

ISAIAH CHAPTER 66

God Comforts His People

Today we conclude this marvelous study of the book of Isaiah. I hope it has impacted your life as much as it has mine. Let's begin by looking at verses 1 and 2 of Isaiah chapter 66.

Isaiah 66:1, 2 NAS:

1 Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?

2 "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

These first two verses are so powerful! God is pictured sitting on His throne (Isaiah 6:1-3) with the earth as His footstool. He is the great God of the universe and He fills both Heaven and earth with His presence. No one can build a house for Him to live in; and even though *He* is the Creator of all things, what He values most are people who are humble and contrite (Isaiah 57:15) and who truly desire to live according to His Word as written in the manual for living, the Holy Bible. People who "tremble at His Word." What do you think it means to "tremble" at God's Word? To reverence it, to respect it, to realize Who it is that has spoken it and therefore to obey that Word. The ceremonies of worship can never take the place of a humble heart. David wrote the following in Psalm 51:16, 17, NLT:

16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

God does not live in buildings; He dwells with those who submit to Him. God is looking for a heart to dwell in, a heart that is tender and broken, not one that is concerned with the externals involved in so many religious services. God is looking to dwell in the hearts of those who take His Word seriously.

In one way or another, this has been Isaiah's message throughout this book, not only to Israel but to Gentile believers as well. God wants His people Israel to follow the truth He has revealed to them in the covenant He made with them when He gave the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai. Pointing the people back to the Word of God,

Isaiah was indicating that they needed to obey it if they were to enjoy His blessings.

Isaiah 66:3, 4 NAS:

*3 "But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood; He who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, And their soul delights in their abominations,
4 So I will choose their punishments And will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight."*

These unusual comparisons in verse 3 indicate that the people's religious sacrifices and offerings were only external ritual. In their hearts the people were murderers and idolaters, and they ignored God's dietary laws. God was quite clear about such things when He gave Israel the dietary laws they should follow. For example they were told by God in Leviticus 11:7, 8 NLT:

7 The pig has evenly split hooves but does not chew the cud, so it is unclean.

8 You may not eat the meat of these animals or even touch their carcasses. They are ceremonially unclean for you.

The main purpose for this dietary code was to remind the Israelites that they belonged to God and were obligated to keep themselves separated from anything that would cause them to sin.

In Isaiah's day, were God's people trembling at His Word as referred to in verse 2? No, they weren't. Instead, they were going through the motions of worship without having a heart for God. The people were not *sacrificing* the animals; they were *murdering* them.

God detests the sacrifices of the wicked and disobedient. At times they killed children to offer as sacrifices (Ezekiel 23:39). Some of the Jews were offering bulls as sacrifices with the same empty heartedness as the pagans offering a man as a sacrifice. Dogs were also considered unclean for sacrifice and were associated with swine. All of these images illustrate the meaninglessness of an offering to God for forgiveness when it is not offered with a contrite and broken heart for one's sins. Such people will be punished by God. Because their hearts were far from God (Isaiah 29:13), their offerings were as unclean things to God. It is the heart of the worshiper that determines the value of the offering. Perhaps you remember the words God spoke to His people in Isaiah 65:1-5 NLT:

1 The Lord says, "I was ready to respond, but no one asked for help. I was ready to be found, but no one was looking for me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am!' to a nation that did not call on my name.

2 All day long I opened my arms to a rebellious people. But they follow

their own evil paths and their own crooked schemes.

3 All day long they insult me to my face by worshiping idols in their sacred gardens. They burn incense on pagan altars.

4 At night they go out among the graves, worshiping the dead. They eat the flesh of pigs and make stews with other forbidden foods.

5 Yet they say to each other, 'Don't come too close or you will defile me! I am holier than you!' These people are a stench in my nostrils, an acrid smell that never goes away.

In reality the people were doing their own thing rather than being obedient to God. Therefore judgment would come.

