

Homiletics Analysis: Isaiah 63

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Isaiah 63 opens with one of the most arresting visuals in all of prophetic literature: a lone warrior striding from Edom, robes drenched in crimson, having trodden the winepress of divine wrath alone (vv. 1–6). The passage then pivots dramatically into the longest sustained prayer of lament and intercession in the book of Isaiah (vv. 7–19), as the covenant people call upon the LORD by recounting His past mercies, confessing the failure of the exodus generation, and crying out in anguish over their present condition of apparent divine abandonment. The chapter ends mid-lament — Isaiah 64 continues without resolution — establishing a tension that is not yet relieved.

The chapter thus contains two distinct but inseparable movements: a divine soliloquy in which the LORD describes His solitary act of judgment-redemption (vv. 1–6), and a human cry that arises in response to the apparent contradiction between what the LORD has done in the past and what the people are now experiencing (vv. 7–19). The divine warrior passage answers the question of God’s capacity and willingness to act. The lament passage raises the question of why He has apparently withheld that action from His own people. Together they frame the great eschatological tension of the covenant: the LORD who has redeemed once can redeem again — but why does He delay?

This Text — Intent:

God intends through this chapter to simultaneously exalt His unique, unrivaled capacity for salvific judgment and to receive the lament of His people as a legitimate, covenant-grounded cry. The divine warrior vision is not primarily a threat to Israel but a comfort — the same LORD who tramples the nations in wrath is the one who remembers His covenant and stoops to carry His people. The lament section is given to the people as the vocabulary of honest, persistent, theologically grounded waiting. God intends Isaiah 63 to produce in the reader both awe before His sovereign power in judgment and bold, grief-filled persistence in prayer — not resignation, not presumption, but anguished trust in the God who acts alone and who will act again.

Subject Sentence: The sovereign LORD who treads the winepress alone also hears His people’s covenant lament.

Primary Claim: God presents Himself as the sole executor of eschatological judgment-redemption in order to become the only legitimate object of His people's lament — the One powerful enough to save and personally bound by covenant obligation to do so.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Identity of the Warrior (vv. 1–6) — Divine or Human?

The most consequential interpretive question in this chapter is the identity of the crimson-robed figure striding from Edom (vv. 1–3). Three broad readings compete.

The *messianic/christological reading*, dominant in Christian interpretation from the New Testament period through the Reformation and beyond, identifies this figure with Christ — specifically with Christ in His role as eschatological judge. Revelation 19:13–15 draws explicitly on this imagery (robe dipped in blood, treading the winepress of God's wrath), and the figure's self-description — "I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (v. 1) — employs the distinctive divine-savior language that the New Testament applies to Christ. The typological development is not merely conceptual but verbal: the New Testament author knows this text and deploys it. This reading *acknowledges* that the immediate referent in Isaiah's context is the divine warrior-LORD acting in covenant faithfulness, and *qualifies* rather than replaces that reading — the New Testament fulfillment is not an imposition on the Old Testament text but its ultimate eschatological resolution.

The *historical judgment reading*, preferred by some critical scholars, identifies the passage as a vision of Yahweh's judgment on Edom as the representative enemy of Israel (with Edom carrying throughout Isaiah the typological weight of the hostile nations). Bozrah (v. 1) was Edom's chief city. This reading is textually grounded and contextually necessary — the historical and canonical freight of Edom in Isaiah's prophecy (cf. Isaiah 34) is real and must not be collapsed into allegory. The Reformed reading does not discard this level but treats it as the first-order literal referent that grounds rather than exhausts the passage's meaning.

A *purely historical-political* reading that stops at Edom-as-nation and refuses the eschatological dimension must be *refuted*. The passage's hyperbole ("I have trodden them in my anger... their lifeblood spattered on my garments," v. 3), its cosmic scope ("the year of my redeemed," v. 4), and the New Testament's explicit use of this imagery as eschatological warrant cannot be accommodated within a narrowly political horizon. The text is doing more than describing a historical military campaign.

