

August 23

Scriptures: Read Isaiah 65 & 66

Key Verse: "... But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. " (Isaiah 66:2b)

Overview

In chapter 65 we read of God's response to the prayer in the previous chapter. He affirms the rebelliousness of His people to whom He had continually stretched out His hands, thus showing that He was truly longsuffering; but they did not respond (Ps. 50:21). The people to whom He had not revealed Himself in that special way, however, sought Him out and found Him; these are the Gentiles who called out to God and have been saved and brought into His fold (cf. Rom. 10:12-13). The Apostle Paul confirms this interpretation, adding that Isaiah was bold to say such a thing to the self-righteous Jews who thought themselves better and holier than the Gentiles (Rom. 10:20-21; cf. Acts 7:51-53) but were, in fact, full of hypocrisy and self-righteousness.

In open rebellion against God, they defiled themselves with idolatry, spiritism, unclean food, as well as cultic rituals before the gods Gad ("fortune"), and Meni ("destiny"; 65:3-4, 11; 66:17; cf. Num.19:16; Deut. 18:11; Jer. 19:13; Zeph. 1:5; 1 Cor. 10:20-21). Their wickedness and impudent attitude so provoked the Lord that He was "fuming" (65:5b; cf. Ps. 18:8), and their judgment, destruction, and punishment were inevitable (65:13-14). Yet because of the few good grapes, they would not be utterly destroyed (65:8). The Lord had a plan for this remnant from whom would come spiritual Israel. They would be a new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; James 1:18), and just as Jerusalem would receive a new name in His Millennial Kingdom, so also will the true believers who will come from the Gentile nations and the Jewish remnant (65:15; cf. 62:2, 12; Rev. 2:17; 3:12). They will enjoy manifold blessings and their former troubles will be forgotten (65:16b; Rev. 21:4; Hos. 13:14).

During His glorious Kingdom reign, God will transform the heavens and earth by renewing it to a state similar to that of the garden of Eden. This will be but a foretaste of the new heavenly Jerusalem (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; Heb. 11:10; 12:22; 13:14). The curse upon God's creation will no longer exist. Human life will be lengthened, the land will be fruitful, there will be no oppressors, and the predatory animals will become tame and herbivorous; but greatest of all, God will be so near that there will be instantaneous answer to prayer (65:24).

In the final chapter of Isaiah, we come to understand that in the Millennial Kingdom there will be no Temple, just as there will not be one in heaven (Rev. 21:22), for the Lord of heaven and earth does not require a house built by man, nor does He require sacrificial animals. Jesus Christ was the final, complete, and perfect sacrifice who came in fulfillment of the Temple service; thus the temple service and sacrificial system is now abolished (Acts 7:48; 17:24-25). What the Lord does require is the humble ("poor"), repentant ("contrite"), and believing hearts of those who fear Him; they are His temples and He dwells within them (66:2; cf. 57:15; 1 Cor. 3:16).

Since the whole context of chapter 66 concerns the end times, it appears that verse three is to be understood as not merely referring to the externalism in worship, but rather that after Jesus

Christ's great sacrifice of Himself, the whole sacrificial system became an abomination to God. He no longer took delight in it, for when He called to them with the message of the Gospel, they did not hear or heed (66:4). Those who feared the Lord and did believe His message were hated, mocked, persecuted, and cast out by the unbelieving Jews (66:5; e.g. Stephen, Acts 7; 22:1; John 15:18; Matt. 24:9). However, those who have mocked the followers of Jesus (whom the Lord "glorified"), will one day be put to shame. In an instant, the omniscient Lord will return in fury to judge and repay His enemies who will all be slain (66:6,15-18a). Also in an instant the Messiah will miraculously establish His new Kingdom (66:7-9) with all His faithful children gathered there from "all nations and tongues" (66:18), that they might see "His glory" and enjoy the peace, delight, comfort, sustenance, and abundance of Jerusalem's glory. They will not sit idle, however, for the Lord, who is the "sign among them" (66:19; cf. Luke 2:34) will send them as His emissaries to declare His glory among the nations, who will willingly pay Him tribute and come under His leadership. There will be faithful believers from these nations who will be a part of the Lord's holy priesthood and servants who will continually offer to Him the sacrifice of praise ("Levis", 66:21; 1 Pet. 2:9).

The book of Isaiah closes with a glimpse of the final state of all mankind: God's people in the heavenly realm ("the new heavens and the new earth"; Rev. 21:1, 4). His people will have life eternal and will continually come before Him to worship; but the wicked who have rebelled against God will be cast into the unquenchable fire for eternity (66:24; cf. Mark 9:43-48). What a strong appeal for us to become "watchmen" (62:6) who sound out the warning of the coming doom for the wicked. We must proclaim the God News of Jesus to the lost, that we might avert their souls from destruction and lead them to new and eternal life in Christ.

Prayer

Lord, we have looked with Isaiah into truth and tremble at Your word. We want only to see the word picture of Your judgment on the wicked in the final sentence of Isaiah's prophecy. By Your grace we've trusted Your salvation. We determine to throw ourselves daily at Your feet, worship You, and love and serve You forever.