EBS12 Isa 63-64

**Lesson 12: Isaiah 63-64**

**God’s Past and Present Work**

**Objectives:**

1. The students will understand how God’s plans for Jerusalem include the people joining him in creating a community of justice and righteousness.
2. The students will understand how many in ancient Jerusalem did not work for justice and righteousness.
3. The students will see how God’s plans for the new Jerusalem (Isa 60-62) have not been fulfilled.

**Preparation:**

1. Review passages in the NT that talk about the trinity including the scenes where Jesus is baptized and Col 2:9.
2. Review the passages in the NT that speak of God as Father.
3. Review the passages in the NT about the Holy Spirit.
4. Review hymns that call God Father including:
   1. Eternal Father, Strong to Save.
   2. This is My Father’s World.
   3. Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
   4. Faith of Our Fathers
   5. Father God in Heaven

**Theme:** The God high and holy sends a preacher.

**Background:**

1. Isa 56:1 announced the core theological issue of this section: God hoped post exilic Jerusalem would be a place of justice and righteousness. Isa 56:2-8 used the eunuch and alien as examples of how justice and righteousness work in a community dedicated to the covenant with God.
2. Isa 56:9-58:14 described post-exilic Jerusalem not as a place of righteousness and justice, but a community where leaders failed to lead, where the people focused on idolatrous religion and practiced oppression in the community.
3. Isa 57:14-21 and 59:1-22 wrestled with God’s response. The high and holy God dwells among the humble and contrite and loves his people so much as to come in battle against them.
4. Isa 60-62 explained the kind of community God hoped to establish in post-exilic Jerusalem. When God’s people turned to him in faith, kept sabbath, then these blessings followed. Despite Jerusalem’s resistance, God insists that he will create this new Jerusalem if not here in the eschaton.
5. Isa 63-64 set the stage for the grand conclusion of Isaiah 65-66 by recounting these issues:
   1. Isa 63:1-6—God’s solo effort to establish justice.
   2. Isa 63:7-14—God’s long history of loyalty to Israel.
   3. Isa 63:15-64:4—The prophet appeals to God to come again to help Israel.
   4. Isa 64:5-12—The prophet confesses the sins of Israel.
   5. Isa 63-64 ends without an answer from God. That will come in the climax to the book.

**Learning Experiences:**

1. Isa 63:1-6—God’s solo effort to establish justice.
   1. Isa 62:6-12 speaks in anticipation of God coming to establish the new Jerusalem.
      1. Watchmen on the walls call on him to come and wait for his arrival.
      2. Instructions are given for the people to prepare for his coming.
      3. They clearly expect him to return in order to put into place all the promises of Isa 60-62.
   2. Isa 63:1-6 appears to be a conversation between the watchman and God. The watchman asks two questions to which the LORD responds.
      1. The watchman asks: Who is coming from Edom covered in blood?—v 1.
         1. Why has God been in Edom?
            1. God often appears from the east, especially Edom, in theophanies. See additional study below. Isaiah seems to say that God makes his appearance in his normal way.
            2. In the book of Isaiah, Edom often represents the evil nations. See Isa. 11:14; 34:5f, 9; 63:1. It may be God returns from a mission of vengeance where Edom is again the symbol of wickedness.
         2. God appears again as a soldier. See Isa 59:15-20 and the additional study sections about God and violence.
      2. God answers—v 1.
         1. The one covered in blood is the LORD.
         2. He comes announcing vindication (the same word used for righteousness in Isa 56:1; 57:1 and as vindication in 62:1).
         3. The purpose of God’s coming is to establish righteousness and justice in the community.
      3. The watchman asks: Why are your garments red?—v 2.
         1. The image is one who has just finished treading the wine press and is tainted with the reddish stain of the grape.
         2. But God has not been treading wine.
      4. God answers—vv 3-6.
         1. God indicates that it is not wine, but human blood staining his garments as he took vengeance.
            1. It could be the vengeance of Isa 59:15b-21 or 61:2.
            2. God’s vengeance is not a petty self-serving revenge, but an action taken on behalf of the oppressed, vulnerable, innocent, hungry, naked and homeless in which he makes right the wrongs committed by others.
            3. It is not announced here who has received the brunt of his vengeance:

The reference to Edom could indicate it was the nations who brutalized Israel throughout history and thus an echo of Isa 13-24 and 34.

It could be Jerusalem has received the vengeance of God (because of Isa 56:8-58:14) so the reference to Edom indicates that Jerusalem has become as oppressive as the nations.

* + - * 1. Twice the text announces that God expected help in this process just as he did in Isa 59:16, but there was no help.

