

Gathering & Restoring

Isaiah 66:18-24

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**BIG BEND
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Isaiah 66:18-24 (NIV)

¹⁸ “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. 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. ²⁰ And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord—on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,” says the Lord. “They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels. ²¹ And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,” says the Lord. ²² “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure. ²³ From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord. ²⁴ “And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

v18 – What gathering will there be when all nations will see the glory of God?

All nations will have representatives witnessing the return of the Lord which will happen at the Mount of Olives according to Zechariah 14:4.

Joel 3:1-2 – *For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land.*

All nations will be gathered under the Antichrist to go against Israel at the culmination of the Tribulation...

Zechariah 14:2 – *For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity*

What will become of Israel when the nations are gathered against Jerusalem?

Following the Abomination of Desolation, Jews who do escape will flee into the mountains (which Jesus commanded them to do in Matthew 24:15-21). Most believe will be the ancient city of Petra located in modern-day Jordan and was once in the territory of Edom.

Revelation 12:6 – *Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.*

But what does it mean in Zechariah 14:2 that Israel goes “into captivity”?

“Into captivity” is the Hebrew word “bag·gō·w·lāh,” and its definition is “exile or exiles.” The definition of “exile” is: The state or a period of forced absence from one’s country or home; it is voluntary absence, not a compulsorily one as implied by translating the word as captivity.

- “Exile” is most certainly the appropriate translation to the verse. An exile doesn’t have to mean that they are taken by force to another country. It can very well mean that these people are able to flee to a safe harbor as exiles when this attack happens, which would certainly fit what happens after the Abomination of Desolation.

Why do we believe that Israel will shelter in Petra following the Abomination of Desolation?

This possibility is strongly implied by historical events, circumstantial evidence...

- Jesus said in Matthew 24:16 that Israel should flee to the mountains... The only reasonably safe area would be the mountains along the shores of the Dead Sea – the highest and most inaccessible mountains being south of the Dead Sea at Petra.
- Josephus wrote that groups of Jews fled to Edom and Petra during both the Babylonian invasion of Judah in the 6th century BC, and also when the Romans destroyed the city and the temple in 70 AD.
- Petra is about 136 miles (as the crow flies) to the southeast of Jerusalem.

- The Jews will know Jordan to be a safe refuge not directly controlled by the Antichrist: *“He shall also enter the Glorious Land [Israel], and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon”* (Daniel 11:41).

Where is the Valley of Jehoshaphat?

- Since the 4th Century A.D. this term has been associated with the Kidron Valley running North-to-South between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives which is to the East of Jerusalem. The 20-mile long stretch of the valley runs East-Southeast descending 4,000 feet and tapering off into the Dead Sea
- In this valley, the 4th king of the separate kingdom of Judah, Jehoshaphat, overthrew the united enemies of Israel when it was called Valley of Beracah (2 Chronicles 20:26).

So, where will the final battle of the Tribulation take place?

We usually refer to the final battle of the Tribulation just prior to Jesus setting foot on earth as Armageddon because of:

Revelation 16:14, 16 – *For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.*

Armageddon is north of Jerusalem, how is that reconciled with the Lord returning to the Mount of Olives (Southeast of Jerusalem) and Joel 3:12-17 which says the final battle will be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Kidron Valley adjacent to the Mount of Olives)?

There are also passages making reference to this final battle involving Bozrah in the land of Edom such as Isaiah 34:1-8 and there is also this:

Isaiah 63:1-4 – *Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah... I have trodden the winepress alone... For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come.*

And this brings to mind a summary of God pouring out His wrath culminating in a bloody final battle...

Revelation 14:19-20 – *So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.*

This refers to a river of blood 160 miles long... about the distance (in river miles) from the Kidron Valley down to Bosrah which is about 25 miles from Petra and about midway between the Dead Sea and Petra.

I take it that while Armageddon is a staging area for the armies of the world, the main battle of the forces under the Antichrist will be directed at Israel as they close in on them at Petra getting as far as Bozrah. The Lord executes the battle from the air destroying the forces at Armageddon and those closing in on Petra from Bozrah to Jerusalem. This final battle is all but over when Jesus sets foot on the Mount of Olives.

- There is another judgment of the nations described in Matthew 25 (Sheep & Goat Judgment) which may be the location for the non-warriors.
- While the unclean spirits gather the goats, God gathers the sheep to witness the judgment... everyone on earth will be gathered at Armageddon.

v19 – What is this sign that God will set among the nations at the culmination of the Tribulation?

This sign is the sign of the Son of Man...

Matthew 24:30 – *Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Who are sent as missionaries to the nations?

Some of the Jews who escape the Tribulation. This was God's plan for Israel all along but realized in the Millennial Kingdom...

Exodus 19:6 – *And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

This has been foreshadowed in the missionary movements during the Church Age.

- During the Millennial Kingdom, many people will be born in the nations who have not seen the glory of the Lord but need to know Him.

v20 – Who will return to Jerusalem?

There will apparently be a regular regathering of the Jewish missionaries to the nations in Jerusalem. This was foreshadowed in the Jews returning to the Temple during the pilgrimage feasts (Passover, Weeks, Tabernacles)...

Exodus 34:23 – *Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the Lord God of Israel.*

v21 – What reward will some Jerusalem pilgrims receive during the Millennial Kingdom?

The Lord Himself will select some of those who have been missionaries to the nations to serve in the Millennial Kingdom Temple. This will be a great honor.

- This is foreshadowed in the church because saints are called priests (1 Peter 2:5-9, Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6).

Will it only be Jews that are chosen by the Lord to serve in the Millennial Kingdom Temple?

No, it looks like Gentile believers may be chosen as well because the Jewish missionaries *will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord.*

v22 – What is God’s promise to Israel?

As the new creation of God is eternal, so shall be the new creation of God’s people. And this principle applies to us as individuals...

2 Corinthians 5:17 – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

v23 – When will all mankind will come and bow down before the Lord?

While this will be foreshadowed in the Millennial Kingdom when all nations will worship the Lord. Not everyone in the nations will worship Him. But this will in fact happen at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, just before the Eternal State at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15); quoting Isaiah 45:23...

Romans 14:11 – *For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

v24 – What will become of those who rebel against God?

They will suffer the spiritual death of separation from God in the Lake of Fire (Hell).

Why is hell described as *the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched?*

Since we are made to be in a relationship with our Creator for eternity, separation from Him will eat us up inside and burn on the outside. Jesus warned about hell more than He spoke of heaven. For example, He quoted Isaiah 66:24...

Mark 9:47-48 – *if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’*

How is an eternity in hell a just punishment for only a human lifetime of sin?

There are two biblical principles that declare eternity in hell to be the just punishment for sin:

1. The Bible declares that all sin is ultimately against God
Psalm 51:4 – *Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight*

Since God is an eternal Being, the punishment must be for eternity.

2. Those who have not been born again in their spirit have no guarantee of a redeemed soul... they would go on sinning after death.

John 5:28-29 – *Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

The rebellious person receives an eternal, resurrected body but since their spirit has not been born again, they have no capacity to commune with God and thus their soul is unchanged... they retain their sin nature.

What it comes down to is this—if a person wants to be separated from God for eternity, God will grant that desire.

- Believers say to God, “Your will be done.”
- God says to unbelievers, “Your will be done.”

The will of the unsaved is to reject salvation through Jesus Christ and remain in sin; God will honor that decision, and its consequences, for eternity.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- God gathers the nations for judgment at the end of the Tribulation; you don’t want to be part of that.
- What God creates is eternal; make sure you are a new creation in Christ.
- Hell is terrible & forever; help others accept God’s provision for eternal life!