

Isaiah 65-66 forms one great final chiasm.

We won't make it all the way through the chiasm tonight,
because this is the climax of Isaiah's message,
and we need to hear it all!

First, Isaiah 65:1 call those who had not known or sought me.

Isaiah 66:18-21 concludes with those who have not heard my fame.

2nd, Isaiah 65:2-7 speaks of God anger against those who sacrifice in gardens
and eat pig's flesh (rejecting the true worship of God).

Isaiah 66:15-17 uses the exact same language, and speaks of their destruction.

3rd, Isaiah 65:8-10 speaks of the remnant—
the servants who will dwell in the land—
the offspring that will flourish in the land.

Isaiah 66:5-14 explains the miracle children of Zion, the Lord's servants.

4th, Is. 65:11-12 speaks of those who forget God's holy mountain,
turn to an idolatrous feast,
and delight in what was evil in my sight.

Isaiah 66:1-4 then reminds us that heaven is God's throne,
and condemns those who have delighted in false worship.

5th, Isaiah 65:13-16 speaks of the contrast between the feast
of the servants and the starvation of the wicked,
juxtaposing the blessing of the servants and the
cursing of the wicked.

Isaiah 65:19-25 then echoes that language in proclaiming
the blessedness of those who live in the New Jerusalem

And at the very heart of the chiasm are verses 17-18,
the declaration of the coming of the new heavens and the new earth.

The creation of a New Jerusalem,
the city of the living God.

This is the heart of Isaiah's message to Israel and Judah.

Exile is coming.

And after the Exile,

even the Restoration is not going to bring about a fundamental change.

Only when my Singular Servant comes to suffer,
only when the Anointed One arises to conquer,
only then will I establish a new creation.

Only then will I change the hearts of my servants
so that they might seek me as I desire.

First we must start with God's readiness to save the Gentiles.

1) God's Readiness to Save "Them" (the Gentiles)-- 65:1

We have seen this throughout Isaiah.

God is going to do something new and include the Gentiles into his people.

Twice in this first verse God declares his readiness to be found by the Gentiles.

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;

I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, "Here I am, here I am,"

to a nation that was not called by^[a] my name.

Many have argued that this is a reference to apostate Israel.

After all, Isaiah himself declares in 63:19 that

"we have become like those over whom you have never ruled,
like those who are not called by your name."

But the end of verse 1 is too emphatic.

"A nation that was not called by my name."

That was never true of Israel.

Indeed, the LXX and some other ancient translations switch this to

"a nation that did not call on my name."

(Which was certainly true of apostate Israel!)

While that is possible,

it does not explain how the MT would make the switch.

It is easy to see how a copyist could think that the passive would make more sense

because second temple Judaism (the intertestamental period)

was generally less friendly towards the inclusion of the Gentiles.

But since the rest of the chiasm is so clear,

it makes a lot more sense to see this as a reference to the Gentiles,
since they are plainly in view in 66:18-21.

God has cried out "Here I am"—or, literally, "Behold me! Behold me!"

Behold is a key word throughout the passage.

It occurs twice here in verse 1, once in verse 6, four times in verses 13-14,
twice in verses 17-18, and twice more in chapter 66.

Its eleven appearances in this chiasm signal key elements of Isaiah's message.

"Pay attention!" Look at this!

Here, God is calling upon the nations to look at himself.

He is ready to save those who call upon him.

2) God's Readiness to Judge His People—65:2-7

Verses 2-7 then explain why God is so ready to save the Gentiles.

² *I spread out my hands all the day
to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;*
³ *a people who provoke me
to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
and making offerings on bricks;*
⁴ *who sit in tombs,
and spend the night in secret places;
who eat pig's flesh,
and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels;*
⁵ *who say, "Keep to yourself,
do not come near me, for I am too holy for you."*

It is because he has spread out his hands all day to a rebellious people.
Do you realize how upside down that is?
Spreading out your hands is a posture of prayer—of imploring favor.
It is a fitting posture for man.
It is striking pose for God.
God has been pleading with his people to repent and return to him.
And yet this people walks in a way that is not good.
They follow their own devices.
They provoke God to his face,
sacrificing in gardens (cf. ch 1)
making offerings on bricks,
sitting in tombs—in secret places—to offer their strange sacrifices—
even offering pigs, and eating pig's flesh.
They have descended to all manner of abominations and uncleanness.
They do not consider the LORD's standard of holiness and purity.
And so they establish their own standard of holiness,
and turn up their noses at those who fall short of their standard.

