

His true people may be prepared and may see what their own action ought to be in the face of the situation.

### "HOLIER THAN THOU"

Alas, there is in this whole prayer an attitude of self-righteousness. It is felt that since God is their God He must bless them regardless of what they do. The very sins which they have committed have been committed because He has allowed them to fall into them or has not protected them from them. There is no evidence of personal penitence and desire to be cleansed from evil and to do good and follow God. One feels the utter absence of such a thought as the hymn-writer expressed when he said:

"And from my stricken heart with tears  
Two wonders I confess--  
The wonders of redeeming love  
And my own worthlessness."

There is no suggestion of need of a Redeemer to stand between them and God and to take upon His shoulders the punishment that should be theirs. If these chapters are correctly understood they lead directly into the following passage which gives God's answer to them.

God detests carnality and licentiousness, but He detests spiritual pride still more. It is brought out clearly in the chapters following Isaiah 40 that God did not call Abraham or set Israel apart for Himself merely because they were to be His people; but because they were His servants to accomplish His purposes in the world. If they sincerely try to do His will He will give them every blessing. If, however, they sit back and say, "I am holier than others; I am God's and He must bless me because I am His and because of the goodness that He has shown to my ancestors," then His answer will be, "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day" (Cf. 65:5). It is reminiscent of the statement in Jeremiah 7:4: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these." What did Jeremiah mean? Surely it was the temple of the Lord. It had been built at His express command. In it He had been worshiped and His sacrifices had been performed. Yet anyone who trusted that God would bless him simply because this was God's temple was trusting to lying words. God blesses those who follow Him, not those who put their hope upon something that their ancestors have done or upon the idea that they can be set up as better than others because of a previous relation to God. So we find that verses 1 to 15 of chapter 65 contains a most 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, and which is found today, not only among Jews, but also among many groups of Christians. The verses which follow it give just the answer which a careful reading of the prayer would lead us to expect.

### ISAIAH 65

Several times in the passage that we have just discussed the speaker dwells upon the great difference between those who considered themselves to be "all thy people" and those outside who "were not called by thy name" (cf. especially 63:19). In a startling answer, in 65:1-2, God declares that His mercy is to be poured out upon "a nation that was not called by my name," while those who have been His people must go through a period of purging and condemnation. The contrast between these two groups is stressed throughout the first 15 verses of the chapter. It reminds us vividly of the striking prediction of the turning of God's favor to the Gentiles in Isaiah 29, and of Paul's discussion in Romans 11. In Romans 10:20-21 Paul quotes