

Notes on Isaiah 65, 66

By [David H. Linden](#)

Isaiah ends with a surge of heathen coming to the Lord. They forsake their false gods, while so many in Israel adopt the man-made religion of their neighbors. The godly tremble at God's Word. Within the covenant people, as today, there was a mixture of believers and unbelievers. So God's servants endure hostility from their brothers, but the godly remnant will remain faithful. This tension and mixture will end; God will separate them with sudden judgment and create a new Jerusalem, new heavens, and a new earth (2 Peter 3:11-13).

The grace of God delays the final judgment so that Gentiles will travel to all nations in order to declare the glory and gospel of the God of Israel. "They will come" to Zion – a vast number as an offering to the Lord. He makes His own, both Jews and Gentiles, to be grateful brothers in Zion, while those who spurned His Word and invitation, continue their existence in hell.

65:1,2 – Isaiah 65,66 opens and closes with the Lord showing His glory to the nations (66:18). In v.1 God intended to be found and caused these Gentiles to seek Him (Luke 19:10). (See Jeremiah 29:10-14 for an example of seeking caused by the Lord.) V.1 refers to Gentiles coming and v.2 to Israelites refusing to come. Those who were never called by the Name of the Lord would come, but those who had been His people for generations would not.

Jews & Gentiles

Numerous times Isaiah speaks of salvation as worldwide. Isaiah 54,55 shows Christ saving many: many in Israel (54) and many from the nations (55). The Apostle Paul says the Lord richly blesses all who call on the Lord to be saved, Jew and Gentile, (Romans 10:11-13). He quotes 65:1,2 in Romans 10:20,21 as referring to two groups. A nation never called by His Name must be a people who are not Israel. The second group in 65:2 is Israel. Clearly, 65:1 refers to Gentiles. As early as Isaiah 2, Gentile nations stream to the mountain of the Lord (2:2,3). The profits of Tyre will serve the Lord (23:18). The Arabs of Kedar will praise Him (42:11); salvation will come to distant nations (42:12; 49:6). Even the feared warriors of Cush will bring their gifts to the Lord (18:7; 45:14). To these we must add the ancient super-powers: Egypt, the original persecutor of Israel, and Assyria, the great aggressor in Isaiah's day (19:23-25). God has repeatedly revealed the salvation of the nations throughout the prophecy of Isaiah. The Lord returns to this theme in the final words of Isaiah. So we should believe the Lord's word, and be encouraged in our service for Christ. It is not in vain (1 Corinthians

15:58). It will bear eternal fruit.

65:2-7 – As men spread their hands to God in prayer, God spreads His in invitation. The response to God by His covenant people was arrogant resistance. They pursued ways God never commanded, alien ways of worship – ones they imagined. In the sight of the Lord (i.e., *before Me*, Exodus 20:3), they worshipped idols in gardens (1:29). The garden is a place of cultivated fertility; sacrifices offered there were meant to pressure their gods to produce for them. Mountaintops, closer to the clouds that rain, were chosen (v.7) to improve their chances of getting the attention of nature gods.

The places (gardens and graveyards), the altar (bricks), the time (all night rather than morning and evening), the offerings (pigs rather than clean animals), and probably the ones making the offerings (anyone rather than the Lord's appointed priests), and Who would be worshipped (a demonic idol rather than the Holy One of Israel) – all of this is in violation of God's commandment. He is the One Who set out how He would be worshipped. (For related commandments: re the dead, Deuteronomy 18:9-13; re bricks, Exodus 20:25; re times, Deuteronomy 16:4; re animals, Leviticus 11:26-31; re priests, Leviticus 1.)

Their invented standards of holiness provoked division among the people (v.5) and repulsion in the Lord. His anger against sin is holy and eternal. Hell can only burn out when God stops hating sin. People repeat the sins of their fathers and in this way suffer for the same sins. God's judgment is certain, already committed to writing. It will be a payment in full to sinners, personally delivered by God into their laps. Yet there is no fear of God among the wicked (66:2; Romans 3:18). He held out His hands to them and they ignored their God (John 10:27).