The call for assistance reflects on 57:14-21 and 59:1-22 where the establishment of God’s blessings in the community is a joint effort of God and the people. Jerusalem has not responded to God’s offer so God works alone.

See the end of the Isa 5 parable about the vineyard where God again stands alone.

* + - * 1. There are many images of God’s actions on behalf of vindication. List them.

1. Isa 63:7-14—God’s long history of loyalty to Israel.
   1. The dialogue between the watchman and God ends and the prophet speaks again taking up three issues:
      1. A look at the past work of God with Israel.
      2. An appeal for God to come again to help Israel.
      3. A confession of Israel’s sins.
   2. The prophet dips into older Old Testament scripture and history to recount how God worked on Israel’s behalf in the past despite their rebellion.
      1. Israel’s actions include:
         1. Dealing falsely with God—v 8.
         2. Affliction—v 9.
            1. The RSV text says “In all their [i.e. Israel] affliction he [God] was afflicted” which may be a reference to the affliction of the servant in Isa 50 and 53 but the theological implications of God being afflicted for Israel are not fully developed anywhere in the OT.
            2. The alternative reading may be more appropriate reading “In all their [i.e. Israel] affliction he did not afflict” suggesting that God may not have punished Israel when they were already being punished.
         3. Rebelled—v 10.
            1. Isaiah frequently refers to the rebellion of Israel: Isa. 1:2, 5, 20, 23, 28; 30:1, 9; 36:5; 48:8; 50:5; 63:10; 65:2; 66:24
            2. The image in Isa 1 compares Israel to a rebellious child.
         4. Grieved his holy Spirit—v 10.
            1. There are no capital letters in Hebrew so whether this passage says Holy Spirit or holy Spirit or holy spirit is up to the translator.
            2. The doctrine of the trinity is more fully developed in the NT. Some import the NT doctrine of the trinity on OT passages such as this one and Gen 1:1, 26.
            3. The entire book of Isaiah speaks frequently about the holiness of God (Isa. 1:4; 2:19; 3:6; 4:1, 3; 5:16, 19, 24; 6:3, 13; 8:13; 10:17, 20; 11:8f; 12:6; 17:7; 22:17; 27:5, 13; 29:19, 23; 30:11f, 15, 29; 31:1; 33:15, 23; 35:8; 37:23; 40:12, 25; 41:13f, 16, 20; 42:22; 43:3, 14f; 44:14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:2, 17; 49:7; 52:1, 10; 54:2, 5; 55:5; 56:2, 4, 6f; 57:13, 15; 58:13; 60:9, 14; 62:12; 63:10f, 15, 18; 64:7, 10f; 65:11, 25; 66:20) so the appearance of holy here is no surprise and probably continues the dominant thought of the book.
            4. Spirit is also a common word in Isaiah (Isa. 4:4; 11:2; 19:3, 14; 26:9; 28:6; 29:10, 24; 30:1; 31:3; 32:15; 34:16; 37:7; 38:16; 40:13; 42:1, 5; 44:3; 48:16; 54:6; 57:15f; 59:21; 61:1, 3; 63:10f, 14; 65:14; 66:2) though not all the references are to God. However, God is referred to as a spirit in several of these passages: Isa 11:2; 26:9; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; 61:1; 63:11, 14. It seems most likely that the prophet refers to the holy God who is a spirit rather than to the third being of the trinity.
      2. God actions include:
         1. God called them “my people.” This phrase appears repeatedly in the OT. See additional study.
         2. God sent his angel to save them—Ex 23:20-13; 33:12ff.
         3. God carried them—Isa 46:1ff.
         4. God worked through Moses—**E**x 1-Josh 1.
         5. God brought them out of the Red Sea—Ex 14-15.
         6. God sent his holy Spirit. See the discussion above.
         7. God led them through the wilderness—Num 10-Josh 5.
      3. God’s positive regard for Israel is captured in a series of highly theological terms, words that are used in both the OT and NT to describe God’s care for humankind. Using a concordance or memory locate other passages that use the same vocabulary:
         1. Steadfast love—v 7 (twice).
         2. Granted all—v 7.
         3. Goodness—v 7.
         4. Mercy—v 7.
         5. Savior—v 8.
         6. Saved—v9.
         7. Love—v 9.
         8. Pity—(or compassion) v 9.
         9. Redeemed—v 9.
         10. Made himself a glorious name—v 14.
      4. The prophet’s point is to call God to continue to act toward rebellious Israel in the positive ways that mark his past history with them.
2. Isa 63:15-64:4—The prophet appeals to God to come again to help Israel.
