

Israel's Prayer for Deliverance

From the prophetic Word, we understand that there is a “time of Jacob’s trouble” to come upon Israel, when the nation shall be brought to their knees by the afflictions of an invading power. Zechariah speaks of this:

“it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith Yahweh, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: **they shall call on my Name**, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, Yahweh is my God” (Zech. 13:8-9).

So it will be that in the depths of despair, the people shall turn to Yahweh who fought for them in the days of old, calling upon his Name and worshipping Him as their God. Isaiah chapter 30 also describes this cry of Yahweh’s people, and His response to them:

“Yahweh is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: **he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee**” (Isa. 30:18-19).

The chapter that we have as our Old Testament reading for today describes this “cry” in more detail, outlining the prayer of Israel for deliverance at this terrible time. Isaiah chapter 63 describes the advance of Messiah towards Jerusalem, carrying out the judgments of the Almighty upon those who will not accept the righteousness of his rule, and who refuse to submit to the dictates of His Son. Then we have the prayer of Israel for deliverance from the hand of the oppressor:

“Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained?” (Isa. 63:15)

This cry to Yahweh to “look down from heaven” picks up an expression from Deuteronomy chapter 26, and the words which were to be spoken when the tithes were given: “... **look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven**, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto thy fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey” (Deut. 26:15). Here was the implicit recognition that Yahweh was their provider, that he had given them the land, and all the blessings associated with it. The paying of a token ten percent of their produce was a recognition that all of it belonged to Yahweh, and that he was permitting them to enjoy his blessings. Even so, we must trust in the living God “who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). In Isaiah 63, we have the people entreating their God in repentance, recognizing Him as the source of all things, and desiring the blessings to be given once again.

BOWELS AND MERCIES

The source of Divine blessing is described as being “bowels and mercies”. That is, the innermost thought and desire, and the extension of grace as a consequence. The phrase is used in a number of other places:

“if there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, **if any bowels and mercies**, Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:1-2).

“put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **bowels and mercies**, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering ...” (Col. 3:12).

The bowels and mercies then, speaks of the merciful relationships between those of like precious faith: an innermost desire, manifested in the grace extended between saints. By contrast, to shut up one’s bowels is not to show grace to the brethren, and not to provide for their mutual needs:

“whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, **and shutteth up his bowels of compassion** from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (1 Jno. 3:17).

The call to Yahweh then, is to extend love and mercy in meeting Israel’s need for deliverance and subsequent blessing in the land – and that principle is something that Christ’s brethren must perform towards each other in their relationships today.

THOU ART OUR FATHER

It is sometimes thought that the Fatherhood aspect of Yahweh is a New Testament concept, yet this Old Testament passage shows otherwise. The people here plead their case on the grounds that Yahweh is their father, and they his children: “Doubtless thou art our Father ... thou, O Yahweh art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isa. 63:16). The language here is from David’s blessing at the inauguration of Solomon:

“Wherefore David blessed Yahweh before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou Yahweh God of Israel ***our Father***, for ever and ever. Thine O Yahweh, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Yahweh, and thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chron. 29:10-11: see also Mat. 6:9-13).

Israel were the national Son of Yahweh: (cp. “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and ***called my son*** out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1)). As children, they partook of the blessings of their Father, and it is upon the basis of this family relationship that they plead their cause once again before the Head of their family. The Family Name “is from everlasting”, and speaks of the greatness of the family head – even the Almighty Father Himself. The prophet Jeremiah also foretold of those days to come:

“But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me My father; and shall not turn away from me” (Jer. 3:19).

Notice, the proclamation “my father” is the answer to a question. That question is, How shall the blessings be given: i.e. a pleasant land, and a goodly heritage? The answer is, “thou shalt call me My father” – that fact is the basis for the giving of blessings upon the people, even as a father does his son.

“WHY HAST THOU MADE US TO ERR?”

The cry of Israel continues:

“O Yahweh, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servant’s sake, the tribes of thine inheritance” (Isa. 63:17).

Quite remarkably, this verse presents Yahweh as making his sons to err: but how is this so? And why is this so? It is written that “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (Jas. 1:13), so how is it that He can harden the hearts of His people?

A possible answer emerges from the consideration of the principles that lie behind another passage: 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. This chapter describes “them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thes. 2:10-11). Those that perish are those who “believed not the Truth”, and who do not love the Truth. God has sent them a strong delusion to “believe a lie,” and similarly hardened the hearts of those who did not believe the Truth taught by his holy prophets, making them err. Again, the exhortation for us is to do the reverse: to love and believe the Truth, having pleasure in righteousness and not the indulgence of our sinful human nature.

