

God, the Avenger and Deliverer of His People

Today we would like to consider the message of Isaiah 63. It is a difficult passage to interpret in some ways. The passage describes God having engaged in judgment the little nation of Edom, one of Israel's neighbors to the south. It is difficult to assign a particular historical event to what is described. It is also difficult to discover the purpose of the passage in the flow of Isaiah's prophecy that we have been studying. The key is to understand the conditions and events to reach beyond the manifestation of God's judgment in history in that the passage portrays God's judgment that will take place at the end of history. This would be conducive with the theological theme that has been unfolding of the future coming of the Kingdom of God when God would bring salvation to His people even as He also overthrows and punishes His enemies in His final judgment. That this is perceived by some to be the meaning of the contents of the passage, this chapter, along with the final two chapters of Isaiah, has been collectively described as setting forth "Eschatological Overtones." In other words, in these last three chapters of Isaiah God has set before us the end of history, the final judgment, and the eternal state of both God's people and God's enemies.

In this chapter before us we read that God comes to His people to deliver them from their enemies, from all that oppress and hold them in misery and bondage. God regards them who oppress His people as His enemies, and He will fight against them and defeat them. In this way He rescues or saves His people. And so, where in the previous chapter it was said to Zion, "Behold thy salvation comes", in this chapter it is shown how that salvation comes. We also read of how the people of God respond to His merciful and gracious dealings with them. They are grateful for His mercy toward them, His favor that He had bestowed upon them, for His compassionate concern for them, even in the presence of their own unworthiness. And then finally, we read of the people of God petitioning God to be still gracious to them, so as to bring them to experience His full blessing in their full deliverance from their enemies.

Let us read the chapter before us. Here is Isaiah 63:

¹Who is this who comes from Edom,
in crimsoned garments from Bozrah,
he who is splendid in His apparel,
marching in the greatness of His strength?

"It is I, speaking in righteousness,
mighty to save."

²Why is your apparel red,
and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?

³"I have trodden the winepress alone,
and from the peoples no one was with Me;
I trod them in My anger
and trampled them in My wrath;
their lifeblood spattered on My garments,
and stained all My apparel.

⁴For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
and My year of redemption had come.

⁵I looked, but there was no one to help;
I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold;
so My own arm brought Me salvation,
and My wrath upheld me.

⁶I trampled down the peoples in My anger;
I made them drunk in My wrath,

and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

⁷I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD,
the praises of the LORD,
according to all that the LORD has granted us,
and the great goodness to the house of Israel
that He has granted them according to His compassion,
according to the abundance of His steadfast love.

⁸For He said, “Surely they are My people,
children who will not deal falsely.”

And He became their Savior.

⁹In all their affliction He was afflicted,
and the angel of His presence saved them;
in His love and in His pity He redeemed them;
He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

¹⁰But they rebelled
and grieved His Holy Spirit;
therefore He turned to be their enemy,
and Himself fought against them.

¹¹Then he remembered the days of old,
of Moses and his people.

Where is He who brought them up out of the sea
with the shepherds of His flock?

Where is He who put in the midst of them
His Holy Spirit,

¹²who caused His glorious arm
to go at the right hand of Moses,
who divided the waters before them
to make for Himself an everlasting name,

¹³who led them through the depths?

Like a horse in the desert,
they did not stumble.

¹⁴Like livestock that go down into the valley,
the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.

So You led Your people,
to make for Yourself a glorious name.

¹⁵Look down from heaven and see,
from Your holy and beautiful habitation.

Where are Your zeal and your might?

The stirring of Your inner parts and Your compassion
are held back from me.

¹⁶For You are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us,
and Israel does not acknowledge us;

You, O LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is Your name.

¹⁷O LORD, why do You make us wander from Your ways
and harden our heart, so that we fear You not?

Return for the sake of Your servants,
the tribes of Your heritage.

