

WHAT KIND OF LIFE ARE YOU BUILDING?

66 This is what Jehovah says, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. [Therefore,] what kind of house will you build for me, and where will be my resting place? ²My hand has made all these things, so it was that all these things came into being, declares Jehovah. But this is the man I will regard, [namely,] he who is humble and who has a contrite spirit, he who trembles at my word. ³Whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man; and whoever offers a lamb is like one who breaks a dog's neck. Whoever presents a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood; whoever burns frankincense is like one who blesses an idol. Indeed, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; ⁴so I will choose their afflictions and I will bring upon them the things they dread—because when I called, none of them answered; when I spoke, they did not listen. On the contrary, they did what was evil in my sight, and chose those things in which I have no delight.

⁵Hear the word of Jehovah, you who tremble at his word: Your brothers who hate you, who thrust you away because of my name, they have said, May Jehovah be glorified, so that we may see your joy! But they are the ones who shall be put to shame. ⁶Hear the sound of an uproar in the city, a noise from the temple—it is the sound of Jehovah repaying his enemies what they deserve. ⁷Before she went into labor, she gave birth; before the birth pains came upon her, she delivered a son. ⁸Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a country be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet as soon as Zion went into labor she gave birth to her children. ⁹Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause the child to be delivered? asks Jehovah. When I bring [an infant] to [the point of] delivery, do I shut the womb? asks your God. ¹⁰Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. ¹¹[Be glad for her,] so that you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, so that you may suck out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. ¹²This is what Jehovah says, I will extend peace to her like a river, and [bestow upon her] the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream. You will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip, and you will be dandled upon the knees. ¹³I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child; indeed, you will be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴When you see this, your heart will rejoice and your bones will flourish like the grass [of springtime]. The hand of Jehovah will be made known to his servants; but he will exhibit indignation against his enemies.

¹⁵See, Jehovah will come with fire, and his chariots will be like the whirlwind; [he will come] to render his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶With fire and with sword Jehovah will execute judgment upon all mankind, and those slain by Jehovah will be many. ¹⁷Those who consecrate and purify themselves in order to go into the gardens, following the instructions of the priest who stands among them, eating swine's flesh and [other] abominable things, including rats—they will all come to an end together, declares Jehovah. ¹⁸Because of their works and their thoughts I will come to gather all nations and languages; and they will come, and they will see my glory. ¹⁹But I will work a miracle among them, and those who are delivered [from my judgment] I will send to the nations—to Tarshish, to Put, and to the famous archers of Lud, to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have neither heard of my fame nor seen my glory. Those [who have been delivered] shall proclaim my glory to

the nations. ²⁰And these [messengers] will bring all your brothers from out of all the nations as an offering to Jehovah, [conveying them] on horses and in chariots and in wagons and upon mules and upon camels to Jerusalem my holy mountain, declares Jehovah, just as the children of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of Jehovah. ²¹And I will also select some of them to be priests and Levites, declares Jehovah. ²²Just as the new heavens and the new earth, that I will make, shall [always] remain before me, declares Jehovah, so shall your descendants and your name perpetually endure. ²³And it shall be that from one new moon to the next, and from one Sabbath to the next, all mankind will come to bow down before me, declares Jehovah. ²⁴And they will go out and view the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me; the worm [that feeds upon their corpses] shall not die, neither shall the fire [that consumes their corpses] be quenched—they will be an abhorrence to all mankind. (Isa. 66:1-24)

Introduction

On the night of January 10, 1948, a fire broke out in the old First Reformed Church of Paterson, New Jersey. On that cold and bitter winter night it burned to the ground in a three-alarm blaze.

Suppose the same were to happen to the church you presently attend. One night you are awakened by the sound of fire engine sirens and discover that your church building is ablaze. When the flames have finally been extinguished, there is nothing left but charred brick and rubble. Your congregation must rebuild. You are appointed to the building committee. You and the other members of the committee meet together to consider the question, What kind of structure shall we build? In the midst of your deliberations the LORD Himself appears and informs you that He is far more interested in the kind of life you are building than in any architectural design you may choose.

