

ISAIAH

Chapter 64

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—2 as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! 3 When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 4 From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. 5 You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? 6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9 Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. behold, please look, we are all your people. 10 Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised you, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins. 12 Will you restrain yourself at these things, O LORD? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

64:1 *oh that* – Faith turns to the Lord in prayer. Even when God appears barricaded in heaven, ignoring the suffering of His people, faith prays. Consider the example of King Hezekiah. When Hezekiah peered out from behind Jerusalem’s walls to see the Assyrian army massed around his city, all appeared to be lost. No nation had been able to resist the military power of Assyria. Although Hezekiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done” (2 Chronicles 29:2), the Assyrian forces appeared to be irresistible and the destruction of Jerusalem inevitable. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, had led his forces against several other cities of Judah and had overcome every defense. The Assyrian commander taunted Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem. In his arrogant speech before the walls of Jerusalem, the enemy commander offered to give King Hezekiah two thousand horses if he could only put riders on them (Isaiah 36). It was a desperate time. Isaiah recorded the response of Hezekiah to these circumstances: “When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord” (37:1). The writer of Chronicles recorded, “King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this (2 Chon. 32:20) In such ominous times, God’s believers always turn to the Lord in prayer. This prayer serves as another example. All appeared hopeless. God remained silent. Yet faith held to the promises of God. (PBC)

rend the heavens. The sky is compared to a tent curtain. For this and the further description of the cosmic effects of God’s coming in judgment and redemption see Jdg 5:4–5; Ps 18:7–15; 144:5; Na 1:5; Hab 3:3–7. (CSB)

It appears in the time set for this prayer as though the Lord had withdrawn Himself from men, had spread out an impenetrable garment across the heavens and hidden Himself from His

children. This prayer makes bold to beseech God to tear this covering wide open and appear in the rift of the clouds. (Leupold)

come down – The prophet’s chief petition is that God would come down and act to save Judah in some dramatic and powerful way. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

Halfway through 63:19 the lament switches gears. Going beyond the plea for Yahweh to *look* down (63:15), the prayer escalates to the point of asking why Yahweh has not *come* down. Why has God refused to break through the firmament and save his people? Surely he has the power to tear the sky in two and attend to the community’s divisions. Yahweh has done it once (64:2–3 [ET 64:3–4]). Will he do it again? (CC)

The plea for Yahweh to “come down” with the resulting shaking and quaking (63:19b [ET 64:1]; cf. 64:2 [ET 64:3]) harkens back to the burning bush (Ex 3:7–8), the theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:11), the filling of the tabernacle (Ex 40:34), and the conquest of the land (Judg 5:5). When God opens the heavens and comes to save, he brings with him massive convulsions in nature. “Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightings light up the world; the earth sees and convulses. The mountains melt like wax from before Yahweh, from before the Lord of all the earth” (Ps 97:3–5; cf. Hab 3:3–15; Ps 18:10 [ET 18:9]). (CC)

The Word of God is firmly fixed in the heavens (Ps 119:89). But it doesn’t stay there. It rains down from heaven and brings righteousness (Is 45:8) and salvation (Is 55:10–11). It comes in the night to a sleeping Samuel and sets in motion events that cannot be thwarted (1 Samuel 3). It is so mighty that even the strongest of prophets grows weary from holding it in (Jer 20:9). And so they arise and speak. The shepherd picks up the harp and sings the Word (e.g., Psalm 23). The tender of sycamore trees tunes his tongue to prophesy (Amos 7:14–16). The fishermen stand in the temple and preach (Acts 3–4). Apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—they all rise and speak because the Word of God has first spoken to them. Indeed, the Word climactically descended in the incarnation of God’s Son, Jesus, the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14). He came in meekness, but he shall return in great power and glory. The earth quakes at his resurrection (Mt 28:2) and again to set his apostles free to preach (Acts 16:26). The greatest earthquake will commence when he comes down from heaven one final time (Heb 12:25–29; Rev 16:18). (CC)

God appears to have withdrawn His presence from the people crushed by adversity. They feel that He must come down from heaven to see their plight. (TLSB)

64:2–3 When God shows Himself and His brilliant light and fire, mountains will quake and nations will tremble. When the Law was given at Mount Sinai, both the mountain and the people trembled (Ex 19:16, 18). (TLSB)

