

# Inseparable Hope and Judgment – Isaiah 66:14b-24

**Introduction** - The book of Isaiah is a single vision, a prophecy of judgment upon a rebellious people, and that vision is there from beginning to end (1:2, 7-8; 66:24). And yet, within the walls of judgment, the mercy of the LORD for His people and His unthwarted plan for the salvation of the world swells in overwhelming triumph (...from the intro to my sermon on Isaiah 1:2ff). Isaiah preached a message of a New Creation which the faithful remnant would see initiated when the ascended Messiah reigns from the heavens over all nations, gathering them all to Himself through preaching of the Good News. He prophesied that Israel, as a nation of stiff-necked rebels, would reject this message and fall under the judgment of God. After nearly 60 years of preaching, Isaiah was martyred by the ruler of Judah, Manasseh (according to Jewish historians, possibly alluded to in Heb 11:37).

**The LORD Will Come** (vv14b-17) – As we have seen throughout the book, this is a prophecy of the fiery judgment promised upon unbelieving Jerusalem and the apostasy of the idolatrous temple worship. Paul promised the same as he encouraged the saints at Thessalonica to stand firm (2 Thess 1:3-10). The Old Covenant administrations would come to an end; new priests will be selected from elsewhere (see v21). Fire is a picture of judgment throughout the Word of God and so there is always application for these warnings. To those who have been made holy by His grace, the fire of His character is a picture of His sanctifying work like the dross removed from the silver (Psalm 12:6). But to those who depend upon their own efforts to stand in His presence, they will find Him to be a roaring blast furnace (Psalm 18:12-14).

**The LORD Will Gather** (vv18-21) – I think the NIV gets v18 better: “*And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.*” This is what Paul would say as he walked away from the Jews who mocked the message of Jesus the Messiah (i.e. Acts 13:46). Then it says that God will “*set a sign among*” the nations (v19). That sign is the gospel proclamation of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords (Dan 7:13-14, Rev 11:15). In our language, the nations listed include Spain and Africa, Turkey and Greece, and the far-off islands you have never heard of (v19). They will come from everywhere to the mountain of the Lord, the New Jerusalem, by any means they can (v20, Isaiah 2:1-2) – and of course this is what has been happening over two millennia and certainly is far from complete. This is the judgment that came in the last days which the authors of the New Testament declared had come and which their generation would witness (1 Pet 4:7, Rom 13:11, Heb 9:26, James 5:8, 1 John 2:18): A great judgment and then the Gospel age of Hope!

**Hope and Judgment** (vv22-24) – These final verses are not jumping ahead to the end of our age but they are declaring the *telos*, the point to which all of this is now going, much as the last chapters of the book of Revelation. On this new heavens and new earth shall remain the remnant and many descendants (think “children’s children to a thousand generations”) who will worship in time immemorial (vv22-23). Heb 12:18-24 teaches us that when we gather each Lord’s Day in worship, we gather with those “*who are registered in heaven...to the spirits of just men made perfect.*” In one sense, every church is a mega-church on Sunday morning! But why the stark contrast and somber end of verse 24? Jesus would give the same idea of hope and judgment in Matt 8:10-12. And since Isaiah ends here, with a picture of hell, so should we. Some think such language of eternal judgment is an unchristian way to speak. Except that Jesus quotes this verse not once, but thrice, as recorded in Mark 9:42-48.

**The Worm and Fire** – Some try to evade the force of these words by pointing out that the language is symbolic, which is obvious. But remember, if the language is symbolic, it is symbolizing something far more a place of horror. A symbol is always less than the reality. If the lake of fire is not literal, then the real hell is far, far worse, probably beyond our capacity to imagine. The word for hell is gehenna, which comes from the valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem. During the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, children were sacrificed in this valley (2 Kings 16:3, 21:6) and the place was forever linked with the foul deeds enacted there. And so Isaiah provides language of eternal punishment. If you compare these with Rev 20:10 and Matt 25:41, the heaviness of this must not be missed.

**Ascension Day Hope and Warning** – All anyone has to do to go to hell is stay on his present course of self-salvation and self-justification. The outcome of your rejection of God will be God’s eternal rejection of you. Hell is an eternal “no” to sin – sin left uncovered by the judgment of Jesus will be sin judged for eternity in hell. If you’ve never realized that you deserve hell, if you find yourself angry at God for the fallen world in which you have to live, you don’t understand yourself. There is a reason why there is so much tragedy in the world and it reminds even those who are being sanctified by grace through faith. We deserve hell. But Jesus suffered hell out of love for us to save us from our hell-bound folly. What is left for us to do is to bow the knee in faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. That is the ever-present message of Isaiah