

Isaiah 66:12-22

This passage, the Haftarah reading for Deuteronomy 20-21, decrees consolation for Jerusalem, retribution upon the enemies of God, Gentiles as well as hypocrites among the Jews.

Begun at the cross and enjoyed by us now, it will be completed at the end of time.

Consolation

God will use the peace of Jerusalem and the honor given to it by the Gentiles to comfort believers.

Isaiah 66:12 - "For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her [Jerusalem] like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye [those who love Jerusalem] suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

Like the Gospel song, "I've got peace like a river..." Ever flowing in abundance, in perpetuity.

"the glory of the Gentiles" = *kabowd* - glory, honor, sometimes means riches. The Gentiles will bestow honor and riches on the the church when they are converted.

The children of Zion will find a maternal tenderness and care at the hands of the heathen nations, who are to be as their "nursing mothers." (Comp. **Isaiah 60:16**.)

In the same way, the Good Shepherd gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom.

Isaiah 66:14 - "And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies."

"your bones shall flourish like an herb" - a similar image to the vision of the valley of dry bones in **Ezekiel 37**.

This passage Don Isaac Abarbanel and other Jewish writers interpret of the resurrection of the dead.

The image of "flourishing like grass" is used in every Jewish funeral:

"As they return from the grave, everyone of them plucks up grass from off the ground twice or thrice, and casts it over his head behind him, saying those words of the psalmist, "and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth", **Psalms 72:16** and this they do, to signify their hopes of the resurrection of the dead, who shall flourish as

the grass, as the prophet says, "your bones shall flourish as the herb."

Isaiah 66:15 - "For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire."

This was partially seen at Pentecost, where the wind and fire spiritually destroyed the chaff of our old identity as Adam:

- **Acts 2:2-3** - "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."

At the end of time at God's final triumph, real wind and fire will accompany final destruction of the wicked.

Rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235) says this will be fulfilled in the war of Gog and Magog:

- **Ezekiel 38:22** - "And I will plead against him [Gog] with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone."

See also **Revelation 14:9-10** - "Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

...And **Revelation 18:8** , where Babylon "shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her."

Isaiah 66:16 - "For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many."

"plead" = *shaphat* - a judicial term that means contend with legally, judge, decide or pronounce sentence upon.

This "judicial" image is the link back to the Torah readings in **Deuteronomy 18-21** concerning courts, judges, witnesses and justice.

'In the Midst' of the Garden

Isaiah 66:17 - "They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD."

There are several different interpretations of this. But one thing stands out:

"in the midst" - *tavek* - the same word used to designate the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden.

- **Genesis 2:3:3** - "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst (*tavek*) of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

The Jews interpreted this is a picture of "Edom" continually engaging in a false sacred ritual of idolatry in the midst of a garden "where such was the custom to erect it" trying to purify themselves with uncleanness.

Isaiah has already used this image:

- **Isaiah 65:3** - "A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick"

The gardens (usually in high places) were where the Asherah - the groves or false trees of life - were set up and worshipped, accompanied by many abominable practices.

But idolatry originated in the Garden of Eden, when Eve judged good and evil on her own:

- **Genesis 3:6** - "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

This is emblematic of the whole human condition, still enchanted by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but suffering the pangs of guilt and death brought on by our sin.

We will do anything to free ourselves from guilt. Losing ourselves in drugs or debauchery, or the reverse - trying to offset our evil deeds with good ones. We deny death as a serious possibility for us. But nothing works except repentance and accepting God's mercy through Christ's atoning death on the cross.

Isaiah 66:18 - "For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory."

"all nations and languages" - prefigured at Pentecost.

- **Isaiah 40:5** - "And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

"thoughts" = *machashabah* - usually *evil* thoughts, devices, imaginations, inventions, plots, cunning work

- **Genesis 6:5** - "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the

earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

- **Hebrews 4:12** - "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Rashi - Their deeds and their thoughts have come to Me. And that forces Me to gather all the heathens (nations [Mss. and K'li Paz]), and to let them know that their deeds are vanity and the thoughts they are thinking, "For the sake of my name, the Lord shall be glorified," let them understand that it is false. And where is the gathering? It is the gathering that Zechariah prophesied (Zechariah 14:2): "And I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem."

"And they shall see My glory": When I wage war with them with the plague of the following description (Zechariah 14: 12): "Their flesh shall disintegrate... and their eyes... and their tongue."

Part of God's glory is His unfailing judgment against wickedness.