64:2 *fire kindles brushwood...water to boil* – The first two lines of this verse are parenthetical. They indicate that something must happen to the earthly, material object when brought into the presence of the Holy God. Fire kindled near dry brushwood ignites and consumes quickly. Hot fire brought into touch with water makes it to seethe. (Leupold)

brushwood. Useful for making a quick, hot fire. (TLSB)

Throughout the Bible, fire often announces God’s presence. In this context, though, sorrow is expressed: if Yahweh had sent his protecting fire, much like the “pillar of fire” that led Israel out of Egypt and on her way in the wilderness (e.g., Ex 14:24; Deut 1:33; Is 63:9, 11–13), the

community would not be experiencing its present pain. But alas, there is no divine blazing and burning, only silence. (CC)

make your name known. The revelation of God, displaying His power and glory.) (CSB)

But far more striking is the effect of the divine theophany on those who thought they might confront the Almighty without fear. Were they to be confronted by the Lord, they would come to know the “name” of the Lord, that is, become aware of His superlative majesty. But if such awareness did not result they still would be strongly affected, overcome by fear and trembling. (Leupold)

64:3 *awesome things.* See Ps 66:3, 5–6. (CSB)

“In your doing awesome things [that] we did not expect ...” There had been a time when Yahweh addressed his people’s cries in unpredictable ways (e.g., Ex 2:24–25; 3:7–9, 11–14; 4:1–17). This is not to say that God acts out of character or repudiates his Word, quite the opposite (Ex 2:24; 3:15–16). Yet at one time in Israel’s history every avenue of escape was closed. So what did Yahweh do? He came down and parted the waters at the Red Sea (Exodus 14). No one expected that! When Israel was faced with the “impenetrable” walls of Jericho, Yahweh brought them down (Joshua 6). Again, no one expected that! We stumble in the dark, determined to stay on the road to eternal darkness. What did God do? He sent Jesus to die for our sins, and against all expectation (Lk 24:4–5, 11, 22–24, 41), the Savior rose again on the third day. He began pouring out his Holy Spirit through his appointed means of grace (Acts 2:38–39). Nobody imagined that would happen, but it did. And it still does! (CC)

The prayer began with a recitation of “the many good things [the Lord] has done for the house of Israel” (63:7). Here the praying prophet pins his prayer onto the grace God had demonstrated to His people in the past. (PBC)

mountains quake – This alludes to the Lord’s theophany on Mount Sinai. Although that appearance was to the chosen people alone, Isaiah trusts that another such “rending the heavens” would take place to destroy Judah’s enemies. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

64:4 Cf 43:10. Paul uses this verse to marvel at the incomprehensible wisdom “God has revealed” in the Gospel of salvation (1Co 2:9–10). (TLSB)

no ... God besides you. Following Isaiah’s lament that Yahweh could have and should have acted like he did in the days of old (63:19b–64:2 [ET 64:1–3]), in this verse he offers an interlude that celebrates a prominent theme in his book: no other god acts like Yahweh (e.g., 44:6–8; 45:5–6, 18–22; 46:9). A similar pause, announcing Yahweh’s incomparability, comes in the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:10–11). Likewise, after laying out the divine plan for “Israel” (Romans 9–11), the apostle Paul cannot restrain himself from blurting out a doxology of God’s incommensurability (Rom 11:33–36). (CC)

Neither history nor revelation nor human experience testify to any other god who acts to save those who wait for him. Only Yahweh has been heard and seen. His involvement with the world climaxes with the incarnation of Jesus (Heb 1:1–4; 1 Jn 1:1–3). *Homo factus est*, “(he) was made man” (Nicene Creed). There in the arms of Mary is the eternal Son of the Father. There on Calvary, he endured the shame of the cross (Heb 12:2). A week after Easter, even doubting Thomas had to acclaim him, “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28). Now we wait for his second

epiphany, the “manifestation of the glory of our great *God* and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). (CC)

The only God is the Trinity (Is 59:21; 61:1; 63:9–10). He alone makes himself known in judgment, but all the more through the grace and mercy that come through Christ Jesus. Every other so-called “god” or “lord” is a figment of human imagination (cf. 1 Cor 8:5–6). Those who trust them will face eternal disappointment, for they are waiting to see and hear gods that do not exist. They will find out that Satan is the sinister reality behind their false gods (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:19–20; 1 Tim 4:1). (CC)