¹⁸Your holy people held possession for a little while;
our adversaries have trampled down Your sanctuary.
¹⁹We have become like those over whom You have never ruled,
like those who are not called by Your name.¹

Here is an outline to help us understand our passage more clearly:

1. God's judgment upon Edom (63:1-6)
2. God's favourable regard and merciful dealings toward His people (63:7-14)
3. God's people pray for God to deliver them (63:15-19)

1. God's Judgment upon Edom (63:1-6)

Verses 1-6 describe a soldier who is returning presumably to Jerusalem, after having vanquished his enemy in the region of Edom. His garments are stained with the blood shed in battle of those he had slain. The amount of blood on his garments caused him to appear as though he had been treading grapes in a winepress. This is a reference to God Who Himself went into battle in order to avenge His people and to deliver them from oppression.

Does this describe an actual, historical event when God judged Edom? If so, when did this occur? It is difficult to say. Some have said that this is a statement of God rescuing His people from the Babylonian captivity. But if this were so, why is Edom directly mentioned and not Babylon? And besides, when was His people ever in bondage to Edom? Perhaps the idea is that Edom had to be dealt with in judgment so that His people could make their way unhindered as they return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Not that Edom lies between Jerusalem and Babylon, but because "Edom" was a symbol for hindrance from coming to experience life in Zion. Long before Edom had forbid the passing of the Israelites through their land on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land (cf. Numb. 20:14ff). Some argue, therefore, that Edom is used here as it was in Isaiah 34:1-17, as a symbol of anything that stands in the way of prohibiting a return of His people to Himself. Edom represents the enemies of God and His people, enemies upon which God purposes to bring His judgment.

Matthew Henry wrote of the metaphor of "Edom" and its broader meaning:

Yet this victory over Edom is put as an instance or specimen of the like victories obtained over other nations that had been enemies to Israel. This over the Edomites is named for the sake of the old enmity of Esau against Jacob (Gen. 27:41) and perhaps with an allusion to David's glorious triumphs over the Edomites, by which it should seem, more than by any other of his victories, he *got himself a name* (Psa. 60, *title*, 2 Sam. 8:13, 14). But this is not all: It is a victory obtained by the grace of God in Christ over our spiritual enemies. We find the garments dipped in blood adorning him whose name is called *The Word of God*, (Rev. 19:13). And who that is we know very well; for it is through him that we are more than conquerors over those principalities and powers which on the cross he spoiled and triumphed over.

Let us take each verse in turn. **Verse 1** reads,

¹*Who is this who comes from Edom,
in crimsoned garments from Bozrah,*

¹ This is the English Standard Version (ESV), however, I capitalized the pronouns for deity, which the ESV does not do in its translation.

***He who is splendid in His apparel,
marching in the greatness of His strength?
“It is I, speaking in righteousness,
mighty to save.”***

Edom was on the east side of the Dead Sea, therefore south and east of Jerusalem. Bozrah was the ancient capital city of Edom. This Mighty Soldier is marching from Edom in a manner signifying his triumph in battle after having destroyed Edom. He had been doing a “saving” work, which meant rendering justice on those who had oppressed His people.

Salvation always involves God pronouncing and executing judgment. Our Lord Jesus fought a battle against sin and satan on our behalf and won the victory. He judged sin in Himself on the cross, having defeated and dethroned the devil with respect to His people, thereby securing our release from captivity to sin. That is not to say this was a prophecy of Jesus coming forth from His bloody cross. Although many have set forth the Lord Jesus as bloody from the cross on which He died, as did Matthew Henry above, the blood on the clothing of this Warrior is not His own blood, but it is the blood of His enemies slain in battle.

The point of the verses is to show the people of God that He is their Protector, Avenger, and Deliverer. He is today as then. We may entrust ourselves to Him and His care. And if any do harm us, He will avenge us upon them in judgment. We read of God’s dealings in this manner in the New Testament. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica:

³We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, ⁵which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; ⁶since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, ⁷and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2 Thess. 1:3-10)

We read in **verse 2**,

***²Why is Your apparel red,
and Your garments like his who treads in the winepress?***

The question is asked of this one who comes, “Why do You appear so? Why are Your garments as one who had been treading grapes?” The answer is in **verse 3**, in which the Warrior answers the question posed to Him.

***³“I have trodden the winepress alone,
and from the peoples no one was with Me;
I trod them in My anger
and trampled them in My wrath;
their lifeblood spattered on My garments,
and stained all My apparel.***

God Himself had effected this victory. Now historically Edom was destroyed through human instrumentality, but God’s people ultimately see all victories as His work alone. The expression “there was no man with Me” does not mean He did not use human instrumentality, but that none could stand and

legitimately take credit for what happened. God alone had brought to pass the destruction and decimation of Edom.