The Reformed reading holds the three levels in canonical sequence: the divine warrior here is the LORD acting in sovereign judgment against covenant enemies (the historical-prophetic level); this act typologically anticipates the final eschatological judgment executed by the Messiah (the typological-fulfillment level); and Revelation 19 identifies

that executor as the risen Christ (the New Testament level). The levels are sequential and cumulative, not competing.

The Lament Section (vv. 7–19) — Whose Voice? What Theology of Prayer?

The lament of vv. 7–19 raises the question of how the people can appeal to the LORD when they simultaneously acknowledge the faithlessness of the exodus generation (v. 10) and their own present abandonment (vv. 15–19). Several issues emerge.

A *Wesleyan/Arminian* reading of vv. 9–10 may emphasize the human-response structure — God’s affliction with Israel (v. 9) and Israel’s rebellion (v. 10) — in ways that imply a genuinely contingent divine responsiveness to human faithfulness. This reading *acknowledges* the real bilateral texture of the covenant depicted here — God’s grief over rebellion is genuine, and human response genuinely matters. It should be *qualified*, however: the passage grounds the appeal not in Israel’s improving response but in the LORD’s own character and covenant name (“where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion are held back from me,” v. 15). The lament appeals to what God is and what He has committed, not to what Israel has earned.

A *dispensational* reading may treat this lament as the voice of a future Jewish remnant during the tribulation period, with the “servants” of v. 17 being a faithful remnant distinct from apostate Israel. This reading *acknowledges* the eschatological forward-pointing dimension of the passage. It should be *qualified* because it tends to bracket the passage from direct application to the present covenant community, whereas Isaiah presents this lament vocabulary as paradigmatic for the covenant people in any generation of apparent divine silence.

The Reformed reading locates the lament within the Psalter-like tradition of covenant complaint — the people cry to the LORD on the basis of His own covenant character and prior acts (vv. 7–9), honestly acknowledge failure (v. 10), and return to the root of appeal: not their own worthiness but the LORD’s name, His fatherhood (v. 16), and His redemptive identity. This is the grammar of Psalms 44, 74, and 89, and it is presented here as the legitimate and God-given response to experienced desolation.

Key Canonical Support

- **Revelation 19:11–16** — The New Testament’s explicit appropriation of the divine warrior imagery (robe dipped in blood, treading the winepress of wrath) identifies the executor of Isaiah 63’s judgment as the risen Christ, completing the typological trajectory begun here.
- **Psalms 44:9–26** — The covenant lament pattern — “yet you have rejected and humbled us... Rise up; come to our help!” — provides the Psalter parallel that establishes the lament section of Isaiah 63 as a recognized and legitimate form of covenant address, not an expression of doubt but of faith under pressure.

- **Isaiah 34:1–17** — The earlier Edom judgment oracle establishes the canonical weight of Edom as representative enemy and gives the Isaiah 63 warrior vision its full context; the judgment announced in chapter 34 is enacted in chapter 63.
- **Exodus 15:1–18** — The Song of the Sea is the primal antecedent for both themes: the LORD as warrior who acts alone to save (“The LORD is a man of war,” v. 3) and the covenant people’s subsequent sustained appeal to that saving God. Isaiah 63 consciously echoes and extends this tradition.
- **Hebrews 2:14–18** — Christ as the one who “shares in flesh and blood” to “destroy the one who has the power of death” grounds the New Testament’s christological reading of the solitary warrior — the One who acts alone does so precisely because He has become one of us in order to carry us.