The uniqueness of the God of Israel is under consideration. He alone has been known to appear unto the help of His people. God back as far as the annals of history or the memory of man can carry you, there is nothing on record like the deeds which the Lord has done. There are involved here no idle appearances to no affect or purpose. (Leupold)

wait for him. What would that deliverance be? How would it come? Just as no one in the past could have imagined the Exodus, so no human could imagine the deliverance God has provided for His people. God’s entire plan of salvation lay outside the scope of human thought and imagination. Who could imagine that God would send His one and only Son as a substitute to redeem the world from sin and deliver all humanity from death? Who would have ever imagined that God would accomplish this by sacrificing His own Son? What human mind could have anticipated the empty tomb? Would any single human imagine that by faith in God’s Servant Jesus Christ, a man or woman could become an adopted child of God? God’s deliverance always goes beyond what the human intellect can imagine by itself. (PBC)

64:5 *You meet.* To greet and bless. (TLSB)

works of righteousness. See 56:1. (CSB)

Isaiah recognizes the dilemma that should prevent a favorable answer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

God’s favors are not bestowed according to deserts but man must be receptive for what God has to give. Such receptivity is measured by the attitude that a man “rejoices to work righteousness,” that is to say, he remembers what God has taught His people to do and delights in doing it. But always God is in the background of such a man’s thinking, or man remembers Him in his ways. He cannot forget how God has helped and is sure that He will help again. (Leupold)

you were angry. God’s anger culminated in the exile. (CSB)

Prayer has its moods. It may fluctuate. In the preceding words a fact was firmly established: God is well able at any time to take things in hand for His people. But this note of confidence is now lost for the moment. Misgivings assail the individual and the nation. A touch of hopelessness takes hold. Where the speaker had come to some measure of assurance about pardon for his sins, he now feels that there may be some doubt about forgiveness. He feels that he and the nation are still under God’s anger. (Leupold)

saved. Or “delivered.” (CSB)

Whether translated as a statement (KJV), a question, or a wish, this clause points to the underlying cause of all distress: “We have sinned.” (TLSB)

Halfway through this verse there is an abrupt shift from the thanksgiving carried over from 64:3 (ET 64:4). Isaiah changes from high doxology to a woeful confession of sins. This returns the lament to the crux of the matter: Israel's guilt. Sin is confessed literally (64:4b [ET 64:5b]), cultically (64:5a [ET 64:6a]), and figuratively (64:5b [ET 64:6b]). God hides his face from such iniquity (64:6 [ET 64:7]; see also 59:2). (CC)

Judah, however, has been anything but devoted, and has done anything but right. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

They even felt for that matter, that they were perhaps beyond the point of recovery. (Leupold)

we sinned inn our sins – Only a few months after the Exodus, Israel worshiped a golden calf. (PBC)

In spite of the fact that the nation knew that God was displeased, they had to admit “we kept on sinning.” Sin had become a strongly ingrained habit. They had been so long in this unhappy state that it had become second nature. (Leupold)

64:6 *we have all* – In those words God's prophet proclaimed a principle that extends to all humanity of all time. He included us as well. (PBC)

Isaiah employs four similes to describe Israel's sin. An adequate grasp of the significance of human wrongdoing requires a variety of images. “Unclean” refers to being ceremonially defiled in sin or disease (Lev 5:2–3; 13:45–46). A recognition of his own uncleanness stands at the heart of Isaiah's experience: he is a man of unclean lips and is dwelling in the midst of the same kind of unclean people (6:5). (CC)

But this is not just Isaiah's problem. It is ours as well. We *all* have become unclean (cf. Rom 3:23). The vile taste of the truth is this: “and like a garment of menstruation are all our righteous acts” (Is 64:5 [ET 64:6]). Though it is hard to swallow, good works cannot save us from God's just judgment against sin. In fact, instead of being the solution, our attempts at achieving righteousness by doing good works are the root of our problem. Seeking to justify ourselves before God, we believe that climbing the ladder of noble deeds will make things right. The deepest desire of sinners is to boast in self, to be accounted righteous based on who we are and what we have accomplished. But such self-righteousness based on the Law is an affront to Yahweh. “At the cross our human righteousness and piety found themselves ranged in murderous enmity against the God whom they proposed to honor.” (CC)