“THEY WERE NOT CALLED BY THY NAME”

One of the themes of this chapter, is that of the Name of Yahweh. Verse 12 describes how the Almighty divided the water at the Exodus “to make himself an everlasting Name”. Verse 14 describes how that He led his people “to make thyself an glorious Name”. Again, in addressing Yahweh as their Father, Israel are portrayed as calling upon their Redeemer and saying: “thy name is from everlasting”. Verse 19, under current consideration describes the enemy: “thy were not called by thy Name”, and again verse 7 of chapter 64 laments: “there is none that calleth upon thy Name”. The Name of Yahweh, literally meaning, “He shall be” encapsulates the purpose of the Almighty to become manifest in a great company of sons and daughters. Those “residue of men” (Gentiles who embrace the hope of Israel) who “seek after the Lord” are those “upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord”. They are from the Gentiles, taken out to be “a people for his Name” (Acts 15:17, 14). Israel were originally ordained to declare their Father’s glory and Name amongst the nations, and in their state of repentance, they will seek to attain to that position once more. By contrast, those who had the mastery over them were never called by His Name, being unbelieving

Gentiles, who had their own motives for crushing Yahweh's People. They will be blown away like the chaff from the summer threshing floor, whilst Israel will be restored under the auspices of Yahweh's Son.

A REVELATION OF THINGS NOT SEEN

Verse 4 of Isaiah 64 is a passage often misunderstood, or at least, misquoted:

“For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him” (Isa. 64:4).

This verse is often cited to show that the best of the blessings of the Kingdom are not known by mortal man: he cannot know them, as they have not been revealed. However, the Apostle cites this verse in a contrary manner:

“as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. ***But God hath revealed them unto us*** by His Spirit ...” (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

It is true that man can naturally know nothing about the things of God, and it is also undoubtedly true that there will be aspects of life in the coming kingdom which is not made known to us. But the point made by the apostle is that the things which were formerly hidden, are now revealed. “we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). These things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ were not known until the revelation made by Him, and his Apostles - and since that time, believers throughout the ages have known them, rejoice in their understanding of them.

FILTHY RAGS

Another passage often misquoted is the next verse:

“but we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are ***as filthy rags***; and we do all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6).

So it is said that this is our present condition: dressed in filthy rags before our Creator. But this is contrary to the teaching of Scripture elsewhere: all our righteousnesses are not as filthy rags, according to Revelation 19:8, speaking of the Lamb's Wife:

“and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints ...” (Rev. 19:8).

The righteousness of saints then, are not “filthy rags”, but fine, white linen. The description in Isaiah 64 is Israel lamenting their state of sin before God. We, by grace, are not in that state: we have been cleansed by washing our garments in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). We must not confuse our position with that of the “miserable sinners” of the Gentiles, but be thankful for the cleansing that we have in Christ. We must seek to bring others into that same relationship that we share, taking heed that we do not defile our garments once again: “others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23). Filthy garments are worn by those outside of the sanctifying power of Christ, and are to be “hated” as we seek to save others with fear.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

In their cry for deliverance, Israel shall come once more to accept Yahweh as their provider, and deliverer. And in so doing, they recognize that they are but vessels in the hand of the potter, Who will make all things according to His Will: “But now, O Yahweh, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we are all the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8).

We are told elsewhere that it is through much tribulation that we shall enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22), and the word used there signifies *pressure*. We are but vessels in the hand of the potter, who will apply whatever pressure is needed to develop us into a splendid vessel, suitable for the Master's use. Another passage which describes the same idea is Jeremiah chapter 18:

“O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Saith Yahweh. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand O, house of Israel” (Jer. 18:6).

Again, in this cry for deliverance, there is an implicit trust in the pressure that is brought to bear for the development of an appropriate vessel, fit for the master’s use.

FORGIVENESS

The next principle in Israel’s prayer, is that Yahweh will not be angry for ever:

“Be not wroth very sore, O Yahweh, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people” (Isa. 64:9).

Here is a fundamental principle, also expressed in Psalm 30:

“For his anger endureth but for a moment: in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5).

Though we may do things that warrant the wrath of God, we can trust that he will turn from that wrath, and give us the joy of a new day, marked by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. His anger is but for a moment, especially when compared with the eternal joyous vision of the kingdom that he has provided us with. Again, another Psalm is comforting in this regard:

“If thou, Yahweh, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mightiest be feared” (Psa. 130:4).

In conclusion then, we see that in Israel’s prayer for deliverance, we find many aspects and principles which are brought to bear for our own deliverance from the bondage of sin and death. We implicitly trust in our Father for all that we have, and have the confidence that He is a wise potter able to make us suitable for His use. And we therefore look beyond the time of His anger, to the time of consolation, when the kingdom shall be restored to Israel, and by His grace, we might be included in that day of great joy and rejoicing before the lord in glorious immortality.

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