   1. Sensing that God is turning away from Israel, the prophet makes an impassionate plea for God to again appear on the earth. See the discussion of theophany in the additional study section.
   2. The appeal is made on several levels:
      1. Look down from heaven and see us—v 15.
      2. Return for the sake of Israel—v 17.
      3. Rend the heavens (as if heaven had curtains that needed to be opened for God to return, cf. Micah 1:2ff)—v 1.
         1. The return of God to the earth here makes the mountains quake.
         2. The prophet compares the effect of God’s return on nature to an uncontrollable fire.
      4. Make your name known—v 2. God’s name was an indication of his presence and affirmation of his relationship with Israel. It would be like one person giving another their passwords.
      5. You came down—v 3.
   3. God is described in several different ways:
      1. He lives in a holy and glorious place—v 13.
      2. He is characterized by zeal and might.
      3. His heart yearns for his people and is filled with compassion
      4. He is their Father.
         1. The image of God as Father is most highly developed in the NT and appears only a few times in the OT. See Deut 32:6; Psa 68:5; 89:26; 103:13 in addition to the multiple appearances here.
         2. See
            1. <http://www.haroldshank.com/essays/healing-the-wounded-father-%E2%80%93-the-contemporary-fathering-crisis/>
            2. Harold Shank, “Chapter Fifteen--Care for the Fatherless: Running Home to God” in *Listening to His Heartbeat—What the Bible Says About the Heart of God*. Joplin, Mo: College Press, 2009.
      5. He is Redeemer—v 16.
      6. He is unique and otherwise unduplicated—v 4.
   4. Israel is referred to in different ways:
      1. Abraham and Jacob do not know them—v16
         1. The reference compares God’s role as a Father who knows them with their biological ancestors Abraham and Jacob who long dead do not know them.
         2. It could also refer to the fact that the great men of faith would not know their faithless descendants.
      2. God made them err and hardened their hearts—v 17.
         1. This passage may reflect God’s role in hardening hearts during the time of the plagues in Egypt in which God responds to hearts hardened by hardening them even more.
         2. The passage may reflect the prophet’s view that God could do more for his people and thus the appeal for him to return.
      3. Servants—v 17.
         1. This term will be used 7 times in Isa 65.
         2. The reference here is not to the suffering servant of Isa 53, but Israel as God’s people.
      4. Tribes of his heritage—v 17.
      5. Holy people—v 18. See Isa 63:18; Dan. 12:7.
      6. Like those whom God never ruled—v 19.
      7. Like those who were never called by God’s name—v 19.
3. Isa 64:5-12—The prophet confesses the sins of Israel.
   1. Isa 64:5 involves 3 groups:
      1. The prophet addresses God who is the “you.”
      2. The “him” that works righteousness are the righteous and just in Jerusalem (Isa 56:1-7; 57:1; the oppressed in Isa a58).
      3. The “we” and “our” represents those in Jerusalem who fail to do justice and righteous on whose behalf the prophet confesses sin.
   2. Isa 64:6-7 is a confession of the sins of the “we and “our” in Jerusalem who do not do justice and righteousness.
      1. Their wrong doings are described in several ways:
         1. Unclean—v 6.
         2. Their best deeds are like polluted garments—v 6.
         3. Their lives are like a faded leaf, there is no life—v 6.
         4. They commit iniquities—v 6.
         5. No one calls on God’s name—v 7.
      2. As a result God has turned away:
         1. They are blowing away like the wind—v 6.
         2. God hides his face from them—v 7.
         3. God turns them over to their own sin—v 7.
   3. Isa 64:8-12 is the prophet’s repeated appeal for God to forgive and return to Jerusalem in which he makes several comparisons and arguments:
      1. God as Father should care for his children—v 8.
      2. God as the potter should mold the clay—v 8. See the same image in Isa 29:16.
      3. God is asked to minimize his anger—v 9.
      4. God is asked not to remember their sins forever—v 9.
      5. God is reminded that Israel is his people—v 10.
      6. The prophet points to the ruins of Jerusalem which God promised to rebuild—v 10-11. See Isa 42:14.
      7. The prophet drops all images and asks God not to restrain himself or to be silent or to continue the affliction on Jerusalem.
4. Isa 63-64 ends without an answer from God. That will come in the climax to the book.