At its root, sin is deeper than thoughts, words, or deeds that are done wrongly or left undone; it is a defilement at the core of who we are, as people living apart from a holy and righteous God. We should say to everyone we meet, “Hi. I am dying from sin, and it is contagious. I suggest you keep your distance from me because I will infect you and kill you too” (see 1 Cor 15:33). Being unclean makes us the opposite of Yahweh, for he is perfectly holy (Is 6:3–5). “Then where is the boasting? It was excluded” (Rom 3:27). We can only pray, “Forgive us our trespasses” (Mt 6:12), “Enter not into judgment with your servant” (Ps 143:2), and “We are unworthy servants” (Lk 17:10). Thank God that Christ, in his great love, not only touched and mingled with those who were unclean (Mk 2:16; 5:2, 27, 41; Lk 7:14), but also forensically became *omnium maximus peccator*, “the greatest of all sinners,” as the sin of the world was imputed to him on the cross (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24). (CC)

Isaiah combines the next two metaphors for sin into a picture of withering vegetation (cf. Is 1:30; 28:1, 4; 40:7–8) blown by the wind (Pss 1:3–4; 90:5–6), which rips fading leaves from their branches and whisks them away until they fall to the ground, where they decompose, rot, and over the course of time, vanish completely. What a grim picture of decay and death! Gregory the Great asks: “What is man but a leaf who fell from the tree in paradise? What is he but a leaf driven by the wind of temptation [cf. Ps 1:4] and lifted up by the gusts of his desires?” (CC)

unclean.† Like a person with a terrible disease (see 6:5; Lev 5:2; 13:45). (CSB)

polluted garment. Cloth used for a woman’s menstrual period, a time of uncleanness (Lv 15:19–33). “God rejoices in them [godly works] with all the angels. In comparison with these works all human holiness is just stench and filth” (LC I 198). (TLSB)

The prophet confesses gross sins of the whole nation and includes himself. He realizes the position in which this puts his petition. Again Luther’s explanation of the Lord’s Prayer (Fifth Petition) is instructive: We beg God’s forgiveness, “for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.” We are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, but we ask “that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

The word unclean means “polluted and defiled.” The Levitical laws described many things, such as certain animals as “unclean.” Isaiah confessed that the people themselves were “unclean” and placed himself among the polluted and defiled. (PBC)

polluted garment. The cloths a woman uses during her period, a time when she is “unclean” (see Lev 15:19–24; Eze 36:17). (CSB)

No matter how you construe it, it speaks of a deep awareness of sin, and is a powerful word. (Leupold)

fade like a leaf. A figure used also in 1:30. (CSB)

Sin makes us lifeless and dead like dry leaves that skitter and scrape across the ground in the autumn wind. By ourselves we have no life and can produce nothing of value in God’s eyes. Paul wrote, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

like the wind. Which blows away the chaff. (CSB)

This last comparison stresses the total instability of the life of sin. The disruptive effects of sin are under consideration. (Leupold)

64:7 *No one who calls upon your name*. The Lord urges earnest prayer in times of distress (see, e.g., 2Ch 7:14). (CSB)

The note of hopelessness becomes stronger. No encouraging signs may be detected. No one recalls that God is a God who forgives. So no one dares venture to approach the Lord to take him by the hand and claim mercy from the all-gracious Lord. Whatever repentance there is, it has not dared to claim any of God’s gracious promises as including him, a poor sinner. (Leupold)

hidden your face. Luther: “This is a Hebraism: To hide the face and to let it shine. A calm face signifies grace and goodwill. To turn away and to hide the face means that God is angry [Ps

27:9]... Such were the cloud, the fiery pillar, and other signs, whereby God is perceived as being well disposed toward us. This is the meaning of God's calm face. God's face is God's very presence either in the Word, the promise and the sacraments, where God's thought is set before my conscience, or in deed, when God removes evils, pestilence, and murder. Summary: The face is called the design, or the appearance; the 'face' of a house or the 'face' of a tree. Therefore when God hides His face, both Word and deed, nothing remains but the face of the devil, of death, and of sin" (AE 17:370–71) (TLSB)

Why is Yahweh standing far off? Because "there is no one calling on your name." No one stirs or arouses himself. The prophet's call to awake, issued two times (Is 51:17; 52:1), goes unheeded, as did our Lord's (Mt 26:38–46; cf. Mt 24:42). Locked in apathy, no one seeks God, not even one (cf. Ps 14:2–3). Unlike Jacob, who wrestled with "a Man" all night and refused to let him go (Gen 32:25–33 [ET 32:24–32]), these people are lost in melancholy, and all their zeal has departed. So Yahweh hides his face. Commenting on Is 64:6 (ET 64:7), Luther writes: "God's face is God's very presence ... in the Word, the promise and the sacraments." (CC)

Isaiah will surely not blame God; he will plead for grace. The prophet knows that he cannot present his own or the nation's righteousness as grounds to earn an answer to his prayer.

