

serve Him aright. It is all based upon the assumption that those who speak are His people and therefore entitled to His help.

Thus, verse 16, taken out of its context, might be a beautiful presentation of a wonderful truth. Even such great earthly support as that of Abraham and Jacob avails nothing without God's assistance. If one belongs to Him, all looking to earthly help is unnecessary. In the context the idea seems to be that the people whom God has chosen have an undeniable claim upon Him. He is their father, and therefore they feel that He must help them. While it is true, of course, that the one who has been born of God can never be lost, it is equally true and vital that such a one is bound to inquire what is wrong in Himself when God withdraws His blessing and to pray that God will cleanse and change him, lest a worse chastening be necessary.

In verse 17 the goodness of God is questioned, and He is blamed for their plight. They ask why He has made them err from His ways and hardened their heart from His fear. In the face of a similar charge Paul said: "May but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Romans 9:20). God never allows man to excuse his sinfulness on the ground that God caused it. James said: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (James 1:13-14).

There is an occasional touch in these two chapters of a sort of fatalism, a parody on true Calvinism. The Bible never condones denial of human responsibility, nor gives man the opportunity to make the excuse that he could not help himself. Calvinism recognizes that everything is in God's hands, and that He controls all the events of the universe, but is very careful never to make Him the author of sin. We are punished, not because God causes us to wander astray from His paths and hardens our hearts, but because we have turned aside from doing His desire and have neglected to seek to follow His righteous way. His mercy is boundless, but it has as its necessary precursor a broken and a contrite heart. Of personal contrition for the sin that separates us from God this passage shows no trace.

The latter part of verse 17 stresses the note that recurs over and over in the passage: "Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance." The makers of the prayer feel that they alone have a claim on God's blessing. He must help them because they are His. In verses 18 and 19 the sharp contrast is drawn again between "the people of thy holiness" and "our adversaries." The Authorized Version renders verse 19: "We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name."

#### ISAIAH 64

In 64:1-3, which should not be separated in any way from the preceding verses, the ardent plea for divine intervention is renewed, and the great acts which He has performed in past times are again vividly portrayed. All this is fine, if the right attitude is taken first; without such an attitude it is presumption and insolence. James said: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." (James 2:19)

Similarly verse 4 points out the indescribable nature of the blessings which God has prepared for those who wait for Him. There is no other God who can do such wonders. They surpass human understanding. Paul quotes this verse in I Corinthians 2:9 in showing the failure of the princes of this world to see the true power of God. It must be revealed by God Himself. The prayer thus contains a wonderful statement of God's goodness. But again the question must be asked, Who are the ones for whom the blessings are intended? Does waiting for Him simply mean being born to parents who come of a line that He has blessed, or does it require a personal attitude of