65:8-10 – Isaiah has spoken so far in 65 about the Gentiles who will find the Lord and about God's obstinate people who sought their own ways. This makes one wonder if all Israel will be damned when the Lord said all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26)! In Isaiah's day the true Israel (Galatians 6:16) existed within professing Israel (Romans 9:6-8). The Lord now speaks of this remnant as those who sought Him (v.10). Romans 11 shows that the remnant becomes the entire people of Israel!

One illustration of the remnant is of grapes so ripe that juice drips from them. They do not need to be in a winepress. These were prized grapes, so men said, "Do not destroy." The winepress was the place of Christ's wrath (63:3). These grapes (the remnant) in v.8 were spared from being crushed in that winepress. God will not destroy His servants, the descendants of Jacob who were His chosen ones (v.9). (Not all of His supposed "servants" were elect!) Of His true people God said, "I will not destroy". The Lord distinguishes among His covenant people. Some He purges; others He brings into the bond of the covenant (Ezekiel 20:37,38), the ones "who seek me!" First they are His chosen ones, so that they become those who seek Him. The obedient remnant will possess His mountain.

The plains of Sharon, once like a desert (33:9), will be a pasture again. Achor, a place noted for trouble (Joshua 7:24-26), will also be blessed. Thus God's curse rests on covenant breaking people He never knew (Matthew 7:23), and His blessing on His elect remnant (Romans 11:5).

65:11-12 – Isaiah returns to idolaters in vv.11,12. They worship on their own mountain (v.7); by doing so, they forsake the place where the Lord was present on Mount Zion, God's holy mountain. A failure to submit to what God had established was the chief defect in Samaritan worship generations later (John 4:22). God had established and sustained the line of David; so coming to Jerusalem was not optional but required. God set out where He could be approached – on Mt. Zion in His House between the cherubim (Psalm 80:1,2). To go to another mountain is to go to another god. If God has established anything, such as His church, we must never erect an alternative to it, or neglect it.

The idolaters provided food for their gods. (Our God needs no food! He feeds us.) They have religious rites designed to benefit them, but they will be slaughtered for rejecting their God. God called to these who were His covenant people; they would not answer. He called Gentiles and they came (v.1).

65:13-16 – Isaiah is moving to his central theme – the new heavens and earth. From 56 on Isaiah has repeated that there is a mixture of the righteous and God-rejecters. The mixture will end; the final separation is coming.

God speaks here of His own as His “servants” and to the idolaters as “you”. They spread out food for an idol, yet they will go hungry, their needs not met, (57:13). They will not have joy but shame and anguish (Matthew 8:12). Isaiah shows their loss as an introduction to what follows in vv. 17-25.

The name the idolaters once had as children of Abraham will be taken from them in a ‘curse’ pronouncement of the Lord. That good name will be left for God's servants when they will receive a name that fits their nature and destiny. All who are in the new world will speak and swear (Exodus 20:7) only by “the God of truth”. This is the only place in the Bible where this Name for God appears. The old horrors of a sinful world, as in 57:1, will not be remembered even by the Lord.

65:17-25 – The new heavens and new earth

1) The righteous must be made righteous by the Lord bringing them to repentance in this life (57:18,19) and Christ finishing salvation in them at His Coming. 2) The wicked must be judged and removed. Both things are declared as certain. Both changes await the Second Coming of Christ appearing in glory.

Past troubles will not be repeated, vv.16,17. God creates (Revelation 21:5) what He calls “new heavens and a new earth”. The Enemy cannot frustrate God's original purpose in creation (45:18). God will have on this earth His kind of world.

Since it is a creation by God alone, it is not a project in which we assist. God does allow us to participate in communicating His Word, but the rule is: if it is God's *creation*, it is an act of God alone. The three times 'create' is used in vv.17,18, it was all by God alone (45:12). In this passage, creation is not limited to the material universe; it includes the people of the New Jerusalem. Now they are called "my" people, using familiar covenantal language; the "not my people" of Hosea 1:9 will never be said of them. Jerusalem is not merely a delight to us, but also to the Lord.