Isaiah 66:19 - "And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles."

Tarshish is Tartessus on the Atlantic coast of Spain; Pul and Lud represent Africa, Tubal was a son of Japheth, whose descendants settled in north-eastern Europe or Russia, and Javan is the biblical name for Greece.

Those that Escape

i.e. those who survive the judgment of God (those who convert and receive His mercy and forgiveness) will be sent to the four quarters of the world with the Gospel. God will "set a sign" on them - "an ensign," as the word signifies, Psalm 74:4, which is a military sign or banner, to gather people together, to which, as is promised in Isaiah 11:12, the Gentiles shall seek.

The sign could be a supernatural sign like those at Pentecost and the miracles produced through the apostles.

It is also implied that "the sign" is what allows them to escape the destruction in the first place, similar to the mark on the forehead of those who "wept for the sins of Jerusalem" in **Ezekiel 9**. i.e. the Hebrew letter "tau" or the cross, used by the ancient Jews to mark Messianic passages in their scripture manuscripts. A signal, by which God's true friends would escape the retribution.

The Jewish interpreters, and among them Abarbanel, suppose that it refers to a hostile and warlike assembling of all nations in the time of the Messiah, who, say they, shall attack Jerusalem with the Messiah in it, and shall be defeated. Many of the early church

fathers also referred it to the final judgment.

Isaiah 66:20 - "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD."

The picture is of these "survivors" bringing converts from among the Gentiles to Jerusalem in all kinds of ways, in the same way that people went up at the pilgrimage feasts or with their first fruit offerings in clean vessels - i.e. the Gentiles would be like an offering brought to God.

Rashi - "an offering in a pure vessel for acceptance", so will they bring your brethren as an acceptable offering [the *minchah*, or meal offering].

Rashi understood this to be Jews who had assimilated into Gentile culture and who were being returned to Jerusalem. We can see them as Gentiles who were predestined to believe and be part of the New Jerusalem being gathered in by the Gospel from every nation to join the true Israel.

In fact, Paul uses this exact phrase, quoting from this verse:

- **Romans 15:16** - "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost." (also see below, "ministering as a priest")

Just as Abraham was considered the "father of faith" not just of the Jews, but all who come to believe.

- **Jeremiah 3:14** - "...I will take you— one from a city and two from a family— and bring you to Zion."

The rabbis (Midrash Tillim apud Yalkut in Psal. lxxxvii. 4.) interpret all this as the gifts brought to the King Messiah in his days.

Isaiah 66:21 - "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD."

This is amazing - Priests and Levites could only be Jews - the Levites specifically from the tribe of Levi, and priests only from descendants of Aaron. But here, Gentiles are included.

Rashi - Before Me the priests and the Levites among them are revealed, and I will select them from among them, and they shall minister before Me, said the Lord. Now where did He say it? (Deut. 29:28) "The hidden things are for the Lord our God." In this manner it is explained in the Aggadah of Psalm 87:6.

- **1 Peter 2:4-5** - "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

- **Revelation 1:5-6** - "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Paul refers to himself as doing the work of a priest:

- **Romans 15:16** - "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering (*hierourgéō*) the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."

(*hierourgéō*) "temple work" is only used in **Romans 15:16**, "To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest (*hierourgéō*) the gospel of God..."

...Not to offer up slain beasts, as the priests of old; but to point to the sacrifice of Christ, to the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of men; and to teach the knowledge of crucified Christ."

Not Just Offerings, but Teaching and Prayer

Moses' blessing on the tribe of Levi:

- **Deuteronomy 33:10** - "They will teach Your ordinances to Jacob and Your law to Israel; they will set incense before You and whole burnt offerings on Your altar."

- **Malachi 2:7** - "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

The various ministries and offices of the church answer to this - apostles, prophets, pastors, elders, teachers, deacons, helps, etc. aided by all the gifts of the Spirit.

New Heavens and New Earth

Isaiah 66:22 - "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain."

Jewish translation: "For, as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making stand before Me," says the Lord, "so shall your seed and your name stand."

"I am making" - It's an ongoing project somehow. But the results will be permanent and eternal.

Isaiah mentioned this previously:

- **Isaiah 65:17** - "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."

- **1 Peter 3:10** - "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

- **Revelation 21:1** - "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."

"so shall your seed and your name remain" -

The spiritual "seed" of the church and the name of Christ they name and confess, and by which they are called. In fact this is the "new name"

- **Revelation 2:17** - "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it."