Our day has its share of such apostates.
Many mainline churches have established alternate codes of "holiness"
so that if anyone speaks against women's ordination or homosexual relations,
or if anyone speaks for doctrinal orthodoxy,
they are cast aside as unclean—unfit to serve in Christ's church.
I rarely warn against mainline Protestantism,
largely because I do not get the sense that any of you might be attracted to it,
but I would be miscreant in my duties
if I failed to give occasional warnings
against an apostasy that has destroyed much of the church in this country,

and severely weakened even the orthodox.
Because, as God declares,
*These are a smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that burns all the day.*

These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.
God cannot forget those who have corrupted his worship and his standards of holiness.
Therefore, *Behold*—signaling here the conclusion of the section:

⁶ *Behold, it is written before me:
“I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their lap
⁷ both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together,
says the LORD;*

I will not keep silent.
But I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their bosom
both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together, says the LORD. (6-7)
Judgment will fall, says the LORD.
I will not forget their wicked deeds.
And he even recounts the rationale once again in verse 7.

*because they made offerings on the mountains
and insulted me on the hills,
I will measure into their lap
payment for their former deeds.”*

The judgment of God will fall upon those who have rebelled against him.
And it will fall in one day.
God has stored up wrath for generations,
but it will all be poured out in a moment.
That moment came in the day of Lord Jesus Christ.
When God's wrath was poured out upon Jesus,
he brought the final judgment upon that generation.
You could even say that God's judgment fell upon
both the righteous and the wicked on that day.
Because in Jesus we see the division of humanity
into those who believe and those who do not.

Thus the next three sections deal with the contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

3) God's Blessing upon the Remnant of His Servants—65:8-10

⁸ *Thus says the LORD:
“As the new wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, ‘Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,’*

The first two sections fit into the first “says the LORD”
now the second two sections contain the second “thus says the LORD (8-12).

The “new wine” here (tiros) is not grape juice,
but the sweetest wine made from the ripest of grapes—
the champagne of the ancient world—
new wine was considered a great blessing
because it signaled a new grape harvest,
another year of bounty

When they say “do not destroy” in verse 8,
this may be a reference to Psalms 57-59 or 75,
all of which have the title, “According to Do Not Destroy.”
So it is entirely possible that the reference is to these songs of the remnant,
pleading with God for mercy in the face their enemies.

But when the remnant pleads with God, he responds with two “I wills”

*so I will do for my servants' sake,
and not destroy them all.*

First, “So I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all.”
The God who spreads out his hands to his people
will hear them when they cry to him,
and he will deliver the remnant.
All through chapters 41-53 “servant” was in the singular.
Only in Is. 54:17 did we finally hear about the plural “servants”
who would be redeemed by the singular servant.
God promises that his servants will not be destroyed.
And the second “I will” sets forth what God will do:

⁹ *I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,
and from Judah possessors of my mountains;
my chosen shall possess it,
and my servants shall dwell there.*
¹⁰ *Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me.*

I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,
my chosen will possess my mountains, and my servants shall dwell there.

Those who seek the LORD will find rest in him

4) The Destiny of Those Who Forget God's Holy Mountain—65:11-12

*¹¹ But you who forsake the LORD,
who forget my holy mountain,
who set a table for Fortune
and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny,*

But you who forsake the LORD,
you who forget my holy mountain,
who set a table for Fortune
and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny.
In other words, those who call yourself my people,
but do not dwell on my mountain.
You who say that you love me,
but do not drink from my new wine—
you who have turned to Folly's feast (Prov 9)--
"I will" do one thing to you.
You have loved "Destiny"
so I will destine you to the sword.

*¹² I will destine you to the sword,
and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter,
because, when I called, you did not answer;
when I spoke, you did not listen,
but you did what was evil in my eyes
and chose what I did not delight in."*

Again we hear of their cultic practices:
they have turned away from the worship of the living God,
and have worshiped false gods.
"When I called, you did not answer;
when I spoke, you did not listen,
but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in."