Aim: To confront the reader with the LORD’s unrivaled capacity for judgment-redemption and thereby equip them to bring their own season of divine silence before Him with honest, theologically grounded, covenant-anchored lament.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1a	Question to the warrior: “Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with garments stained crimson?”	Edom as representative enemy; Bozrah as capital city; the stained garments establish the warrior’s identity as one who has been in combat
1b	Warrior’s self-identification: “I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save”	The warrior does not answer the identity question with a name but with a character description — righteousness in speech, power in salvation
2	Second question: “Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?”	The imagery shifts from blood-stained warrior to vintner at the press — the nations are the grapes; wrath is the pressing
3	Warrior’s answer: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no	Three emphases: <i>alone</i> (no human ally), <i>anger/wrath</i> (this is judicial, not

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	one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.”	arbitrary), <i>staining</i> (the completeness of judgment)
4	The LORD’s motivation stated: “For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption had come.”	“Day of vengeance” and “year of redemption” are held together — divine wrath and divine rescue are not opposites but coordinate acts of the same sovereign
5	The LORD’s solitude reiterated: “I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm achieved salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me.”	Reinforces v. 3’s “alone” — this is deliberate, not reluctant; the solitude is itself the point
6	Judgment complete: “I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”	Closing summary of the warrior vision; sets up the pivot to the lament
7	Lament opening: Isaiah (or the community) recounts the LORD’s “deeds of kindness,” “the many good things he has done for Israel”	The lament begins with a <i>memorial</i> — recalling prior acts of covenant faithfulness is the basis for the appeal that follows
8	The LORD’s covenant declaration recalled: “Surely they are my people, children who will not be false” — and so He became their Savior	The pathos here is profound: the LORD’s declaration was made in hope; the people will betray that hope; yet the declaration stands
9	In all their affliction He was afflicted — His presence, His love, His redemptive carrying	God’s solidarity with suffering Israel is grounded not in sentiment but in covenant — He is afflicted in their affliction; He carries

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		them
10	Israel's rebellion — they grieved His Holy Spirit; He turned and became their enemy	The Spirit's grief (an anticipation of Ephesians 4:30) — rebellion has relational and not merely transactional consequences; God experiences grief
11–13	The people recall the Moses/Exodus generation — “Where is he who brought them through the sea?” and the Spirit at work then	The historical memory of the Exodus is invoked as evidence that the LORD can and does intervene dramatically; if He did it then, why not now?
14	The Spirit gave rest — “This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name”	The Exodus's ultimate purpose: God's own glory; the lament implies that inaction now would undermine that same purpose
15	The cry of appeal: “Look down from heaven and see, from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us.”	This is the hinge verse of the lament — the people are not doubting the LORD's power (just demonstrated in vv. 1–6) but questioning His <i>willingness</i> to direct it toward them
16	“But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.”	The appeal moves from historical memory to ontological identity — Fatherhood, not merit; the human patriarchs cannot help, but the divine Father remains
17	“Why, LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance.”	The most theologically charged verse — the people bring their own spiritual dullness before God and ask Him to be responsible for it; this is not evasion but radical dependence

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
18	“For a little while your people possessed your holy place, but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary.”	The desolation of the temple/sanctuary — concrete, historical grief; the holy place is the locus of the divine name and presence
19	“We are yours from of old; but you have not ruled over them, they have not been called by your name.”	The chapter closes in mid-lament — the contrast between the people who bear the LORD’s name and the nations who do not is the final ground of appeal, unanswered until Isaiah 64

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–6	The Solitary Warrior: The LORD Treads the Winepress Alone
2	7–9	The Covenant Remembered: Recounting the LORD’s Acts of Faithful Love
3	10–14	The Covenant Broken and the Memory of Redemption
4	15–19	The Covenant Lament: Crying to the Father Who Has Withdrawn

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The sovereign LORD who treads the winepress alone also hears His people’s covenant lament.

Primary Claim: God presents Himself as the sole executor of eschatological judgment-redemption in order to become the only legitimate object of His people’s lament — the One powerful enough to save and personally bound by covenant obligation to do so.