This same imagery of judgment likened to a winepress is found in the book of the Revelation in reference to Christ's judgment at His second coming (Rev. 19:15; cf. 14:19, 20).

¹⁷Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.
¹⁸And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." ¹⁹So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. ²⁰And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs. (Rev. 14:17-20)

We then read in **verse 4**:

***⁴For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
and My year of redemption had come.***

Here we read that redemption comes through judgment. This is a common theme of Isaiah's prophecy. Oppressors must be put down for the oppressed to be released. The reference to "My year" is an allusion to the Jubilee year, that one year every fifty when slaves in Israel were to be set free. Though to the people of God while being oppressed that the "day of vengeance" may seem not to come, yet it is in God's "heart" to punish sin. Note that vengeance is in terms of a "day", but redemption is in terms of a "year." God makes a swift end of judgment, but enjoyment of deliverance is prolonged, even unto life everlasting.

We read in **verse 5** that God alone could bring salvation to His people:

***⁵I looked, but there was no one to help;
I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold;
so My own arm brought Me salvation,
and My wrath upheld Me.***

In order to encourage His people to look to Him alone, God described Himself as looking about prior to taking action to see if any would come to deliver His people. No one could or would step forward for the task. So He takes the matter in hand. By His power He brings judgment and deliverance for His people. God Himself, God alone, seeks the salvation of His people. No one else can or will. His "arm" is the symbol of His power. It wields His invincible scepter and the sword. He goes to battle alone.

Verse 6 sets forth the outcome of the battle.

***⁶I trampled down the peoples in My anger;
I made them drunk in My wrath,
and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."***

Here the Edomites are described as the objects of God's wrath. He goes through them cutting and hacking, causing them to teeter as drunken men before they fall to earth in their blood. With this verse this very graphic depiction of the righteous vengeance of God on sin and sinners concludes.

And so, we have before us in these first six verses a depiction of God's wrath toward all those who are not numbered among His people. The wrath of God abides on them and one day His just, eternal, wrath, will be administered to all who are opposed to Him and to His people.

Jonathan Edwards set forth the wrath of God upon sinners, describing their accumulation of guilt and aggravated damnation throughout their lives. He wrote the follow words based on **1 Thessalonians 2:6**, which reads, "*To fill up their sins always; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.*" He preached

in the typical Puritan fashion. After explaining the text, he drew out a doctrine, explained certain reasonable conclusions or propositions consistent with that doctrine, and then would supply a direct application of the matter to the faith and practice of his people. Here are some of Edwards' words:

DOCTRINE—When those that continue in sin shall have filled up the measure of their sin, then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost.

I. PROPOSITION. There is a certain measure that God has set to the sin of every wicked man. God says concerning the sin of man, as he says to the raging waves of the sea, hitherto shall you come, and no further. The measure of some is much greater than of others. Some reprobates commit but a little sin in comparison with others, and so are to endure proportionably a smaller punishment. There are many vessels of wrath; but some are smaller and others greater vessels. Some will contain comparatively but little wrath, others a greater measure of it. Sometimes, when we see men go to dreadful lengths, and become very heinously wicked, we are ready to wonder that God lets them alone. He sees them go on in such audacious wickedness, and keeps silence, nor does anything to interrupt them, but they go smoothly on, and meet with no hurt. But sometimes the reason why God lets them alone is because they have not filled up the measure of their sins. When they live in dreadful wickedness, they are but filling up the measure which God has limited for them. This is sometimes why God allows very wicked men to live so long; because their iniquity is not full, Genesis 15:16, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." For this reason also God sometimes allows them to live in prosperity. Their prosperity is a snare to them, and an occasion of their sinning a great deal more. Wherefore God allows them to have such a snare, because he allows them to fill up a larger measure. So, for this cause, he sometimes allows them to live under great light, and great means and advantages, at the same time to neglect and misimprove all. Everyone shall live until he has filled up his measure.