65:20 – A difficult verse re: the infant and the old man

God communicates things we cannot understand by analogies that we do. (This is why spiritual life may be pictured as water making plants grow as in 44:3,4). V.20 surprises us, and people may take from it more than is intended. Many children die. (Our first son lived less than one day.) This is a common part of this life; thousands of children die daily. The new earth will be so different, it is stated as "never again will there be an infant who" ... experiences death. That is not meant to teach that death will come but only later; it is meant that we should view a life so different that it is like childhood with *no death at all*. In the resurrection there is no marriage (Matthew 22:30), so no children will even be born. Isaiah has already taught that there will be *no death at all* (25:7,8). The rule of interpretation is that we must view a statement of Scripture in the light of all others that deal with the same thing. There are no Scriptures that teach death in the new order God will create; a number tell us of no more death (Revelation 21:4). We should let the clearer passage limit statements we find obscure. V.22 does not mean people will live only as long as trees. We observe trees living on and on. That is the point of this analogy. Isaiah does not contradict the promise of eternal life.

The analogy continues. If a sinner were somehow present in the holy city – a genuine impossibility (Revelation 22:14,15) – but if one were present, then what? This translation helps: "A sinner one hundred years old will be accursed." In other words, the sin would find and finish him. He would not continue among the righteous. So v.20 probably means by these two analogies that death will have no more power, and sin no more presence in the New Jerusalem.

65:21-23 – The frustration of doing work that benefits only others, and the sorrow of losing children will be over forever. Such suffering was part of the curse of God on sin. Because Christ bore their curse for them (Galatians 3:13,14) and destroyed death (1 Corinthians 15:54-56), His descendants will have His blessing (Genesis 17:7,8).

65:24,25 – Isaiah shows how immediate needs are met. The Lord is still their providing God and we will never be independent of Him. Old dangers are gone and all nature is harmless. What remains from the old life is that God's curse on sin is never removed; the serpent will still eat dust (Genesis 3:14).

66:1,2 – The Lord compares His temple and His obedient people. His house was important as His footstool. [His enemies (Psalm 110:1), the earth (Matthew 5:35), and the temple (1 Chronicles 28:2), are all called God's footstool.] God Who made all things, needs no house, yet He was willing to be in it among His people (Exodus 25:8). He was not impressed with the temple; rather the Lord treasures people who tremble in respect for His Word. They are meek (Matthew 5:3) with good reason – knowing their moral weakness, they are contrite; they do not boast (Romans 3:27).

66:3,4 – Isaiah describes the situation in Israel as a contradiction. They offered bulls and killed men. They offered lambs, grain offerings, incense and pig's blood to God, a horrible combination of what was legitimate and forbidden. They 'worshipped' God *and* idols. Choosing their own worship, they delighted in things repugnant to God; they did not tremble at God's Word. God chose for them swift and unexpected judgment (Matthew 24:37-39). He had called them (65:2) but their answer to Him was to turn to false gods. They hoped to avoid dangers they dreaded, but for such evil choices, God would make sure they experienced what they feared.

66:5,6 – Brothers had hostility to those who trembled at God's Word. 'Brothers' (i.e., those in the same community) have often put believers out of the church! (Note John 9:22,34.) The righteous may even perish (57:1) because of faithfulness to His Name and rejecting false worship (Revelation 13:15-17). Even the believer's joy and confidence irritates the wicked. Righteous choices often bring on wrath. His servants endure shame briefly, but God will put false brothers to shame forever (2 Corinthians 11:26; 2 Peter 2:1). The Lord will repay His enemies. In the city and temple, the sounds of conflict reveal His judgment. When the Babylonians later came to destroy the city and temple – obviously in Isaiah's mind it was not already destroyed – they would have in these words God's explanation of what was happening (Jeremiah 7:1-14; 52:12-16).

66:7-9 – Isaiah switches to what happens with believers. God's enemies face sudden judgment; His people will enjoy sudden relief. Painless birth shows the curse is removed (Genesis 3:16). Such a birth is supernatural to us; it is a way to speak of the sudden birth of Zion in its fullness. Many things in history are gradual such as the spread of the gospel, but here is the culminating act of God which brings final judgment, total and permanent separation of false and true brothers, and the instantaneous restoration of Zion. The sudden appearance of Christ will bring everything to a decisive climax (1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1-8).