Applications (Five)

1. (Mind/Belief) The divine warrior vision of verses 1–6 is given to the covenant people before the lament begins — and that ordering is deliberate. When you enter a season of apparent divine silence or withdrawal, the first movement is not to question God’s power but to remember what that power looks like when it is deployed. The LORD who treads the winepress alone, whose arm achieves salvation without any assistance, is the same LORD to whom your lament is addressed. Let the vision precede the petition. Theological clarity about who God is does not make lament unnecessary — it makes it possible. You can only truly cry out to a God you believe can answer.

2. (Affections/Worship) Verse 9 contains one of the most astonishing affirmations in all of prophetic literature: “In all their affliction he was afflicted.” God is not a remote sovereign who administers suffering from a distance — He has entered into the affliction of His people, bearing it with them. This should not merely inform you; it should break something in you and rebuild it differently. The God of Isaiah 63 is not managing your suffering from the outside — He is inside it with you. Let that truth move you from managed distance to genuine intimacy. Pray to the One who knows affliction, not merely the One who permits it.

3. (Will/Behavior) Verses 15–16 model a specific and recoverable practice: when you cannot feel the presence of God, address Him by His covenant names anyway. The people call Him “Father” and “Redeemer from of old” not because those names feel true in the moment but because they *are* true regardless of feeling. In whatever season of spiritual dryness or divine distance you are currently navigating, write down three names or titles of God from Scripture that describe what He has committed to be for you, and address Him by those names in your prayers this week — not as a formula, but as an act of covenant memory that refuses to let experience be the last word.

4. (Affections/Worship) The lament of verse 17 — “Why, LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts?” — models a kind of radical dependence that is deeply counterintuitive to self-reliant religion. The people are bringing their own spiritual dullness to God and asking Him to fix what they cannot fix themselves. This requires an emotional reckoning: if you have been approaching your lack of zeal, your coldness in prayer, or your persistent sin as a project of self-improvement, this passage invites you to grieve that failure before God and ask Him to do what you cannot. The affection this cultivates is not despair but desperate, honest faith.

5. (Mind/Belief) The chapter ends without resolution — the lament continues into Isaiah 64, and the full answer does not arrive until much later in the canon (and in one sense, not until the New Testament). This is not a literary accident but a theological instruction: God does not always close the loop within the chapter of your life that you are currently living. The people of Isaiah 63 cry out with covenant warrant and do not receive an immediate answer. This reframes the experience of unanswered prayer. The absence of a divine answer is not evidence that the lament has been rejected — Israel’s lament in Egypt was

heard but not answered for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13). Sustained, theologically grounded lament is itself a form of faith, not its failure.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Isaiah 63 simultaneously advances two of the most important theological claims in all of prophetic literature. First, it establishes divine aseity in salvation: the LORD acts “alone,” without human aid, in redeeming His people and judging His enemies — His saving work does not require, and is not contingent upon, human assistance (vv. 3, 5). This is not a peripheral point but the text’s explicit emphasis, repeated twice for weight. Second, it establishes the LORD’s genuine covenantal grief and solidarity: He was “afflicted in their affliction” (v. 9); He is appealed to as Father (v. 16) because His relationship to His people is not merely contractual but paternal. The God who acts alone in sovereign power is the same God who carries His people and is grieved by their rebellion — Isaiah 63 refuses the false choice between sovereignty and intimacy, presenting them as coordinate features of the covenant LORD’s character.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Isaiah 63 is a crucible passage for several distinctively Reformed doctrines. The divine warrior vision (vv. 1–6) grounds the Reformed insistence on monergistic redemption — salvation is accomplished by divine power alone, apart from human contribution, and the LORD’s solitude in the act is the passage’s own emphasis. The lament section (vv. 7–19) grounds the Reformed understanding of perseverance — not as a disposition of the strong but as the cry of the weak who know where to turn; the people persist in prayer not because of their own resources but because the God to whom they cry is bound by His own covenant name and character. The passage also grounds a Reformed theology of lament as distinct from both stoic resignation and faithless despair: the people pray “look down from heaven and see” (v. 15) not because God has forgotten but because persistent, theologically honest prayer is the covenant-appointed means by which the people express their dependence on the God who acts alone. Finally, the New Testament’s christological appropriation of the divine warrior vision (Revelation 19) confirms that the solitary Redeemer is ultimately the incarnate Son — the One who acts alone because He has become the sole mediator, with no other name given for salvation.

