



Isaiah continues to ponder the thought of the extermination of wickedness. He looks into the future judgement that will purify the world itself.

**1. God will remove the world's wickedness**

**1. God will act to remove the world's wickedness.**

*18'But I am present! Look at their deeds and their thoughts! The time will surely come for me to act.'*<sup>a</sup>

**2. His purposes are worldwide**

**2. His purposes are worldwide.** *'I plan to gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory.'* It is not simply that the temple will be purified. What is to happen in Israel is to happen on a worldwide scale. God's people will be worldwide. God's purifying judgements will be worldwide.

**3. God sends his people into the world to bring about his purposes**

**3. God sends his people into the world to bring about his purposes.** As so often Isaiah's viewpoint is 'panoramic'. It takes in what we would call the first coming and the second coming of Jesus. Its viewpoint begins with Isaiah's time and stretches forward to the end of the world. There will be a worldwide people of God. Sin will be eventually exterminated.

*19'I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations – to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.'*

• A panoramic viewpoint

• Old Testament Message of salvation

Here we have a kind of evangelistic programme for God's people. Even in Old Testament times, God planned to start sending people out into the world with the message of his coming salvation. Those who survive the chastening judgements of God become evangelists. This was what was significant about the scattering of the people of Israel throughout many nations from the sixth century BC onwards. 'The sign' is God's people with God's message of God's salvation. It still continues, but now 'the sign' is clearer than ever. It is the message of the cross. The 'survivors' have been enlarged by millions of gentiles who have joined God's 'Israel'.

• Now the message of the cross – includes gentiles

• Strangers become 'brothers'

*20'And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to Yahweh – on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,' says Yahweh. 'They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain-offerings, to the temple of Yahweh in ceremonially clean vessels. 21And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,' says Yahweh.*

• Gentiles pour into the church and every member is a priest and a Levite

People who once were strangers and aliens become 'brothers'. They pour into the people of God from all over the world, bringing themselves and all that they have to serve God. They become officials in the newly restored worldwide people of God. Isaiah uses Old Testament language (he had no other language to use) but the fulfilment may be expressed in 'church' language. Gentiles pour into the church and every member is a priest and Levite – servants of God in whatever calling he reveals to them.

**4. The end-point is a glorified world**

**4. The end-point is a glorified world.**

*22'As the new heavens and the new earth that I am going to make will endure before me,' – oracle of Yahweh – 'so will your seed and your name endure. 23From one New Moon to another and from one sabbath to another, all flesh will come and bow down before me,' says Yahweh.*

• There is a new universe

• The righteous endure for ever – a family relationship

Eventually there is a new universe. The righteous endure forever. They are all the seed of Abraham, the seed of the woman. There is family relationship between them. They worship God all the time, says Isaiah (using Old Testament language).

• Evil is abolished

In the glorified world that is to come, evil is abolished. Outside the city there is a cemetery.

• There is a cemetery outside the city

*24<sup>a</sup> And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.*

• A picture of unconscious corpses

The final picture is not a picture of pain; it is a picture of unconscious corpses. The whirlwind of judgement<sup>Ⓜ1</sup> is 'a wind that leaves nothing behind'<sup>b</sup> The people concerned 'come to an end'<sup>Ⓜ2</sup>. The literalistic translation of the Soncino commentary on Isaiah translates 'shall be consumed'.<sup>c</sup> Verse 24 speaks of an endless state but it is a picture of unconscious corpses. (This does not prejudge the interpretation of the words in Matthew 25:41, 46, but Jesus' use there of the idea here is a development of the thought and must be considered in its own right.)

Ⓜ1 66:15  
Ⓜ2 66:17

• The saved 'endure'

We note that punishment is the opposite of 'enduring'. The saved 'endure'. The lost become corpses and their dead bodies are lying in decay in the nearby Valley of Gehenna. There is no picture of conscious suffering at **this** point – although the wicked have suffered a great deal before they came to the cemetery. The picture at **this** point is not of anyone suffering endlessly. The picture in Isaiah is that of totally unconscious corpses. There are worms in the decaying bodies, and fire endlessly burns the corpses. Using the language of Genesis 19 – after Sodom and Gomorrah were exterminated – we might say, 'The **smoke** of their torment goes up for ever.' The cemetery is not a place of suffering. There is no suffering in God's final Zion. But there is a reminder of the suffering that was once involved as the wicked were slaughtered. It is a reminder that sin is destined never to survive. Only that which does the will of God endures for ever.

• The lost become corpses – no suffering at this point

• A reminder that sin is destined not to survive

• A repulsive scene

The scene is repulsive. It is meant to be. Sin will always end up in what is repulsive. The punishment is everlasting in the sense that 'no light of dawn will ever break upon them'<sup>Ⓜ1</sup>. Being thrown into hell is not an act which will ever be reversed in the lives of the unsaved. But eventually it is good news, not bad news. The good news is that God's people will survive in a righteous kingdom that lasts for ever. 'The light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of his fire does not shine'<sup>Ⓜ2</sup>, but the righteous will 'shine like the brightness of the sky'<sup>Ⓜ3</sup>. All tears will be dried. Justice will be done. Some questions will be answered. God's name will be vindicated. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Indeed Jesus said it best: 'Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear'<sup>Ⓜ4</sup>.

Ⓜ1 8:20

Ⓜ2 Job 18:5  
Ⓜ3 Daniel 12:3  
Ⓜ4 Matthew 13:43

• Punishment is everlasting

• God's people will survive and all tears will be dried

## Notes

<sup>a</sup> The Hebrew says, 'And I. Their deeds and their thoughts. It will come. In order to gather . . . ' These are broken, fragmentary words and I give the sense of them the best I can. All commentators find the text difficult here.

<sup>b</sup> J.A. Motyer, Isaiah, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Tyndale, 1999), p. 539.

<sup>c</sup> W. Slotki, Isaiah, Soncino Bible (1949), p. 324.