

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
The Grand Finale - Part 3
Isaiah 65-66
February 24, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

Sin is Israel's problem. As a result, she has been and will be punished. That punishment will include complete desolation of her land (1:7). The word "desolate" is used 18 times by Isaiah.

The desolation would also impact the temple in Jerusalem. It would be torn down and destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar, brought about by the sins of Israel (64:11). Now, not only because the physical temple would be destroyed but also because God had planned to increase those who would be considered His people from the physical descendants of Abraham, the physical nation of Israel, to a people who would also be composed of Gentiles, those who would walk according to the faith of Abraham.

So, God planned to build and establish a *spiritual* house, a *spiritual temple* (2:2-4). The term "house" is used 63 times in Isaiah. In Isaiah 14:1-2, Isaiah uses both expressions, "house of Jacob" and "house of Israel" to include *Gentiles*.

I have said all that to say this - the restored relationship with God that is being offered here in Isaiah is not about living in the physical, literal city of Jerusalem. It's about a spiritual relationship between God and man, both Jew and Gentile, and that relationship is portrayed through various metaphors - the temple, the sanctuary, the "holy mountain," the "city of Jerusalem," and the "new heavens and a new earth."

In the Disney movie, Aladdin sings to Princess Jasmin: "I can show you the world Shining, shimmering, splendid Tell me, princess, now when did You last let your heart decide? I can open your eyes Take you wonder by wonder Over, sideways and under On a magic carpet ride A whole new world A new fantastic point of view No one to tell us no or where to go Or say we're only dreaming." (Lyrics by ALAN IRWIN MENKEN, TIMOTHY MILES, and BINDON RICE)

Aladdin did not mean by the phrase a "whole new world," to take Jasmin to a completely different planet or universe. As the song goes on to explain, it is a "new fantastic point of view." It's "indescribable feelings" experienced with someone who loves you.

It is my conviction that that is exactly what we have pictured here in the last two chapters of Isaiah - a whole new world, a new fantastic point of view, indescribable feelings portrayed through a figure of speech - the merism - in the "new heavens and new earth" (65:17; 66:22). This figure of speech (merism) uses two opposites in order to portray the entirety, as in "black and white."

This phrase suggests that Israel will have a whole new relationship with God when they return to Him and have their sins forgiven through the blood of Christ, a whole new relationship, a whole new experience, a whole new world. So, as we mentioned last week, this new heaven and new earth is fulfilled spiritually in Jesus Christ but it will be fulfilled eternally in heaven such that Peter uses this expression to refer to heaven in 2 Peter 3:13. Nothing in Isaiah leads us to believe that God is most interested in the physical city of Jerusalem or the physical land of Palestine. They mean nothing to God in the overall theology of the Bible. Are you righteous

before Him through the blood of Christ, Jew or Gentile? That is the preeminent question of Isaiah.

Let's consider this "Grand Finale" in Isaiah 65-66... Chapter 64 ended with Israel asking God, "Will you restrain yourself at the desolation of the land and the temple? Will you keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?" (64:12). Chapters 65-66 are an answer to that question.

THE DESTINY OF BELIEVING AND UNBELIEVING ISRAEL - 65:1-16:

The rebellious will be judged - 65:1-7:

God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:3-4. In Isaiah's words, or God's words, "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, "Here am I, here am I, to a nation which did not call on My name" (vs 1). Paul is clear in teaching us in Romans 10:21 that these are Gentiles. God allowed Himself to be found by people who were not Jews by blood or nationality.

In fact, relative to those who are Jews by nationality, verse 2 - "I have spread My hands to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts." The Jews rebelled against God and that has been a theme in Isaiah since chapter 1.

In the ensuing verses, Isaiah details some of their acts of rebellion - verse 3, they provoke God to His face by offering perverted (unauthorized) worship. Verse 4 - they seek guidance from among the dead and ignore the laws on what is clean and unclean foods. Verse 5 - they are arrogant and haughty. To God, the rebellious Jews were irritants like smoke in the nostrils.