**Continuities:**

1. Name some NT passages that call God Father. Why does the NT use the image of God as Father more frequently than the OT? How does Isaiah use the image?
2. Name some NT passages about the Holy Spirit. Why does the NT speak of the Holy Spirit as part of the Godhead while the concept is either infrequent or lacking in the OT? What does Isaiah mean by “holy spirit?”
3. Isaiah confesses the sins of Israel. How might a prophet confess the sins of your community?
4. Isaiah cites history of God’s past work with Israel. Why does he include the events and thoughts he does mention? What would you have added?
5. What is the nature of the God being described by Isaiah? What seems to make its first appearance here? What are continuities here that are mentioned earlier in the OT or repeated in the NT?

**Assignment: Read Isa 65-66.**

**Additional Study:**

1. Theophany
   1. The word “theophany” comes from two Greek words meaning “the appearance of God” while the term “epiphany” derives from Greek words meaning “to show forth.”
      1. God’s appearances on the earth are often divided into these two categories:
         1. Epiphany refers to God’s coming to act.
            1. In God’s visit in Jdg 5, he does not speak, but acts to save.
         2. Theophany refers to God coming to speak.
            1. Ex 19-34 is the Sinai theophany where God speaks repeatedly.
      2. Gen 2-11; Ex 3:1-22; Jud 5:4-5; Ps 68:1-2, 7-9; Isa 40; 63:1; 64:1-3; and Hab 3:13-15 are among the most often cited cases of theophany and epiphany.
   2. In the theophanies God often comes from the east (Seir, Teman, Paran and Edom are all in the east):
      1. Jdgs 5:4 LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom…
      2. Hab 3:3 God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.
      3. Deut 33:2 He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran, he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right.
2. Study the references to the people of God being called “my people.” Gen. 23:11; 41:40; 49:29; Exod. 3:7, 10; 5:1; 6:7; 7:4, 16; 8:1, 8, 20ff; 9:1, 13, 17, 27; 10:3f; 12:31; 22:25; Lev. 26:12; Num. 24:14; Jdg. 12:2; Ruth 1:16; 4:4; 1 Sam. 2:29; 9:16f; 15:30; 2 Sam. 3:18; 5:2; 7:7f, 10f; 1 Ki. 6:13; 8:16; 14:7; 16:2; 22:4; 2 Ki. 3:7; 20:5; 1 Chr. 11:2; 17:6f, 9f; 28:2; 29:14; 2 Chr. 1:11; 6:5f; 7:13f; 18:3; Est. 7:3f; 8:6; Ps. 14:4; 50:7; 53:4; 59:11; 78:1; 81:8, 11, 13; Isa. 1:3; 3:12, 15; 5:13; 10:2, 24; 19:25; 22:4; 26:20; 32:13, 18; 40:1; 47:6; 51:4, 16; 52:4ff; 53:8; 58:1; 63:8; 65:10, 19, 22; Jer. 2:11, 13, 31f; 4:11, 22; 5:26, 31; 6:14, 26f; 7:12, 23; 8:7, 11, 19, 21f; 9:1f, 7; 11:4; 12:14, 16; 14:17; 15:7; 18:15; 23:2, 13, 22, 27, 32; 24:7; 29:32; 30:3, 22; 31:1, 14, 33; 32:38; 33:24; 50:6; 51:45; Lam. 2:11; 3:48; 4:3, 6, 10; Ezek. 11:20; 13:9f, 18f, 21, 23; 14:8f, 11; 21:12; 25:14; 33:31; 34:30; 36:8, 12, 28; 37:12f, 23, 27; 38:14, 16; 39:7; 44:23; 45:8f; 46:18; Dan. 9:20; Hos. 1:9f; 2:1, 23; 4:6, 8, 12; 6:11; 11:7; Joel 2:26f; 3:2f; Amos 7:8, 15; 8:2; 9:10, 14; Obad. 1:13; Mic. 1:9; 2:4, 8f; 3:2f, 5; 6:3, 5; Zeph. 2:8f; Zech. 2:11; 8:7f; 13:9.
3. Make a study of fathers in the OT.
   1. List the biological fathers mentioned in the OT.
   2. Which fathers seem to be good fathers? Which ones are poor fathers?
   3. What kind of role does the father play in Proverbs?
   4. What implications are there in God’s instructions to Abraham as father in Gen 18:19? How does that passage connect with the concerns of Isa 56-66?
4. Make a study of God as spirit in the OT.
   1. Identify the passages where the word “spirit” refers to God. See the list above.
   2. God is often depicted in human terms (“God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” in Gen 3:8 or “the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” in Gen 6:6). How would one reconcile God as spirit with the descriptions of God in human terms?
   3. Look up the term anthropomorphism and anthropopathism in a good theological dictionary. How do these terms help in understanding the descriptions of God in the Bible?