

Staff Work

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Being the Descendants of Judah

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Being the Descendants of Judah

Abstract

"God also has the compassion to explain to Israel, once again, where they have gone astray."

Posting about God's patience despite our failures from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

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Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 65:1-13](#)

[Isaiah 48:1-5](#)

[Romans 2:12-16](#)

Upon first reading of today's passage found in Isaiah, it seems like God is being a bit immature. I'm reminded of a child taunting "I told you so!" and sticking her tongue out at a stubborn sibling. We might think that the God of the universe should not act in this childish way, but here's a news flash: God does not need our feedback or guidance. He certainly does not need to justify His actions or attitudes to us, but by His grace He does, at times, choose to explain Himself for our benefit.

In this chapter of Isaiah, God clearly explains why he is admonishing Israel—"so that [they] could not say, 'My images brought them about; my wooden image and metal god ordained them'" (verse 5). God is not shouting "I told you so" at an annoying sibling in order to win some petty argument. Instead, the Lord is explaining to Israel why their actions are unacceptable and demanding the glory that is due to Him. Later, in verse 9, God says, "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off... For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another." Instead of sneering "I told you so" at Israel, the Lord has mercy and restrains His anger; God also has the compassion to explain to Israel, once again, where they have gone astray.

Despite God's patience for Israel, He is undeniably angry. In verse 1, He commands "Listen to this, you descendants of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel, and come from the line of Judah." On the surface, this opening statement seems fairly straightforward—God is just identifying his audience. However, this intro brings to mind my mother's stern voice declaring, "Sit down and listen, Alexis Marie Kreun"—if your childhood was anything like mine, you'll know that this command meant Mom had something serious to say. Furthermore, referring to Israel as "descendants of Jacob" and "from the line of Judah" has certain implications. The name "Jacob" means to supplant, cheat, or overreach (based on the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25-27) and likewise, the reference to Judah, who was known for his cruelty (Genesis 37:26-27) and immorality (Genesis 38), is less than flattering. Essentially, God starts off his speech to Israel by saying "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

However, God's point is not to remind Israel of their ancestors' sordid past or to throw mud on the names of their fathers. Instead, the purpose is to remind Israel of their *true* Father and the benefits of listening to Him. When God says that He foretold what was to come and then acted and it happened, He is not mocking Israel; He is directing Israel back to the correct path, the path of wisdom.

One of my favorite quotes, commonly attributed to Mark Twain, goes like this: "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years!" As this tongue-in-cheek quote points out, children are often quick to disregard the wisdom of their parents, which can often end in disastrous results. God is reminding Israel that He knows best, and that it's in their best interest to pay attention.

God is not a spoiled child who needs to prove Himself to Israel; He knows who He is and has no need for explanations. Instead, God is a merciful Father who wants what's good for his people. The next time we hear God speaking "I told you so" into our lives, let's not dismiss or ignore his voice, but rather acknowledge His wisdom and strive for renewed obedience.