

ending his discussion of this passage with a reference to the great urgency of the plea, and stating that the suffering would be aggravated if it introduced Israel's destruction, or did not issue at last in Israel's restoration. He says, "Such an aggravation is inconceivable. Jehovah's mercy cannot violently restrain itself much longer; it must burst forth like Joseph's tears in a recognition scene, Gen. XLV:1."

These words of Delitzsch show the impression which many get from the impassioned prayer of 63:7-64:12. Surely God will immediately answer with a declaration that He is only too anxious to deliver His people from the suffering into which they have fallen. Yet Delitzsch continues with the following words, "After the people have poured out their hearts before Jehovah, He declares what they have to expect from Him. But promise does not follow at once, as one might expect, after the preceding prayer; but at first rebuke and menace; for although the penitent portion of the Church identifies itself in this prayer with the entire nation, destruction, not redemption awaited a portion of the people and that portion the larger one." Surely Delitzsch has pointed out a very strange fact.

A similar observation is found in Ellicott's Commentary (2) which says of 64:12: "The final appeal to the fatherly compassion of Jehovah reminds us of the scene when Joseph could not 'refrain' (Gen. XLV:1) and natural tenderness would find a vent. Could the God of Israel look on the scene of desolation and not be moved to pity?" Yet in his discussion of 65:1 he says, "Is this the answer to the previous prayer? Most commentators say, 'Yes,' but there is at least an apparent absence of continuous sequence. A more probable view is that it was written after an interval more or less considerable and that the prophet utters what has been revealed to him as explaining why the plaintive appeal of Chapter 64:12 does not meet at once with the answer that might have been looked for."

Here is a strange situation indeed. The prayer which many commentators consider as so very moving that it must surely find an immediate answer is followed by fifteen verses of as strong denunciation and rebuke as occur anywhere in the Scripture. Surely the meaning is obvious. 63:7-64:12 is not the presentation of a godly prayer but rather the indication of an attitude on the part of those who are supposed to be God's people which receives as first answer not a promise of real blessing but a declaration of rebuke and punishment!

While the factual material of the passage is true, and many of the sentiments contained in it 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 that is displeasing to Him.

VERSE BY VERSE

This will be clearer after we have examined the contents of the passage. It begins with a declaration of God's loving kindness to Israel in the past (verses 7-9). There is a wonderful statement of the close association which God established with His people, and of the sympathy which He showed with every phase of their lives in the days of old.

Verse 10 points out that despite the love which God had shown His people, they rebelled against Him, and that He, as a result, became their enemy. Terrible results have proceeded from this event. A situation of misery is assumed in all the rest of our present section (to end of chapter 64).

After verse 10 we might expect any one of various attitudes to be taken. The most probable would be an expression of penitence on the part of the people and a prayer that God would cleanse them from their sin and make them fit again to be the beneficiaries of His love. Another possible attitude would be an expression of pity

(2) Charles John Ellicott, D.D., An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers, vol. 4 p. 570-571