But, God will, God has to, implement justice. A holy God cannot do otherwise - verse 6. They will be punished for their iniquities (verse 7) because they worshiped false gods. "Therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom." They will get what is coming to them. Oswalt asks a good question and gives a good answer: "But is membership in the elect nation proof that a person belongs to God? The answer is, as it has been throughout this division, a resounding no. Obedience alone is a sign that one is a member of the elect..." (640).

God's servants versus the rebellious - 65:8-16:

Just as the farmer will preserve the grape that has new wine in it (verse 8), God will preserve for Himself the faithful remnant. He will not destroy *all* of Israel for the sake of His servants. Please observe here that that Hebrew word "wine" refers to fresh grape juice. "Chs. 56-66 make plain that those who are truly the servants of God are those who believe his promises enough to obey his covenant" (Oswalt, 646).

Verse 9 uses several synonyms for the faithful remnant whom God will bring into a new relationship with Him. Verse 10 pictures this new relationship in physical terms but it is for those "who seek Me," God says. Young comments (508): "What Isaiah is predicting is not a physical return of the Jews to Palestine, for the seed is to consist not merely of Jews but also of Gentiles (cf. v. 1). The geographical features are symbols of the heavenly Canaan."

But the ones who forsake the Lord (verse 11), who forget His "holy mountain," who worship false gods named "Fortune" (*gad* - Syrian - Josh. 11:17; 12:7; 13:5; Judg. 15:37) and "Destiny," (verse 12) - they will be destined to the sword. Those who bowed to the idols will bow to the slaughter. God called; they did not answer. God spoke; they did not hear. They did evil and choose things in which God did not delight.

Verses 13-15 continues this contrast between the children of God (spiritually) and the children of the devil. For those who seek God, He will provide food, drink, rejoicing, joyful shouting, a new name.

In verse 16, physical blessings will be accompanied by spiritual blessings, by the “God of truth.” The Hebrew word for truth is “*amet*,” which is transliterated in Greek as “Amen.” He is the God of Amen; He is characterized naturally by truth (2 Cor. 1:20). The one who makes oaths on earth, will make oaths by the God of truth. The life of sin and rebellion will be left behind. The world of sin and deception will be left behind.

God has planned for the faithful remnant, a “whole new world...”

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH - 65:17-25:

Jerusalem is a special blessing - 65:17-19:

The former life will not be remembered (cf. 24:18-19; 51:6) as God creates a new heaven and a new earth (vs 17). Verse 18, He calls on Israel to be “glad and rejoice” in what God creates. Please observe in verse 18 that a synonym for this new heaven and new earth is “Jerusalem.” “I create Jerusalem for rejoicing and her people for gladness.” Again, verse 19, God will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad (please observe the synonym) in “My people.” In this new relationship with God, there will not be weeping and crying for sins or because of punishment for sins.

Commenting on verse 17, Young writes (514): “With the advent of the Messiah the blessing to be revealed will in every sense be so great that it can be described only as the creation of a new heaven and a new earth... but includes the entire reign of Christ, including the second advent and the eternal state.”

So, “new heaven and new earth” is parallel with “Jerusalem,” which is parallel with “My people.” Spiritually, we are the “new Jerusalem,” the “new city,” in Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:26-27). But *eternally*, this “new Jerusalem” will be completed, consummated in heaven. In Revelation 3:12, Jesus promises Christians who do not compromise but stay faithful until the end, “I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”

The people will be especially blessed - 65:20-25:

How can you describe spiritual realities to a people who have not seen the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Indeed, heaven is a spiritual reality yet in Revelation 21 and 22, it is described in physical terms. Terms that make sense to a first-century people steeped in the Old Testament. Here in Isaiah 65 and 66, Isaiah will describe the new spiritual relationship with God in physical terms...

