

## Handout: Isaiah Lesson 24

Isaiah's appeal for Yahweh to come down in judgment in Isaiah 63:19b-64:1-2 is described in terms of other theophanies in verses 1-2, like the events of the Exodus liberation (similar to those same works recalled in Ps 18:7-8l; 144:5):

- Like the quaking of the mountain in the theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16; 20:18).
- Like the holy fire in the theophany of the burning bush (Ex 3:2-6).
- Like the workings of God's other miracles that the people saw in the Exodus liberation (Ex 13:15-31; 15:11; 34:10; Dt 10:21; 2 Sam 7:23; Ps 106:22).

Fire is a re-occurring image of the mighty works of God; especially as the manifestation of His divine presence, as a sign of purification, and a sign of divine judgment. For example:

- God set angels with fiery swords to close the entrance to the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam (Gen 4:23-24).
- God destroyed the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire (Gen 19:23-25).
- God led the Israelites in the Exodus liberation in the manifestation of the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13:22).
- God descended on Mt. Sinai in the form of fire and appeared to the Israelites as fire (Ex 19:18; 24:17; Dt 4:12, 15, 24, 33, 36).
- God destroyed the sons of Aaron who defiled their priestly obedience with fire from heaven (Lev 10:1-3).
- God destroyed the Levites who rebelled against Moses and Aaron with fire from heaven (Num 16:35).
- God the Holy Spirit descended upon the first community of Christians praying in the Upper Room on the Feast of Pentecost in the image of tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4).
- The judgment at the end of time will come in unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43-49; Lk 12:49; 2 Pt 3:7, 12; Jude 7; Rev 20:9-15; 21:8).

Fire being associated with the presence of God is especially true in the Book of Isaiah (see is 4:5; 6:6; 9:4/5; 10:16; 29:6; 30:37, 30; 31:9; 33:12, 14; 66:15, 16, 24). Also see CCC 696, 1031, 1147, 1189 concerning the symbolic imagery of fire in Scripture.

64:7-11 are the final stanza of Isaiah's lament. So certain is Isaiah that these promised events will happen that he speaks of them in the past tense. Isaiah calls for Yahweh to remember two things and then ends his lament with a question. He asks God to remember:

1. It is God who is the one who created the nation of Israel.
2. God's covenant people are existing in a continual state of misery and shame.

Isaiah's question is: How can God ignore these facts and will He leave them to continual suffering by not forgiving them their sins?

In chapter 65 God answers Isaiah's lament in chapter 64. In the continued warnings concerning the destiny of the righteous and the wicked, God's message to Isaiah concerns:

1. God's judgment that is coming for the rebellious (65:1-7).
2. The contrast between God's righteous servants who listen to God and the rebellious wicked who have abandoned Him (65:8-16).
3. God's promise of the new heavens and the new earth (65:17-25).

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The sins of the people that God lists in 65:3-5 include:

1. They sacrificed using inappropriate sacrifices and worship sites.
2. They sat among the unclean graves of the dead expecting a revelation to guide them.
3. They ate forbidden foods like pork and yet considered themselves holier than others.

Isaiah describes the contrast between the righteous and the rebellious in 65:13-14. Each contrast is marked by the Hebrew word *hinneh* which means “behold” or “lo.”

1. God’s servants will eat while the rebellious go hungry.
2. God’s servants will drink while the rebellious are thirsty.
3. God’s servants will rejoice while the rebellious are put to shame.
4. God’s servants will shout for joy in their relationship with God while the rebellious shriek with sorrow and a broken spirit.

These blessings for the righteous servants points to the Eucharist in the Age of the Church and the promised divine banquet in the Wedding Supper of the Lamb at the end of time.

In 65:17-25, Isaiah receives an oracle concerning “something new.” “Something new” was first mentioned in 43:19 concerning the road of return from exile and mentioned again 48:6 concerning the secrets for the future about which the people do not know.

In Chapter 66, the final chapter of Isaiah, the focus is on:

1. God’s ultimate judgment and final restoration (66:1-14a).
2. The final wrath and glory of God (66:41b-24).

Verses 66:3-4 are an attack on insincere religious practices and pagan practices. Isaiah compares four legitimate expressions of religious practice with idolatrous practices that are an abomination to the Lord.

1. Sacrifice of a bull compared to pagan human sacrifice.
2. Sacrifice of a lamb compared to the pagan offering of a strangled dog.
3. Legitimate blood sacrifice compared to the pagan offering of pig’s blood.
4. Legitimate offering of incense compared to illicit offerings of incense.

The idea is that worship that is merely external is as evil as though it were idolatry.

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