

Verses 1-15 of chapter 65 contain an overwhelming denunciation of the sin of the people who have been trying to use God instead of truly following Him.

Thus Isaiah 63:7-64:12 gives us a picture, not only of an attitude which existed in Isaiah's day, but of one which was especially typical of the Pharisees at the time of Christ. Today similar attitudes are found, not only among Jews, but also among many groups of Christians. The verses which follow give just the answer which a careful reading of the prayer would lead us to expect.

A very strong presumption in favor of the idea that this is not a prayer of God's people but a picture of a false attitude held by a substantial portion of the nation, is found in the fact that it is not followed as one might expect by words of pity or forgiveness, but by sixteen verses that include as strong a denunciation as can be found anywhere in the Scripture.

The prayer recognizes that the people had turned away from God and that this was the reason for their suffering, but contains no real statement of repentance, of sorrow for sin, or of determination to live in a way that would be pleasing to God. Its primary basis for asking help is: "God did wonderful things for us in the past, why doesn't He do them now? We are His people; nobody else has as much claim on God's goodness as we have. Beautiful as some of the expressions are, the general tone of the prayer is like the Pharisee's prayer in the New Testament, thanking God that he is not like other men.

As one reads the prayer it even seems at places to blame God for the fact that the people have fallen into sin. In 63:17 they ask why He made them err from His ways and hardened their hearts! After all they are His people and His temple has been destroyed. How can He keep from feeling sorry for them and restoring them and giving them again the great blessings that had been theirs in the past?

While the factual material of the passage is true, and many of its sentiments are entirely in line with the teaching of God's Word, there is a background which displeases God. It is not so much what is said as what is left unspoken.

The severe denunciation which follows shows that in the actual situation the prayer represents a pharisaical, holier-