Such is the message of this last chapter of Isaiah. The setting may have been the occasion when the people of Israel repaired the temple in the days of Hezekiah. In this setting the LORD comes to the people by the prophet Isaiah and informs them of what is of primary importance to Him. As we study this passage of Scripture, let us consider what kind of life the LORD desires for us to be building.

I. Build a Life that is Worthy of the LORD (Isa. 66:1-2a)

The people were in the process of repairing the temple that had been in a state of deterioration due to neglect. 2 Chronicles 29:3 describes the work of repairing the temple in the days of King Hezekiah: *“In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of Jehovah and repaired them.”* As the people are engaged in this work, the LORD speaks to them by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet:

This is what Jehovah says, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Therefore, what kind of house will you build for me, and where will be my resting place? ²My hand has made all these things, so it was that all these things came into being, declares Jehovah. (Isa. 66:1-2a)

The LORD reminds the people of His great majesty: heaven is His throne, the earth is His footstool, He has made the whole creation with His own hands. The LORD then proceeds to ask the question, *“What kind of house will you build for me?”*—He is urging them to realize that there is nothing they can make that could even begin to contain the greatness of His presence or begin to do justice to the greatness of His glory. Seeing that heaven itself is God’s throne and the earth is His footstool, what kind of house is man able to build for God that is worthy of Him and that could contain His glorious Person? Seeing that the LORD Himself has created the heavens and the earth, what could man possibly build that would be adequate to serve as a fit dwelling place for our Creator?

If we are to build lives that are worthy of the LORD we must begin by being aware of the majesty and the awesomeness of who He is: *“Jehovah is exalted over all the nations; his glory is above the heavens. ⁵Who is like Jehovah our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, ⁶who stoops down to look upon the heavens and the earth?”* (Psl. 113:4-6.) If we are to build lives that are worthy of the LORD we must understand what is of paramount interest to Him and what is pleasing to Him: *“Jehovah said to Samuel, ... ‘Jehovah does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but Jehovah looks at the heart’”* (1 Sam. 16:7.) When the LORD first consecrated Israel as His covenant people, He informed them what He required of them: *“Love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”* (Deut. 6:5.) If we are to build lives that are worthy of the LORD we must realize that it requires the work of God in us, it is not something we can manufacture ourselves: *“Unless Jehovah builds the house, its builders labor in vain”* (Psl. 127:1a.) We must rely upon the Holy Spirit and the sure promise the LORD makes:

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezek. 36:25b-27)

Let us build lives that are worthy of the LORD, yielding our selves to Him and asking Him to do His gracious work in us.

II. Build a Life that is Characterized by a God-Pleasing Spirit (Isa. 66:2b-6)

The LORD is not impressed by any temple or cathedral that men may build for Him, but He does look with favor upon the man whom He describes as one *“who is humble and who has a contrite spirit.”* The reference here is to the man who is aware of his spiritual need, is humble before the LORD his God, and exhibits

sorrow for sin and a repentant spirit. It is the spirit and attitude exhibited by the tax collector in Jesus' parable:

... the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. ¹⁴I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Lk. 18:13-14)

As the Psalmist assures us, "*Jehovah is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a contrite spirit*" (Psl. 34:18.) Furthermore, the man upon whom the LORD looks with favor is described by Him as the man "*who trembles at my word.*" Holy fear is a right and proper response for a man to make to the Person of God: "*There is none like you, O Jehovah; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. ⁷Who should not fear you, O King of the nations? for to you it appertain*" (Jer. 10:6-7a.) Holy fear of the LORD is a characteristic of a godly man; it was a characteristic of Christ Himself in His incarnate state. Speaking of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews declares, "*During the days of his life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his godly fear*" (Heb. 5:7.) It is the teaching of Scripture that the man who fears the LORD is the man who experiences the tender mercies of the LORD:

... for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him ... ¹³As a father has compassion on his children, so Jehovah has compassion on those who fear him ... ¹⁷But from everlasting to everlasting the lovingkindness of Jehovah is upon those who fear him. (Psl. 103:11,13,17)

As verse 3a of Isaiah 66 indicates, the LORD has no respect for those who offer Him the mere formalities of worship:

Whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man; and whoever offers a lamb is like one who breaks a dog's neck. Whoever presents a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood; whoever burns frankincense is like one who blesses an idol. (Isa. 66:3a)

Worship may be offered to the LORD in strict accordance with the guidelines of Scripture, but if the worshiper lacks the qualities outlined in verse 2, his worship is considered by the LORD to be in the same class as idolatry. Those who would build lives that are pleasing to God must be aware of the majesty and awesomeness of God's person, must humble themselves before Him in humility and godly fear, and must worship Him with whole-hearted devotion.