God condemns externalism in worship. The Almighty God does not desire or need magnificent buildings to live in nor does he need or want a lot of entertaining spectacles to express worship for Him. It is the repentant and believing heart that He desires and requires. Apart from faith, the slaying of animals is as repulsive to God as murder, or the offering of an unclean beast as a sacrifice. Those who turn away from Him will find to their sorrow that He will turn away from them when they call on Him.

Isaiah 66:5, 6 NAS:

5 Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word: "Your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name's sake, Have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy.' But they will be put to shame.

6 "A voice of uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, The voice of the Lord who is rendering recompense to His enemies.

Let's read these same verses again, but this time from the New Living Translation.

Isaiah 66:5,6 NLT:

5 Hear this message from the Lord, all you who tremble at his words: "Your own people hate you and throw you out for being loyal to my name. 'Let the Lord be honored!' they scoff. 'Be joyful in him!' But they will be put to shame.

6 What is all the commotion in the city? What is that terrible noise from the Temple? It is the voice of the Lord taking vengeance against his enemies.

There were a few who did tremble at God's Words and who did worship Him in truth. But they were mocked by the hypocrites who scoffed at them as they endeavored to worship God as He had directed. God reassures the true worshipers that those in Israel who pretended to know **God** but **who** actually hated and discriminated against God's people would be punished. These pretenders sarcastically said, "Let the Lord be honored," and "Be joyful in him!" when in reality they were shaming God's name. These people will be judged and sent to Hell for eternity for such behavior.

Isaiah 66:7-9 NAS:

7 *“Before she travailed, she brought forth; Before her pain came, she gave birth to a boy.*

8 *“Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons.*

9 *“Shall I bring to the point of birth and not give delivery?” says the Lord. “Or shall I who gives delivery shut the womb?” says your God.*

Let’s also look at these verses in the New Living Translation as well.

Isaiah 66:7-9 NLT:

7 *“Before the birth pains even begin, Jerusalem gives birth to a son.*

8 *Who has ever seen anything as strange as this? Who ever heard of such a thing? Has a nation ever been born in a single day? Has a country ever come forth in a mere moment? But by the time Jerusalem’s birth pains begin, her children will be born.*

9 *Would I ever bring this nation to the point of birth and then not deliver it?” asks the Lord. “No! I would never keep this nation from being born,” says your God.*

The remarkable promise in these verses is the *“birth of a nation”* as Israel takes center stage on the international scene (vv. 7–9). No birth can come until labor pains begin. When labor occurs, birth will follow. The return of the Jews to their land will be as swift as the birth of a baby. Israel’s *“travail,” her labor pains*, will be her suffering during the 3-½ years of the Great Tribulation, *“the Day of the Lord”* or *“the time of Jacob’s trouble”* (Jeremiah 30:7), when God will purify His people and prepare them for the coming of their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Political Israel was born on May 14, 1948; but *“the new Israel”* will be *“born in a day”* when they believe in Jesus Christ. Jerusalem will experience joy, peace, and satisfaction. Like a nursing baby, she will find health and peace in the arms of Jesus. *“Peace like a river”* reminds us of Isaiah’s words to Ahaz in Isaiah 8:5–8 and God’s promises in Isaiah 41:18 and 48:18.

Here Isaiah predicts the marvelous deliverance of the repentant remnant of Jews. The unbelieving majority of Jews ridicule the sincere Bible believers, challenging their God to display His glory by a miracle of deliverance or of vengeance, if He can. In the “last days” the remnant of Jews was to multiply speedily into a great and numerous people as the Gospel was preached. The return of redeemed Jews from all over the world to the land of Israel (Palestine) will be so remarkably quick that it will be like a woman giving birth to a son before or as soon as she has any labor pains. God does not start something and leave it unfinished. As surely as a woman’s womb opens for delivery, so will God accomplish for Jerusalem what He has set out to do.