Melt in the hand – What a sad state of affairs for the sinner! God hides His face and turns the sinner over to his or her own sins. As sinners persist in their sins, God abandons them to their own imaginations. He withdraws Himself and His grace and mercy. Each sin carries the sinner, step by step, farther away from God and closed to destruction and judgment. By nature, sins chains every human in its bondage and dooms everyone to destruction. By nature, sinners cannot rescue themselves from the inevitable consequences of their sins. (PBC)

Cf Gn 14:20; Jb 8:4 for a similar construction. The context here also includes reference to wind removing leaves (v 6), which perhaps evoked the idea of melting, as when a pile of leaves or chaff is gradually whisked away. (TLSB)

64:8 *clay ... potter*. We are as God shapes us to be. God created and shaped the destiny of the chosen people as an artisan fashions clay into a vase. (TLSB)

A number of the lament's earlier motifs recur in its close. Connections include references to fathers in the faith ("Abraham" and "Israel," 63:16; "our fathers," 64:10 [ET 64:11]). There is also an appeal to memory (as in, e.g., 63:7), but this time it is for Yahweh *not* to remember sins (64:8 [ET 64:9]). Isaiah repeats the plea for God to look upon his people (64:8 [ET 64:9]), as in 63:15, and again maintains that all his people belong to him (64:7, 8 [ET 64:8, 9]); compare the prior statements with "my people" (63:8), "his people" (63:11), and "your people" (63:14, 18). The prayer likewise laments the desolation of the land and the city (64:9 [ET 64:10]); see 63:18–19. Isaiah mourns over the state of "our holy and glorious house" (64:10 [ET 64:11]), and this contrasts with Yahweh's "holy and beautiful dwelling place" in heaven (63:15). Finally, "how can you restrain yourself?" (64:11 [ET 64:12]) is linked to the plea for Yahweh not to withhold his compassion (63:15). (CC)

The section's angst is demonstrated by means of the threefold use of the vocative "Yahweh" (64:7, 8, 11 [ET 64:8, 9, 12]). Certainly Yahweh has the wisdom to know when enough is enough (cf. 28:23–29), but is he displaying that wisdom now? He has spoken of letting go of his wrath and judgment, but when will this happen? Likewise, Christians assent in theory to the promise "faithful is God, who will not permit you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but he will

make with the temptation the way of escape, that you may be able to endure” (1 Cor 10:13). But how often do we think that God is not keeping it or has not yet kept it—for us! (CC)

Everyone is unclean and fading (Is 64:5 [ET 64:6]), and no one calls upon Yahweh (64:6 [ET 64:7]). God hides his face, and people melt in their sin (64:6 [ET 64:7]). The relationship is at an impasse. Israel is at a dead end. Or is she? (CC)

The climax of Isaiah’s prayer is signaled by הַעַתָּה, “but now” (64:7 [ET 64:8]), as he transitions from a grief-stricken lament to a bold and confident faith. At this critical juncture the prophet appeals to Yahweh’s role as Israel’s Father, returning to this positive paternal language first introduced in 63:16 (with “our Father” twice). (CC)

“Father” along with “Potter” denotes Yahweh’s loving authority, creativity, and personal care. When paired together, we see two sides of Yahweh’s character. He has covenantal obligations to his children (“Father”), while he is free to do with them as he sees fit (“Potter”). Commenting on this verse, Luther writes: “Although in darkness our reason thinks that You are angry and a tyrant, our faith nevertheless concludes that You are our Father, because it grasps the promises.” (CC)

work of your hand. God has made them as a potter forms clay. (CSB)

Once more that appeal is to the Lord as father and Creator. Isaiah is willing to leave to God just how his prayer will be answered. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

