible if God does it?*

That approach to sovereignty reminds me of the famous Richard Nixon quote, "When the president does it, *that means that it is not illegal.*"

God is so sovereign that He can (and does) allow for my free will.

Isa 64:9 Do not be furious, O LORD, Nor remember iniquity forever; Indeed, please look - **we all are Your people!**

When *has* or *will* **all** Israel be saved?? At the Second Coming of Jesus.

Isa 64:10 Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.

Isa 64:11 Our holy and beautiful temple, Where our fathers praised You, Is burned up with fire; And all our pleasant things are laid waste.

There are admittedly various times that these two verses can be said to have been fulfilled. One of those times is in the future Temple in the Great Tribulation. That seems to fit the context best here.

Isa 64:12 Will You restrain Yourself because of these things, O LORD? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?

Dr. J. Vernon McGee writes, *"The prophet closes this chapter with a question: Will God refuse to act? The remainder of Isaiah's prophecy is God's answer to this question. God rejected Israel only after they rejected Him, but it did not thwart His plan and purpose for them and for the Earth. God has carried through with His program, which is yet to be finalized."*

More than a few scholars suggest that this prayer in chapter 64 is **the** prayer of repentance that the Jewish remnant will pray while holed-up in Bozrah and under attack by the antichrist. We looked last week at a passage in Hosea that indicated they would repent, over a period of three days, looking upon the One they pierced as Jesus returns. **All Israel will thus be saved!**

The Master Potter has made it clear: "O United States, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "The instant I speak to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy the US, if you turn from evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. The instant I speak concerning the US, to build and to plant it, if you do evil in My sight so that you do not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit you."