In the latter part of verse three and verse four, the LORD once again describes the people in their present sinful condition. "*They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations.*" Here was a nation of people who

were engaged in the practice of the formal worship of God, while resolutely determined to go their own way and to delight in those very things that the LORD defines as "*abominations.*" "*I will choose their afflictions and I will bring upon them the things they dread—because when I called, none [of them] answered, when I spoke, they did not listen.*" Because they did not fear God, God will therefore bring upon them the things they dread—in this case a reference to the fear of conquest by a fierce foreign power, a temporal form of the judgment of God. There now follow words of assurance addressed to those who tremble at God's word:

Hear the word of Jehovah, you who tremble at his word: Your brothers who hate you, who thrust you away because of my name, they have said, May Jehovah be glorified, so that we may see your joy! But they are the ones who shall be put to shame. ⁶Hear the sound of an uproar in the city, a noise from the temple—it is the sound of Jehovah repaying his enemies what they deserve. (Isa. 66:5-6)

Those persons who are devoted to the LORD their God presently suffer persecution at the hands of their countrymen: they are hated, they are ostracized, they are mocked for their devotion to the LORD and their continued confidence in His promises. But there is coming a great reversal: those who presently engage in mocking the LORD and His servants shall themselves be put to shame. This great reversal shall be accomplished by the voice of the LORD rendering recompense to His enemies, causing a voice of tumult to arise throughout the city and the nation. What is being referred to here is the voice of anguish raised by the vanquished amidst the voice of the battle cry raised by the invaders—once again, a temporal form of God's final judgment.

Let us build lives that are characterized by a God-pleasing spirit: lives that are characterized by godly humility and holy fear, a contrite heart, and a devotion to God's will.

III. Build a Life that Receives God's Blessing (Isa. 66:7-24)

As the smoke of war and destruction and judgment clear away, we see the miraculous rebirth of Zion, the city of God:

Before she went into labor, she gave birth; before the birth pains came upon her, she delivered a son. ⁸Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a country be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet as soon as Zion went into labor she gave birth to her children. ⁹Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause the child to be delivered? asks Jehovah. When I bring [an infant] to [the point of] delivery, do I shut the womb? asks your God. (Isa. 66:7-9)

The imagery here is that of a woman giving birth, and the wonder of the effortless swiftness of the birth, as well as the wonder of the abundance of her offspring (vs. 7-8.) Verse 9 indicates this to be the work of the LORD, and the LORD will bring to fulfillment the good work He has begun—the good work of redeeming His people to be His own possession and to inherit His everlasting kingdom.

Those who have loved Jerusalem and who have mourned for her, are now called to rejoice with her (Jerusalem here representing the kingdom of God):

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. ¹¹[Be glad for her,] so that you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, so that you may suck out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. (Isa. 66:10-11)

As a baby contently feeds upon his mother's milk, so shall the godly drink in (experience) the consolations and the abundant glory of (the new) Jerusalem.

The LORD Himself testifies that He will bless His city and His servants in it:

This is what Jehovah says, I will extend peace to her like a river, and [bestow upon her] the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream. You will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip, and you will be dandled upon the knees. ¹³I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child; indeed, you will be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴When you see this, your heart will rejoice and your bones will flourish like the grass [of springtime]. The hand of Jehovah will be made known to his servants; but he will exhibit indignation against his enemies. (Isa. 66:12-14)

The LORD will bless "Jerusalem" with peace like a flowing river and with the wealth of the nations—just as the nations now reign in glory, so shall the LORD bestow that glory upon His people (vs. 12.) Christ's servants shall drink in that abundant blessing like a baby drinking his mother's milk, and they shall be comforted by God their Father as a mother comforts her child (vs. 13.) As verse 14 declares, "*the hand of Jehovah will be known to his servants;*" they shall experience His work on their behalf, but He shall have indignation against His enemies.