Isaiah 66:10, 11 NAS:

10 *“Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be*

*exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her,
11 That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That
you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom.”*

Here we have cause for rejoicing. The people of Israel will delight in Jerusalem as an infant delights in its mother's breasts. Isaiah compares Jerusalem to a nursing mother.

Isaiah 66:12-14 NAS:

12 For thus says the Lord, “Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees.

13 “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem.”

14 Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, And your bones will flourish like the new grass; And the hand of the Lord will be made known to His servants, But He will be indignant toward His enemies.

God's hand will bring blessing to His servants but indignation, that is, anger toward His enemies; and Isaiah describes that “*indignation*” in verses 15–18. The Day of the Lord will be a storm of judgment with fire and whirlwinds, and with the sword of God; “*And those slain by the Lord shall be many,*” according to verse 16.

As stated many times in the Book of Isaiah, peace will come to Jerusalem and the wealth of all the world will flow to her. In Isaiah 66:11-12 Jerusalem is compared to a mother; in verse 13 God is compared to a mother who comforts her child.¹ In the comfort and prosperity of the Millennial Kingdom, all believers will enjoy uninterrupted peace and plenty, like a rushing river, as Isaiah describes in verse 12, and will exert a controlling influence over all the world. The closest of relations will exist between Israel and her God. But for those who reject Christ, a decisive and final punishment will be brought upon all the unrighteous and disobedient.

Isaiah 66: 15-18 NAS:

15 For behold, the Lord will come in fire And His chariots like the whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For the Lord will execute judgment by fire And by His sword on all flesh, And those slain by the Lord will be many.

17 “Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go to the gardens, Following one in the center, Who eat swine's flesh, detestable things and mice, Will come to an end altogether,” declares the Lord.

18 “For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory.

¹ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1120

When God restores His people to Jerusalem in the Millennium, as we're told in verses 10-13, they will rejoice and prosper, but idolatrous unbelievers will be delivered to the fires of hell. This fact is reaffirmed in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 NLT:

5 And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering.
6 In his justice he will pay back those who persecute you.
7 And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels,
8 in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus.
9 They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power.
10 When he comes on that day, he will receive glory from his holy people—praise from all who believe. And this includes you, for you believed what we told you about him.

Who will be slain? Those who have disobeyed God's Law; those who have known God's truth and yet despised it. Instead of worshiping the true and living God, they turned to pagan idols and pagan practices. It is not enough to be "religious"; we must serve God according to what He says in His Word (Isaiah 8:20).

This judgment will be fair because of their disgusting sins: worshiping in idolatrous gardens (Isaiah 1:29; 65:3) and eating ceremonially unclean animals such as pigs (Isaiah 65:4; 66:3; Leviticus 11:7) and mice (Leviticus 11:29). When the Messiah returns, His judgment will be on all nations (Zechariah 14:3; Revelation 19:17-18) and because of that judgment the world will see His glory.² Jerusalem will be the center of world attention because of the presence of Jesus there.

Isaiah 66:19-21 NAS:

19 "I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.

20 "Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the Lord, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the Lord, "just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord.

21 "I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the

² Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1120

Lord.

The book closes with a description of messengers going to the ends of the earth to announce what God has done for Israel. The result will be a flow of people to Jerusalem (see 60:3–14 and 66:12) to bring offerings to Christ. In the past, Gentile nations came to Jerusalem to attack and destroy; but in the Kingdom Age, they will come to worship and glorify God.