Just as the new birth of an individual in John 3:3-8 is entirely the work of God's Spirit, the birth of Zion as a nation is His supernatural work as well. God will not bring them to the moment of delivery and fail to finish His project, nor will He change His mind. His faithfulness to His sovereign plan ensures a finished work, a restored Zion on earth. In such promises God's children have patience and

confidence (Revelation 13:10). God finishes what He starts; we depend on His word (Philippians 1:6).

66:10,11 – God's people (i.e., Zion) rejoice in the certainty of God's purpose before seeing the fulfillment, (Hebrews 11). They love Zion because she belongs to God, and He loves her. (See Psalm 102:13.) They mourn for her sins, weakness, and trouble; they rejoice in her blessing. We cannot love God unless we love His church. He has it on His heart all the time. For the welfare of the church, we spend our lives (v.10), and in its life, we will be nourished eternally (v.11). Our involvement is allowed (2Corinthians 6:1), but the foundation of Zion's prosperity is that God appointed the Christ to secure God's blessing. He has secured it alone by His cross and grants us partnership in the delivery of His blessing to the nations (Romans 15:8-12, 15,16).

66:12,13 – Isaiah resorts again to the intimate imagery of the care of children: birth (v.8,9), nursing at Zion's breasts, carried in a mother's arms, played with on her knees, and probably hugged. Every need is supplied; security is combined with happiness. The appeal to care for Jerusalem is replaced by God's comfort for all in Jerusalem. Earlier the flood served as a metaphor for being overwhelmed by the Assyrian army (7:18-20; 8:7,8); now Zion enjoys a flood of wealth.

Peace & Comfort

Peace is first a changed relationship because God's holy alienation against us has been removed by the sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossians 1:19-22; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Christ reconciled God to His people. Having been justified by faith, we have peace extended to us objectively, whether we feel it or not. Learning this truth in the gospel, makes the believer feel a great sense of peace. When we sin and wander, no one in Christ loses the reconciliation Christ obtained for us. We do lose the peace and joy of fellowship till His chastening restores us to a "harvest of peace" in our experience (Hebrews 12:11). The gospel is news of peace: 52:7; 53:5; 54:10,13; 55:12; 57:2,19; 60:17; 66:12. God announces that His alienation is removed, that our sin has been paid for (40:1,2). In this way the Lord produces comfort in us. Christ has secured peace with God so that God may comfort us with it (51:3; 57:18; 66:13).

66:14 – The blessings mentioned will be the unending experience of those who tremble at God's Word, while God's indignation is against His enemies. No longer will His own be in the world but not really part of it (John 17:6-11). His fury will be shown openly, and so will the hand of God that has always been at work in ways we have not known. We have only begun to learn of His grace to us; God has much more to reveal (Ephesians 2:7).

66:15-17 – Divine vengeance will come. A chariot was an ancient symbol of overwhelming power to a poor soldier standing on the ground before its speed

and force. The chief imagery in this passage is that God's judgment is likened to fire. This is the most frequent metaphor in the New Testament as well (Matthew 25:41; Luke 12:49; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Hebrews 10:27; 12:29; 2 Peter 3:7 and Revelation 20:14,15). God's holy character was shown to Moses in a bush burning with fire (Exodus 3:2-5). The Holy One was a flame to consume the Assyrians (10:17; 30:27-33). Here His consuming fire is against the whole world of rebels. Jesus endured the punishment of the sin of "many" (53:12); now the other "many" bear their own sin without a Mediator. Yet just as there were survivors of the noise of judgment in v.6, there will be survivors (v.19) who are rescued and transformed into His servants. Isaiah is specific in applying this judgment to those given to abominable practices. (See vv.3,4.)