Having indicated that He will pour out His everlasting indignation upon His enemies just as surely as He bestows His everlasting favor upon His servants (vs. 14), the scene now shifts back to the fall of Jerusalem—Jerusalem here referring to the earthly city inhabited by a God-defying people:

See, Jehovah will come with fire, and his chariots will be like the whirlwind; [he will come] to render his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶With fire and with sword Jehovah will execute judgment upon all mankind,

and those slain by Jehovah will be many. ¹⁷Those who consecrate and purify themselves in order to go into the gardens, following the instructions of the priest who stands among them, eating swine's flesh and [other] abominable things, including rats—they will all come to an end together, declares Jehovah. (Isa. 66:15-17)

The warning is issued (vs. 15.) The judgment about to fall upon Jerusalem is a type of the final universal judgment that shall take place at the end of history (vs. 16.) It is specifically stated that the LORD's indignation and judgment is directed against the idolaters—all those who give their worship and the devotion of their lives to anything other than to the LORD their God, refusing to give Him the place of supreme pre-eminence in their lives (vs. 17.)

Verses 18-21 speak of a great gathering before the LORD:

Because of their works and their thoughts I will come to gather all nations and languages; and they will come, and they will see my glory. ¹⁹But I will work a miracle among them, and those who are delivered [from my judgment] I will send to the nations—to Tarshish, to Put, and to the famous archers of Lud, to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have neither heard of my fame nor seen my glory. Those [who have been delivered] shall proclaim my glory to the nations. ²⁰And these [messengers] will bring all your brothers from out of all the nations as an offering to Jehovah, [conveying them] on horses and in chariots and in wagons and upon mules and upon camels to Jerusalem my holy mountain, declares Jehovah, just as the children of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of Jehovah. ²¹And I will also select some of them to be priests and Levites, declares Jehovah. (Isa. 66:18-21)

The LORD has set a date for the whole world to stand before Him; to behold His glory, and to be confronted with the truth that He alone is God (vs. 18.) Verse 19 indicates that prior to that appointed day the LORD will “*work a miracle among them,*” and will send to the nations “*those who are delivered [from my judgment],*” and they shall declare the LORD's glory among the nations. In the light of New Testament revelation, this appears to be a reference to the day of Pentecost at which time Jews, (who had been dispersed among the nations,) being gathered together in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, heard the gospel and carried the good news of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ back with them to the distant reaches of the Gentile world. Verses 20-21 appear to be a reference (couched in Old Testament terminology) to the ingathering of all the LORD's redeemed (believing Jew and believing Gentile alike) by means of the universal preaching of the gospel—and they shall all serve the LORD in the same capacity that was once reserved for only the Levites of the Old Testament nation of Israel.

The eternal state that shall characterize the new creation is now outlined in the following terms:

Just as the new heavens and the new earth, that I will make, shall [always] remain before me, declares Jehovah, so shall your descendants and your name perpetually endure. ²³And it shall be that from one new moon to the next, and from one Sabbath to the next, all mankind will come to bow down before me, declares Jehovah. ²⁴And they will go out and view the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me; the worm [that feeds upon their corpses] shall not die, neither shall the fire [that consumes their corpses] be quenched—they will be an abhorrence to all mankind. (Isa. 66:22-24)

The redeemed of the LORD and their offspring (their believing children) shall remain before the LORD forever (vs. 22.) Again using terminology familiar to the Old Testament people of God, the LORD indicates that all flesh (both the saved and the damned) shall acknowledge that He is God (vs. 23.) Just as the redeemed are destined to experience the eternal blessing of God their Savior; so, too, the unrepentant sinner is destined to experience the eternal curse of God His Judge (vs. 24.)

Let us build lives that receive God's blessing and that shall inherit His everlasting kingdom of glory.

Conclusion

What kind of life are we building?

The Word of God exhorts us to build lives that are worthy of the LORD our God, ...to build lives that have a God-pleasing spirit, ...to build lives that shall receive God's blessing.

As we build our lives in keeping with the divine "blueprint" of Isaiah 66 before us, let us take to heart the words of the Lord Jesus Christ:

I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. ⁴⁸He is like a man building a house; who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete. (Lk. 6:47-49)