

"Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool! Where then is the house you could build for Me? And where is the place that I may rest?' (Isaiah 66:1)

In last week's lesson on Isaiah 65, we saw a God who--in response to Isaiah's compassionate intercessory prayer for Israel--reiterated what He had promised in Isaiah 62--that He would "not remain silent," about what was going on in Israel, as He looked down from "His holy and glorious habitation in heaven...until her righteousness would go forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning"! The people of Israel had pleaded that He not remain silent! But when He spoke here--much to their surprise--it was with words of judgment! And then (in another surprise for them!) He said: "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me! I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation which did not call on My name!" (The apostle Paul, as we noted in our study last week, applied these words to the Gentiles, in Romans 10:20!)

But when He spoke to Israel, He had this to say: "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, a people who continually provoke Me to My face--offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine flesh..." etc. etc. (all idolatrous rituals practiced by the pagans)!

"These are (like) smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day...and I will not keep silent, but I will repay them back for what they have done...for what their sins deserve, says Yahweh" (as the Passion Version puts it!)

And so, MacArthur notes, that "in the midst of the final fury of judgment when the time of Jacob's troubles comes, God will purge out the rebels in Israel but spare a 'faithful remnant"! His "servants," on whose behalf He will act--"bringing forth offspring from Jacob and heirs of His mountain from Judah," to whom would be given the fertile territory of Sharon, "as a pasture land for their flocks," and the valley of Achor, as "a resting place for herds"!

And so, His "chosen ones"--His "servants" (who seek Him, who "tremble at His word"), He said, would be "blessed in the earth" (speaking presumably of the period of the coming Millennium), in contrast with the plight of "those who forsake Him"!

But there's more! "For behold (God promised in verses 17-25) I will create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind"! Isaiah 65 goes on to prophecy how God will create a (new) Jerusalem "as a place for rejoicing and her people for gladness"! And God says that He Himself "will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad for His people..." and that He "will wipe away all tears"! (In case you're wondering about the timing of all these "last day events," MacArthur notes that Isaiah's future kingdom will be two-fold: It will "include a temporal kingdom of a thousand years, known as the Millennial Kingdom--followed by the eternal kingdom, with the creation of "new heavens and a new earth"! But, as MacArthur again notes, Isaiah's account "doesn't make clear the timing between the kingdom's two

aspects as does the later prophecy in the book of the Revelation"! And so we had to go to the book of the Revelation to get a better understanding of how it all fits together!

Revelation 19 ends with the account of the coming Battle of Armageddon and Christ's Second Coming--events which mark the close of the Tribulation! Then, there's the sequence of events in Revelation 20 that will take place--with the binding of Satan; Christ's earthly reign in the 1,000-year Millennium; Satan's 'loosening and final rebellion, and followed by the Great White Throne judgment--all fitting chronologically between the close of the Tribulation and the creation of the new heavens and new earth"! And all still to come!

In Revelation 21:1, John (the apostle) writes that he sees "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away and there is no longer any sea"! Then he sees "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband! And he says, "I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away! And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new"!

Then Isaiah summed up Isaiah 65, by declaring that the relationship between God and His people will be so intimate that "He will anticipate and provide for their every need"! God says that it will come to pass that "before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear"!

And we wondered what more Isaiah might be able to add to this glorious picture of Israel's future!

And so, last night, we unraveled Isaiah 66! Where God "rebukes the returning exiles for wanting to rebuild the temple and restore the outward forms of worship, but with no intentions of turning from their evil ways or having their hearts changed"! The Passion version puts it this way: "God no longer dwells in man-made buildings but in the God-shaped hearts of people who come before Him, humble and contrite of spirit, and who tremble at His Word"! In his sermon on this passage, John MacArthur asserted that God is an eternal infinite Spirit who fills all eternity, and doesn't need a building as His dwelling place but is looking to find His home in the heart of those who are humbled, and broken by sin, and penitent, before Him! Those not coming to Him with a sense of dread or threat, but with a sense of reverence and awe, and a desire to understand and obey His Word"! This same phrase ("to tremble at His Word") appears again in verse 5 where God says, "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His Word"! So the one who trembles at His word becomes, in effect, the identity, the mark, and even the title for the true believer!

When Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure from this world He told them (in John 14:15) that He would "ask His Father, and He would give them another Helper (or 'Comforter') who would abide in them and be with them forever"!

II Corinthians 6:16 says, "We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people'! And John writes in Revelation 21:3, that he "heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them"!

But for those who do not "tremble at His Word,"--the "apostate" Israelites (the "rebels!")- -who go through the motions of worship without having a heart for God, God will judge! These are those who make an offering to God but with "no more heartbrokenness than a pagan who kills a child, offers a dog, sacrifices pig's blood, blesses an idol, and loves such abominations"! These are those also who hate, and mock, their "brothers" who want to see the Lord glorified"! God "loathes" these acts and attitudes of wickedness, Isaiah 66:4 says, "and He will bring on them what they dread"!

In verses 7-9, the Lord again compares the struggles of Israel with the birthpains of a mother; the point being that Israel's suffering will end with a "delivery," and with the assurance that the Lord "will not impose travail on the remnant without bringing them to His kingdom"!

And God will not renege on His promise to bless Israel, we are assured!

"Be joyful with Jerusalem...and be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her," God implores! "For behold, I will extend peace to her like a river...and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream..." He promises that "His hand will be made known to His servants, but that He will be indignant toward His enemies! For behold, the Lord will come in fire and His chariot like a whirlwind to render His anger with fury" (speaking of His second coming)! But, He says, "the time is also coming to gather all nations and tongues"--including "those who have never heard of My fame and My glory"! And so (in what Motyer calls "the clearest Old Testament statement of missionary outreach) verse 19 says that God "will set a sign (which Motyer says can "only mean the cross") and will send survivors (from the faithful remnant) to the nations...and they will declare My glory among the nations! Then (MacArthur notes) "representative Gentile populations from all over the world, who hear of God's glory (many for the first time!), will "expedite the return of Israel's faithful remnant, as a grain offering to the Lord...and God will also take some of them for priests and Levites" (including Gentiles, in fulfillment of Exodus 19:6), declares the Lord!

And to all this (Motyer notes) verse 22 adds "the certainty of a new creation towards which all is moving, with the guarantee of perpetuity"! "For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me, so your offspring and your name will endure! 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!

But on a less positive, yet realistic note, the Lord adds: "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"! (A passage Jesus would refer to, in Mark 9:43-48! And a grim reminder that although the Lord God is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations"!)) Hell is a reality, according to Isaiah!

We've drawn a lot from Alec Motyer's commentary on "The Prophecy of Isaiah," in our study of Isaiah! And here's one more! His final reflection on the nation of Isaiah: "There's a grandeur about Isaiah not found elsewhere even in the most majestic of the rest of Scripture, a majesty full of glory and of solemnity, plain alike in the revelation vouchsafed to him and the language in which he was inspired to express it! But with the grandeur went a stern resoluteness, that if the glory does not win us to the life of obedience, if visions of the coming King, the sin-bearing Servant, and the liberating Anointed Conqueror will not suffice, then maybe (just maybe!) the unmistakably horrible rewards of disobedience will drive our wayward hearts to 'tremble' at the word of the Lord!"

So what should be our response? And how then should we live?

Tremble at the Word of the Lord (as the Word of the Lord tells us to do, in the book of Isaiah)!

"Be comforted! And feel secure in the arms of the Lord!" (Writes Wiersbe, in his book on Isaiah, titled, "Be Comforted"!)

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