God called Abraham and then shaped and molded his descendants into a nation. God made them what they were. But the description also aptly describes God’s people individually. God shapes and molds every believer. We are the clay, and God molds us to the shape and for the use that He deems appropriate. We are the work of His hands. (PBC)

64:9 *be not so terribly angry.* Cf. the promise to end that anger in 54:7–8. (CSB)

This verse does not demand of Yahweh, but rather begs him, “Do not be angry” (אַל־תִּזְעַק), thus addressing the issue brought up with the same verb in 64:4 (ET 64:5) with “you were angry” (תִּזְעַקְתָּ). The theme of Yahweh ending his “anger” (the verb זָעַק or the noun זֵעַק) is also in 54:7–8; 57:16–17; and 60:10 (cf. Jer 31:34; Lam 5:19–22; Micah 7:18). (CC)

Isaiah does not ask for Yahweh not to judge; he only asks that the judgment not be “forever” (לְעוֹלָם), as this would lead to complete extermination. Rather than that, the prophet pleads for Yahweh to “look intently; all of us are your people” (64:8 [ET 64:9]). This time, though (in contrast with 63:15), Isaiah adds the emphatic “behold” (הִנֵּה). The point is that he speaks for those who are “your people” (עַמִּי) and not “this people” (29:13 ;6:9 ,הָעָם הַזֶּה). (CC)

“Your people” is the same argument Moses makes when Yahweh’s wrath is kindled against Israel after the people had fashioned a golden calf. “Why, Yahweh, does your anger burn against *your people*?” (Ex 32:11). He goes on to implore Yahweh to “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants” (Ex 32:13). God’s unconditional covenant of grace, begun with the patriarchs (see, e.g., Gen 12:1–3; 17:7) and certified by the blood of Christ (Lk 22:20; Heb 12:24), is the basis upon which God’s people pray and trust in his steadfast love. (CC)

your people. See 63:17–19; Ps 79:13. (CSB)

Our disgusting sins separate us from God, yet faith turns to God and depends on His gracious promises. This turning to God in spite of sin finds power to pray trusting in the promises of God. As believers we have been taught to pray “in Jesus name.” God has no reason to listen to our prayers. Yet when we come to Him in the name of Jesus, who has shed His blood to wash away our sins. God invites us to pray to Him as dear children ask their dear Father. We can pray with confidence and boldness because, in Jesus, God is our dear Father. This prayer boldly erupts from the heart of a believer who trusts in the gracious promises of the Lord. (PBC)

64:10–12 Isaiah foretold the destruction of the cities of the holy nation (Ex 19:6) and of their “holy and beautiful house” of worship. Though they should expect extinction, he gives them hope for restoration if they humbly ask the Lord not to afflict them more sorely. These words are also for all people laid low by adversities to “the end of the ages,” in order that they “might have hope” (1Co 10:11–13; Rm 15:4). (TLSB)

64:10 *holy cities*. Sacred because Israel was the “holy land” (Ps 78:54). Jerusalem is often called the “holy city.” (CSB)

Zion has become a wilderness... desolation. “The capital city, Jerusalem, where Your Word arose, has become desolate, not just the other cities.” *Holy*, not because of works but because of the Word. (Luther)

64:11 *holy and beautiful house*. “Your house is doubly holy, through Your Word and then holy by our hallowing, as when we come together there, learn, hear, pray, and importune, where we handle sacred things, that is, where we are exercised in the Word and divine institution.” It is by such activities that the house is made holy. *Beautiful*. רָאָה means grandeur and elegance. As a king or a bridegroom goes about in pomp and splendor, so the prophet says here: “We have handled sacred things in that place, and we have done everything with glory and in a most splendid manner.” (Luther)

burned by fire. Isaiah here reaches the climax of his lament. (CSB)

64:12 *restrain yourself... keep silent*. The prayer ends when the believer turns the bleak situation over to God for His gracious action. (PBC)

63:15–64:12 Confessing their sins, the Lord’s penitent people pray to Him as their Father, asking Him to reclaim them. Israel’s confession is like our own, for we also have wandered from the Lord’s ways. In the uncleanness of our sin, all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. In the fullness of time, God rent the heavens and came down for our salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, our heavenly Father was acting on our behalf, not counting our sins against us. • Gracious Father, we confess that we have sinned against You and have withheld the fear You deserve. Forgive us, we pray, for Jesus’ sake, and keep us as Your holy people. Amen. (TLSB)