Main Takeaway

The LORD who strides from Edom alone — needing no ally, consulting no counselor, whose own arm achieved salvation — is the same LORD your lament is addressed to. He is

powerful enough to do what you are asking and bound by His own covenant name to hear you when you ask it. Stop praying small, fearful prayers to a God you have mentally reduced to manageable size. Cry out to the One whose garments are still stained with the evidence of what He is capable of — and do not stop until He answers.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the warrior vision (vv. 1–6) as threat rather than comfort to the covenant community.** The passage opens with terrifying imagery — crimson robes, wrath, winepress — and it is easy to preach it as a warning against God’s enemies without recognizing that it is given first to Israel as a comfort. The solitary warrior who judges the nations is the same Lord who carries His people (v. 9). The power displayed in vv. 1–6 is precisely what qualifies the appeal of vv. 7–19. To preach only the terror without connecting it to the basis for the lament is to misread the passage’s rhetorical purpose.
- **Flattening the lament into a moralism about prayer discipline.** The lament section (vv. 7–19) can easily become “the passage that teaches us to persist in prayer,” with the focus shifting to the people’s activity (the quality and persistence of their prayer) rather than the ground of their appeal (the LORD’s own covenant character and name). The Bullmore Primary Claim discipline is particularly important here: the passage’s claim is not “persist in prayer” but “bring your lament to the One who has already committed Himself to save, on the basis of His own name.” The motivation and direction of the lament is everything; the discipline of persistence is derivative.
- **Underreading verse 9 (“In all their affliction he was afflicted”)** by treating it as a general statement about divine sympathy rather than a specific statement about covenantal solidarity. This verse is one of the most theologically dense affirmations in the Old Testament about the nature of God’s relational engagement with His people’s suffering. It anticipates the incarnation and the language of Hebrews 4:15. To preach it as “God understands how you feel” trivializes what the text is claiming: that the affliction of the covenant people is in some genuine sense shared by the LORD Himself.
- **Avoiding verse 17 (“Why, LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts?”)** because of its theological awkwardness regarding divine causation and human responsibility. This verse raises the hardest question in the passage and preachers often either skip it, over-explain it, or domesticate it into a statement about permissive will. The passage does not resolve the tension theologically — it presents the people bringing their own spiritual failure to God in radical dependence. The Reformed tradition has the doctrinal resources to engage this verse honestly (divine sovereignty over the hardening of the heart, perseverance

as God's act, not just ours), and the preacher should not smooth the text's roughness away.

- **Stopping the chapter's theology at its historical or typological level without completing the christological trajectory.** Revelation 19 is not an optional addendum to Isaiah 63 — it is the passage's canonical fulfillment. Any exposition that treats the divine warrior as a general statement about God's power without naming the One who fulfills that warrior role (the risen Christ at the final judgment) has left the passage's own logic incomplete. The New Testament requires that the solitary Redeemer of Isaiah 63 be identified as Christ; to stop short of that identification is to preach a truncated gospel.
- **Treating the unresolved ending of the chapter as a literary problem rather than a theological statement.** Isaiah 63 ends mid-lament. There is no divine response, no assurance of deliverance, no closing benediction. Preachers instinctively want to resolve this — to supply what Isaiah does not — by jumping to Isaiah 64 or 65 to provide closure. Resist this. The unresolved ending is the text's instruction: sometimes the faithful community lives in the lament without a visible answer, and that condition is given a voice rather than a resolution. Let the text end where it ends and trust the congregation to live in that tension.