66:18 – We have no clear translation of the beginning of v.18. What is clear is an announced program of gathering the nations to see the glory of the Lord. That He would kill His enemies is not a surprise; such a reaction to rebels is universally expected. What follows is the glory of His grace (Titus 2:11; 3:4; Ephesians 1:7-14; Romans 5:2), that God would save enemies (Romans 5:10). All nations and tongues (Revelation 7:9) will come. It is not that they are merely invited; God declares they will come – a certainty, not a mere possibility. They will learn of the fame and glory of God, just as in Joshua 9:9,10. (See also Habakkuk 3:2-4 and Psalms 57 & 96 for God's glory in all the earth.) In 6:3, the glory of God was in all the earth even though the world was sinful. In 66, the glory of the Lord is revealed in the salvation of the nations by the spread of the gospel.

66:19 – God will set a sign in the earth. The sign is undefined. In the New Testament we learn of the centrality of the cross to the gospel message (1 Corinthians 1:18) and that the great sign to authenticate Christ is His resurrection (Matthew 12:38-40). The visible work of Christ on earth is something God set up for the nations to respond to. Usually in the Old Testament, the nations were to be attracted by the glory of God in His people (60:1-3). What the Lord says now is pure missionary activity, "I will send." He sends people with His message to the nations, to a great variety of peoples, as in 11:11. Some people, like the Lydians, are dangerous, skilled with weapons. This is no hindrance; danger does not stop us. Those who carry this good news are not the Jewish survivors in Jerusalem of 1:9, but the survivors of the judgment on all men in v.16. Because of Christ, God has spared them what they deserve. His gospel will be carried by grateful Gentiles who proclaim the glory of the God of Israel to nations that have never heard. Isaiah is describing our moment in history and the gracious privilege granted to us to spread the gospel to all people on earth.

66:20,21 – It will succeed. They will bring "brothers" to Jerusalem from all nations, scattered children of God, brought together and made one (John 11:52). They are an offering (Romans 15:16) the Lord will accept. Since sinful man can never be accepted by God, we must be made clean by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10: 2,10,14). The gospel had been proclaimed to them, so they could see the glory of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:1-6). For this reason, they come to

Jerusalem, just as Hebrew 12:22-24 says. The world is full of alternative options in worship invented by men, coupled with different “gospels”. Just as Old Testament worship became centered in Zion, so the pilgrimage of all nations is to the Lord Who placed His Name there. They come from every direction by every means – wagons on roads and camels in deserts. To show how fully accepted they are in Christ, God says some of these Gentiles will be priests and Levites. The wall between Jew and Gentile has been eradicated by the gospel, when peace in Christ is preached to the Jew who is near and the Gentile far away (Ephesians 2:14-18).

66:22,23 – The brothers from all the nations (v.20), are descendants promised to Abraham (Genesis 22:16-18; Galatians 3:26-29). They are the seed acquired by Christ’s redemption as He freed His offspring from sin (53:10-12). Their name will endure, for they cannot fall into sin again.

Isaiah opens and closes with reference to the religious practice of New Moon offerings and Sabbaths. (See Number 28:11-15.) In 1:14-17 their practices were rejected because they were defiled. Now this is reversed. Worship – not with sacrifices of animals – but a regular worship pleasing to God, will flow to the Lord as all mankind worships in spirit and in truth (John 4:22-24).

As godly pilgrims journey to Jerusalem, in Isaiah’s imagery, they see outside the city a smoldering heap of dead bodies. Such are those who would not worship the Lord. They rebelled against Him and His ordained worship. The Lord will kill many. Do not miss that in Mark 9:47,48 Jesus taught about hell from this verse. The corruption (the worm eating away) and the fire do not stop, because sin continues to corrupt, and the fire is God’s endless and holy wrath. The godly are to see this and to see what they have been saved from. The wicked are loathsome, because sin is loathsome, and apart from Christ, we too, were loathsome to God. Our Lord Jesus took our guilt and endured God’s fire for our sins. In our Savior, the Holy One of Israel has been most merciful to us – we who are so unholy apart from Christ. Our gratitude will continue as endlessly as the fire that never goes out. That fire can only lessen when God finds sin to be pleasing to Him, and that will never happen.

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