God's glory will be made evident to all the world, that is, to all who survive the destructions of the Battle of Armageddon, and have gathered together as followers of the Millennial Church. People outside Israel will turn to Christ and worship Him. The remnant of believing Israelites will travel as missionaries to other parts of the world, to tell Gentiles about God's glory. Those places and peoples will include: Tarshish (western Mediterranean), Pul (south of Egypt, perhaps Somaliland), Lud (probably Lydia in Asia Minor, Tubal (southeast of the Black Sea), and Javan (Greece). 20, 21. All the regenerated Jews will be honorably escorted by their Gentile brothers and sisters to Palestine (Israel). Christ will then appoint some to be priests. These verses refer to all the known world at the time of Isaiah and imply that all of this will refer to the entire world in the end times. In other words, Isaiah couldn't include England, the United States, China, and other nations because they hadn't been discovered yet. They are most definitely, however, included in this prophecy. Also, when Isaiah said they would be brought to Israel by horses, chariots, litters, mules, and camels, those were all the means of transportation known to the world at that time. When Christ returns in the future and this prophecy is actually fulfilled, they will be brought by planes, trains, and automobiles, and anything else available at that time.

Jesus' Second Coming will be followed by a further evangelizing of the world, the full return of Israel, and the establishment of Jerusalem as the world's capitol.

Isaiah 66:22-24 NAS:

22 *"For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the Lord, "So your offspring and your name will endure.*

23 *"And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord.*

24 *"Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."*

The book ends on a seeming negative note describing worshipers looking at the desecrated and decayed corpses of the rebels. The Valley of Hinnom is a picture of judgment in Isaiah 30:33; Jesus used it to picture Hell in Mark 9:43–48. This is most likely where these bodies will be placed for viewing. The people who come to Jerusalem to worship will also go outside the city to this "garbage dump" and be reminded that God is a consuming fire (Jeremiah 7:32).

All mankind, people from all nations, will at one time or another travel to Jerusalem to worship Christ. God, bowing down before Him. As Isaiah had frequently written, these righteous ones will contrast greatly with those who rebelled against God, who will suffer eternal torment.

The way in which this marvelous Book of Isaiah concludes points to the need for unrepentant people to turn to God, the only God, the Holy One of Israel, if they want to spend eternity in Heaven.

The establishment of new heavens and a new earth will usher in the final, permanent, and unchanging state of both the saved and the damned. Apparently the regular appearance of all mankind in Jerusalem for worship is figurative of religious commitment and allegiance to God as the one true God. The faithful will look on the corpses of those who joined in the final assault of the World-Power on Jerusalem and will deplore all that they stood for in this life. The souls of the wicked will be consigned to the eternal torments of Hell as Christ reaffirmed in Mark 9:47-49 NLT:

*47 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,
48 where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.'*
49 "For everyone will be tested with fire.

The atoning work of Jehovah's Servant, Jesus, has laid the foundation for a new Commonwealth, for new heavens and a new earth that shall never pass away.³

Throughout his book, Isaiah has presented us with alternatives: Trust God and live, or rebel against God and die. He has explained the grace and mercy of God and offered God's forgiveness. He has also explained the holiness and wrath of God and warned of His judgment. He has promised glory for those who will believe and judgment for those who ridicule. He has explained the foolishness of trusting mankind's wisdom and the world's resources.

The prophet calls the professing people of God back to spiritual reality. He warns against hypocrisy and empty worship. He pleads for faith, obedience, a heart that delights in God, and a life that glorifies God.

Isaiah tells us that there is no peace for the wicked. (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21). In order to have peace, you must have righteousness (Isaiah 32:17). The only way to have righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:19-31).

Isaiah's message has been, "*Be comforted by the Lord!*"⁴ But God cannot comfort rebels.

³ Pfeiffer, Charles F.: The Wycliffe Bible Commentary : Old Testament. Chicago : Moody Press, 1962, S. Is 66:22

⁴ See Isaiah 12:1; 40:1-2; 49:13; 51:3, 19; 52:9; 54:11; 57:18; 61:2; 66:13.

If we're sinning against God and are comfortable about it, something is radically wrong. That false comfort will lead to false confidence, which will lead to the judgment of God.

Let us close with these summary verses from Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:6 NLT:

6 Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near.

Isaiah 1:18 NLT:

18 "Come now, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool."

Isaiah 12:1 NLT

1 In that day you will sing: "I will praise you, O Lord! You were angry with me, but not any more. Now you comfort me."