Verse 20 - there will not infant mortality nor early death. Young people will live to be one hundred years old and if you don't live to be one hundred, people will think you are accursed by God. That shows that this is a figurative picture of spiritual realities. “The reference to death and a curse on the sinner presents some problems for one would not expect these to be present in the new heavens and the new earth (cf. 26:6-9)” (Smith, 721).

Verse 21 - You will live in the houses you build and eat the fruit from the vineyards you plant.

Verse 22 - Someone else will not live in a house you build nor will any eat what you plant. You will live as long as the lifetime of trees. God's "chosen ones" will outlive what their hands have made.

Verse 23 - Their work will not be in vain. Their children will not see calamity because your children are blessed by the Lord.

In contrast to verse 12, here (vs 24), God will answer *before* the faithful calls. God will hear (and answer) before they are even finished praying. And in a picture reminiscent of 11:6-7 which we know to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the church of Christ, verse 25 envisions peaceful relationships, a peaceful kingdom, peace between man and God and between man and man. This is fulfilled in God's "holy mountain." "It is not necessary that we take these statements any more literally than that we will build houses and plant vineyards in the heavenly Jerusalem" (Oswalt, 662).

Did Isaiah understand his message this way? No. He did not. Peter tells us that the prophets "made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Peter 1:10-11). It was not until Immanuel came to earth and began fulfilling these prophecies that the Jews (and others) could see how Jesus is the piece of the puzzle that completes the entire picture.

Who would, or could, make sense of all this? Only the Jew who had an open mind and an open heart. Please note the first two verses of this last chapter...

THE SOVEREIGN LORD DELIGHTS IN THE HUMBLE - 66:1-2:

The temple in Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. But it doesn't matter. Not only does God not *need* a temple in which to dwell, but He *can't* dwell in a physical temple. "Heaven is God's throne; the earth is His footstool," (vs 1). Where is a (physical) house on earth in which God could dwell? Where, on earth, could God find a place to rest? Not in physical temples made with hands. But He can dwell in a heart created by God Himself...

"My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being. But to this one I will look," that is, in this one person God will dwell, make His home, His habitation, "To him who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at God's word" (vs 2). Do you want God to dwell in you? You've got to be humble, contrite, and be submissive to His word - Jew or Gentile. Together, they will form the spiritual temple of God as Paul describes for us in Ephesians 2:19-21.

THE LORD ENCOURAGES THE FAITHFUL - 66:3-6:

Once again, God rebukes the unfaithful Jew for offering hypocritical worship and not in spirit and in truth (vs 3). God will punish them (vs 4), again, because God called and he did not answer. God spoke but he did not listen. 65:12 repeated.

So, verse 5, God calls on faithful Israel to hear, the one who trembles at God's word. Yes, there will be opposition even within the ranks of Israel itself, those who want to compromise with the world: "Your brothers hate you and exclude you. They say (hypocritically), Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your glory" but they will be ashamed. Just like the Jews at the foot of the cross who said, "He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him" (Matt. 27:42). They had no intention of believing in Jesus whatsoever.

Verse 6 illustrates God's punishment on these hypocrites - a voice of uproar will come from the city, from the temple. It will be the voice of the Lord punishing His enemies - not just the Gentiles but the Jews as well who refuse to submit to God. This might be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

JERUSALEM WILL EXPERIENCE A NEW (SPIRITUAL) BIRTH - 66:7-14:

Using the imagery of childbirth (vss 7-9; to add to the "house, temple, new heavens/new earth" imagery; is John 3:3-5 foreshadowed here?), God shows that He will bring to completion His plans to create a new people. Verse 8 - Can a land be born in a day? Can a nation? You see, God is talking about a new land, a spiritual land, and a new nation, a spiritual nation. He will cause all of this to happen. Oswalt (675) sees the birth of the church on Pentecost in verse 8. Compare Paul's thoughts from Galatians 4:26ff (see also Isa. 49:16-26; 54:1-8; 60:4).