II. PROPOSITION. While men continue in sin, they are filling the measure set them. This is the work in which they spend their whole lives. They begin in their childhood; and if they live to grow old in sin, they still go on with this work. It is the work with which every day is filled up. They may alter their business in other respects. They may sometimes be about one thing and sometimes about another, but they never change from this work of filling up the measure of their sins. Whatever they put their hands to, they are still employed in this work. This is the first thing that they set themselves about when they awake in the morning, and the last thing they do at night. They are all the while treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. It is a gross mistake of some natural men, who think that when they read and pray they do not add to their sins. But on the contrary, they think they diminish their guilt by these exercises. They think, that instead of adding to their sins, they do something to satisfy for their past offenses. But instead of that, they do but add to the measure by their best prayers, and by those services with which they themselves are most pleased.

III. PROPOSITION. When once the measure of their sins is filled up, then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost. God will then wait no longer upon them. Wicked men think that God is altogether such a one as themselves, because, when they commit such wickedness, he keeps silence. "Because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil." But when once they shall have filled up the measure of their sins, judgment will be executed; God will not bear with them any longer. Now is the day of grace, and the day of patience, which they spend in filling up their sins. But when their sins shall be full, then will come the day of wrath, the day of the fierce anger of God.—God often executes his wrath on ungodly men, in a less degree, in this world. He sometimes brings afflictions upon them, and that in wrath. Sometimes he expresses his wrath in very painful judgments. Sometimes he appears in a terrible manner, not only outwardly, but also in the inward expressions of it on their consciences. Some, before they died, have had the wrath of God inflicted on their souls in degrees that have been intolerable. But these things are only forerunners of their punishment, only slight foretastes of wrath. God never stirs up all his wrath

against wicked men while in this world. But when once wicked men shall have filled up the measure of their sins, then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost...²

The next section of our passage includes verses 7 through 14.

2. God's favourable regard and merciful dealings toward His people (63:7-14)

With **verse 7**, a shift takes place. The prophet calls forth by his own example how the people of God are to remember always their past experiences of God's deliverances and manifestations of God's love.

***⁷I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD,
the praises of the LORD,
according to all that the LORD has granted us,
and the great goodness to the house of Israel
that he has granted them according to his compassion,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.***

The prophet speaks of his own practice of recalling God's past deliverances of His people. In so doing it would bring encouragement and foster faith in him as he awaits God's future deliverance. Of course he does so in order to stir up similar responses from His people toward their God. Now, the primary act of God of salvation in Israel's history was that of deliverance from Egypt. The passage probably alludes to this event.

We should always "remember" what God has done in the past for His people. We will be encouraged as we remind ourselves of His good designs for us that have been evident through His gracious actions in the past. But we should voice our own experiences of God's manifestation of His mercy and love to us before others, as the prophet did here, so that they may be encouraged and strengthened by hearing what God has done and will do on behalf of His people. Our remembrance of God's gracious past dealings of His lovingkindnesses will inspire and comfort His people. The whole Bible is a testimony of remembrance of what God has done for His people. These records should encourage us Christians in our walk.

But one might say, "Does this not specifically give words directed toward the house of Israel not us?" The New Testament shows us that we are in Christ "fellow citizens with the saints" and heirs of the promises of God given to them (Cf. Eph. 2:19). The New Testament also states this truth regarding the relevance of the Old Testament Scriptures to New Testament Christians: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

We next read in **verse 8**:

***⁸For He said, "Surely they are My people,
children who will not deal falsely."
And He became their Savior.***

God had designs upon His people when He brought them up from Egypt. He desired them to be an obedient people, as His sons, whom He would bless and give the Promised Land as His inheritance to them. But Israel was anything but obedient sons. God's desires for His people were unrealized. Isaiah 5:4 reads of God's desire for them but of their sad response to Him, "I looked that it should yield grapes, and it hath yielded wild grapes." He judged them, having refused to save them.

² Jonathan Edwards, Sermon entitled, "Wrath Upon the Wicked to the Uttermost", preached in 1735.

But of course, this did not stop God. He purposed to *make* them to become obedient sons. This is what He did in sending His Son to be their Savior. This is what is revealed in Titus 2:14, “Who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” By the time God completes His saving work in the lives of His people, they are characterized as obedient, loyal sons. This is the aim and the result of God’s work of sanctification in the lives of His people.

