

Verse 8 again presents the same idea. Why should God blame His people? He is the potter, and they are merely the clay. Why doesn't He treat them better? After all, they are His people. This is very different from the way that Paul uses the same figure in Romans 9, or Jeremiah in Jeremiah 18. Neither of them provides any warrant for the suggestion that God's sovereignty gives us an excuse for blaming on Him the results of our own sin and neglect.

Verse 9 refers to iniquity again, not as something present that needs change, but as something past which God is remembering too long. "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity forever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." They do not say, "We repent of our iniquities. It's all our fault. We are very sorry. We pray that we may have a changed heart and attitude." They merely say, "Behold, we are all thy people." The next two verses stress the material suffering and desolation. Written in the time of Isaiah, they represent a transference in imagination to the time when events so vividly predicted in the earlier portion of his prophecy would already have been fulfilled. The result is imagined as already present (as also in 63:18). The people know that Isaiah is God's spokesman. They realize that what he predicts is sure to occur. They see that fulfillment as if already present. Facing the situation as a reality, they pray for help. But their prayer falls far short of the attitude that God requires.

The plea, which reaches a climax in verse 12, is very impassioned. It bases itself on a fact -- God's relationship to the people whom He has chosen to be His own. All of it, if certain other elements were added, would be true and effective. As it is, however, it deserves not acquiescence but condemnation. It inevitably leads to the strong rebuke which follows. Even before the exile has begun Isaiah pictures the attitude which so large a portion of the nation will take and also the rebuke which God will give as His answer. He does this in order that His true people may be prepared and may see what their own attitude should be.

"Holier Than Thou"