So, verse 10, He calls on the faithful to be joyful and rejoice, all those who love Jerusalem. Those who would mourn over Jerusalem for her sins and destruction will be able to be "exceedingly glad." They will come to Jerusalem, verse 11, as to a nursing mother and receive all that they need from her. This Jerusalem is the same as Zion back in chapter 2, a picture of God's renewed relationship through Jesus Christ.

God will give peace (verse 12) and bring glory for the nations like a stream and the faithful will be nourished from her spiritual mother (see 9:7; 48:18; 52:7; 54:13; 57:19; 60:17). Verse 13 - God will comfort them as a mother comforts her children and this comfort will come from Jerusalem. Then, verse 14, they will be glad, their bones will flourish (physical imagery portraying spiritual realities) and the hand (power) of the Lord will be made known to His servants while God's indignant wrath will be made known to the enemies.

JUDGMENT AGAINST ALL SIN - 66:14-17:

Because, the Lord will come in fire (verse 15) to render His anger with fury and rebuke with flames of fire. He will execute His judgment by fire and by sword. There will be a lot of people on the receiving end of God's justice (vs 16; Young believes this prophecies the destruction of Jerusalem, 530, citing Matt. 24:22). In religious terms, these are people who try to purify themselves and sanctify themselves (vs 17). They go to the gardens of idols, eating pork and other detestable things but they will come to an end.

Motyer (457) comments: "The Lord is a jealous God, and worship must conform to his revealed will if it is to render to him the worth and honour that are his due."

In this way, the promise from 6:3 that God's glory will fill the earth is fulfilled - through Christians declaring the glory of God.

THE SENDING OF MESSENGERS - 66:18-19:

God knows when and how to fulfill all that He has planned. He has promised to establish a new spiritual house on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. When that happens, verse 18, He will gather all nations and tongues together ((2:2-4). They will come and see His glory. That glory, of course, was embodied in Jesus Christ. Just as the angels at the resurrection told the apostles to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise, so here, Isaiah is telling his people to look to Jerusalem and wait. The glory of God will appear.

Jesus is the "sign," (verse 19; different word than earlier), the "banner," the "signal," the "flag," which God will set up in Jerusalem. From among those whom God assembles in Jerusalem, He will send out messengers to the "nations" (and he gives some examples),

nations who have not known or heard of God's fame and glory and then *they* will declare God's glory to the nations.

THE BLESSING OF NATIONS - 66:20-23:

At that point, many will respond to God's message of righteousness and salvation and bring, please observe (vs 20), "your brethren," from all the nations and God pictures them as a "grain offering to the Lord," (physical pictures for spiritual realities). They will bring Gentiles as "grain offering" to God's holy mountain, just as the sons of Israel bring grain offerings. In Romans 15, Paul will also picture converts as sacrifices offered to God.

Verse 21 - God will make from among the Jews and Gentiles "priests and Levites." All Christians are priests because all Christians serve God in the spiritual temple, the church of Christ, with Jesus being the High Priest.

Verse 22 - The new relationship, this whole new world, the new heavens and the new earth will endure before God forever and so will their children and their new name. "I make" is a present active participle - God was, at that time, creating this new heavens and new earth.

Verse 23 - All year 'round, God's children will worship Him in this new spiritual temple - from new moon to new moon, from sabbath to sabbath, "All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord.

FINAL WARNING TO THE WICKED - 66:24:

Those who do not respond to God with an humble and contrite heart, trembling at His word, will regret it severely. They will be corpses and their death and their punishment will endure just as long as the worship of the faithful will endure. Spiritually speaking, "their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched, as they will be an abhorrence in the face of all mankind." Eternally speaking, of course, Jesus applies this concept to the eternal fires of hell in Mark 9:48.

Isaiah has led us to Jesus through many different images and he has led us to the kingdom of the Messiah, the church of Christ, through many different images. It remains for us now to take a quarter to begin studying the People and the Messiah: Covenant, Kingdom, Christ, and Community - the First of a Six Part Study of the church of Christ.