We read in **verse 9** of God’s concern and identification with His people.

***⁹In all their affliction He was afflicted,
and the angel of His presence saved them;
in His love and in His pity He redeemed them;
He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.***

The prophet recalled that God had great sympathy with their sufferings when they were in Egypt. And so He sent His “angel” to deliver them and lead them out (cf. Ex. 14:19; 23:20-23). It was due to His love and mercy for them that He moved to show forth His power to save them. Remembrance of these things increase faith in God’s *desire* and *ability* to deliver His people from their present distress.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous (one),
But the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Psa. 34:19)

But then we read of the reaction and response of His people toward them in **verse 10**:

***¹⁰But they rebelled
and grieved his Holy Spirit;
therefore He turned to be their enemy,
and Himself fought against them.***

In spite of God’s kind and good dealings with them, they resisted and rebelled. Here we read of the grieving of “His Holy Spirit.” This ability to grieve the Holy Spirit is also set forth in the New Testament in **Ephesians 4:30**, “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” Here in Isaiah 63:10 we see that the people of God whom God has redeemed from their sins, may still grieve God’s Spirit. Due to resistance, rebellion, refusing to submit and obey the Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit may be forfeited by the people of God. Here we read that God Himself fought against them, having become their enemy. One cannot claim to have God on his side if he is in rebellion against Him.

But because God had purposed to save them from their sin, He acted on their behalf to redeem them from their sin and their slavery to sin, as **verse 11** sets forth:

***¹¹Then he (or He?) remembered the days of old,
of Moses and His people.
Where is He who brought them up out of the sea
with the shepherds of His flock?
Where is He who put in the midst of them
His Holy Spirit,***

There is a question as to whom the first pronoun, “he”, refers. It may be understood as a reference to Israel. If this is correct then the idea is that although God had been merciful and gracious to the nation, the people had rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. But then Israel remembered God’s gracious dealings in the past when God intervened on behalf of His people and had rescued His people from Egypt, and then brought them into the Promised Land.” In their affliction they remembered “the good old days” and they begin to long again for God’s mercy and His presence among them.

But if the “he” is referring to God, then God is remembering His former favor toward His people when He came to rescue them from their Egyptian bondage. Because He recalls His former kind dealings with them, that is, being in covenant relationship with His people, He is moved again to deal graciously with them.

When His people stray, upon His chastisement, God brings them along, working toward their recovery. He causes them to acknowledge and regret their former defections, leading them to resolve to repent of them. David wrote this in Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. And Psalm 119:71, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” And Psalm 119:75, “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.”

The people long for God to return to them. They ask where He is, the One Who had brought them through the Red Sea, and had placed His Holy Spirit in their midst. This reference to the Holy Spirit is probably a reference to the Shekenah glory of God which was in the camp of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt.

We read further of God’s deliverance of Israel in the past in **verse 12**:

***¹²who caused His glorious arm
to go at the right hand of Moses,
who divided the waters before them
to make for Himself an everlasting name,***

Here the reference to the Exodus is made forthrightly. Although Moses was led in the power of God, it was God Himself Who had delivered them. God did so in such a way as to glorify Himself before His people. It would be a deed that would always stand out as an act of great salvation, instilling confidence in His ability and hope for a repetition of His action in present and future salvation. In **verse 13** their deliverance through the parting of the Red Sea is described:

***¹³who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in the desert,
they did not stumble.***

He led them through the most difficult of places without any difficulty at all. He never was strained in His effort. Through the sea where there was nothing but water and through the desert wilderness where there was no water at all, God led His people. He led them as a shepherd who leads his flocks.

***¹⁴Like livestock that go down into the valley,
the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.
So You led Your people,
to make for Yourself a glorious name.***

Cattle are led to valleys to pasture in green meadows. The people were led by the Holy Spirit to experience a similar existence of peace and rest. Again, God did this to the end that He would be glorified in the minds of His people throughout all generations.

This brings us to the last section of this chapter in which we read that

3. God’s people pray for God to deliver them (63:15-19)

***¹⁵Look down from heaven and see,
from Your holy and beautiful habitation.
Where are Your zeal and Your might?
The stirring of Your inner parts and Your compassion***

are held back from me.

After remembering and voicing these past deliverances, the prophet now appeals to God to again show Himself powerful in bringing deliverance to His people. God is presented as transcendent. He is holy, exalted, Who is urged to “look down” and show regard to His people in their difficult situation. The prophet did not see presently the manifestations of God’s love and mercy toward His people. The absence of present deliverance gave the appearance that He no longer cared for them. He called upon God to remember their familial relationship to their God as their Father.

*¹⁶For You are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us,
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
You, O LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is Your name.*

The prophet appeals to God as the Father of His people. Abraham and Israel (Jacob) did not know them in the sense that they were estranged from them or had become so unlike them it was as though they had been disowned and disinherited. But it was God in actuality Who had begotten them. He had caused them to be formed into a nation. He had fathered them and now the prophet appeals to Him to be a Father to them in bringing deliverance to them. He is their Redeemer of old and the appeal is that He show forth His power once again in redeeming His people.

Now we commonly speak of God as our “Father.” He is Father to us collectively, as members of His household, the household of faith. But He is also God the Father to each of us. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ God is Your Father. Now although this familial relationship is set forth in the Old Testament, as it is here, it is not done so commonly. And most often in the Old Testament, God is set forth as the Father of Israel collectively, as though His people were one son: “Israel, My Son.” The emphasis on our individual relationship with God as Father is set forth frequently in the New Testament. “We are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:6).

We next read in **verse 17**:

*¹⁷O LORD, why do you make us wander from Your ways
and harden our heart, so that we fear You not?
Return for the sake of Your servants,
the tribes of Your heritage.*

They do not attempt to lessen their guilt by this question. They know that God had judicially hardened them toward Him in order that He might punish them for their sins. He had hardened them in their sin as an act of judgment. God does commonly does this in His working among people (cf. 2 Thess. 2:11; Rom. 1:28; Rom. 9:18). They viewed their hardness and defection from Him as a judgment from Him and then having recognized this, they ask that He return to them. In **Psalm 25:16** we read of David praying to God, “**Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted.**” When we find ourselves having strayed from God, we are to cry out to Him to restore us unto Himself. He must do so, for we cannot restore ourselves.

“Servants” here in verse 17 is a reference to the tribes of Israel. They are professing their desire and perhaps pledging themselves to serve Him faithfully if they are delivered by Him. They also appeal to God as being His heritage, His property which should be claimed and enjoyed.

*¹⁸Your holy people held possession for a little while;
our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.*

This verse suggests that the prophet's immediate appeal was in light of their deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. The sanctuary was possessed "for a little while" in the sense that this was a short hiatus in eternity for God had promised to them an everlasting place of worship.

They lament their terrible condition in **verse 19**.

*¹⁹We have become like those over whom You have never ruled,
like those who are not called by Your name.*

They were so far from the place of blessing and it had been so long since they had experienced blessing, it was as though they never had. They longed for present manifestations of God's power in salvation. Their lives seemed to be characterized as no different from that of people who know not God.

§

In this chapter we are shown what to do when we long for recovery from a state of coldness and lifelessness, in which we do not seem to experience the power of God in our lives. When sin has taken hold of us and we have grown hardened and indifferent toward the Lord, or when we have become, it seems, enslaved to things that no person called by His name should be enslaved to, what are we to do? We call out to Him in prayer for deliverance. He must rescue us or we will stay in our deadness. We recall our former experiences of His deliverances from captivity, perhaps our original salvation experience. We recognize and acknowledge we had failed Him and have refused to aspire and live according to His designs for us. We lament our present condition that we have brought upon ourselves. We plead with Him as our covenant God, Who has made promises to His people through the Patriarchs to Whom He bound Himself to be gracious to their offspring (cf. Ps. 122:1). We recite to Him our present sufferings and appeal to Him, knowing that He suffers with us. We acknowledge that even our present coldness is due to His having chastened us and that He was just in doing so when we consider our defections. We plead with Him as He being our owner and Who has had designs on us in the past which have not been realized. We are His inheritance to be enjoyed by Him. And of course all of our appealing is done on the basis of and for the cause of Jesus Christ, our Blessed Mediator and Deliverer. May He enable each of us who believe to walk faithfully before Him and in sweet fellowship with Him.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24)