God is calling.
He has spoken to you in Jesus Christ.
Are you listening?

5) The Contrast between the Servants and “You”—65:13-16

Verse 13 launches this penultimate section with a string of therefore – thus – behold!

Any one of these would ordinarily signal something important.

“Therefore” says we’ve come to the point of the preceding sections.

“Thus says the Lord GOD” adds Adonai to Yahweh emphasizing its importance.

And the string of four “behold”s has Isaiah’s characteristic repetitiveness
in highlighting key points.

Put all three of these triggers together,

and even the slowest of Isaiah’s hearers

would know that it was time to pay attention!

¹³ *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD:*

“Behold, my servants shall eat,

but you shall be hungry;

behold, my servants shall drink,

but you shall be thirsty;

behold, my servants shall rejoice,

but you shall be put to shame;

Behold, my servants shall eat,

but you shall be hungry.

The faithless have been feasting on pork and other unclean foods.

Their faithless feasting will turn to starvation in the Day of the LORD.

But the righteous remnant, my servants, will feast.

Behold, my servants shall drink,

but you shall be thirsty.

The new wine of blessing will flow bountifully for my servants.

Indeed, our Lord Jesus Christ has provided this bountiful food and drink
in the Lord’s Supper,

where we have a foretaste of the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

Behold, my servants shall rejoice,

but you shall be put to shame.

If you are a wicked apostate, then you have every reason to be morbid
at the Lord’s Table.

But if you are a servant of Christ, then you must rejoice!

Behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,

(And with this fourth behold, Isaiah now tacks on five “waws”--

adding insult to injury!)

¹⁴ *behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,*

but you shall cry out for pain of heart

and shall wail for breaking of spirit.

¹⁵ *You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse,*

*and the Lord GOD will put you to death,
but his servants he will call by another name,*

Boom...boom...boom...boom...boom.

It's this typical Isianic rapid-fire nailing the coffin shut with a nail gun!

My servants shall have gladness of heart
you shall have pain of heart.
And not only that!

You will have 'ruach teyelilu' (the very word sounds like wailing!)

You name will become a curse word for my remnant.

And Adonai Yahweh will put you to death.

Your name will no longer be known in the earth,

because his servants he will call by another name.

And indeed, no longer are we known by the name of Israel.

I would by no means wish to encourage anti-Semitism,

but it was Isaiah who predicted that the name of Israel would become a curse.

A prediction come true in John's usage of the term "Jew."

But the primary fulfillment of this came on the cross,

when all the curses of God fell upon his only-begotten Son!

What is the result of all this?

The end is that

*¹⁶ so that he who blesses himself in the land
shall bless himself by the God of truth,
and he who takes an oath in the land
shall swear by the God of truth;
because the former troubles are forgotten
and are hidden from my eyes.*

The God of Truth – the God of the Amen (this is the only place where this title is used) –
he is the one who will who do it.

6) The Coming of the New Creation—65:17-18

*¹⁷ "For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.*

*¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;*

*for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.*

But the God of the Amen is doing something new.

And here at the center of the chiasm—
the final message Isaiah declares to his hearers—
is the revelation of the new creation.

And he unveils it in a pair of “For beholds”
Not just the regular “hiney”
But “ki-hiney”

For behold! I create new heavens and a new earth.

Isaiah has frequently reminded us of the tohu-vbohu,
the barren emptiness from which God formed all things.

Israel is returning to bohu,
and yet God will create a new heavens and a new earth.

All things will be made new.

He will no longer hold the former things against us.

It is not that God’s memory is bad.

Rather, his memory will be purged.

He will forgive all of our sins and hold them against us no more!

So be glad! And rejoice forever in that which I create.

What is this new heavens and new earth?

You cannot take the first “ki-hiney” without the second.

For behold! I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.

John understood Isaiah’s point.

When he speaks of the creation of the new heavens and the new earth
in Rev. 21:1-2, he says,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more...”

(and remember that the sea regularly stands for the Gentile nations
in their hostility against God and his people)

If you take the heavens and the earth, and remove the Gentiles,
what do you have?

Keep listening to John (or Isaiah—it amounts to the same thing!):

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

But bara is used three times here in this impending future sense (it is actually a participle).
God creates a new heavens and a new earth,

which can otherwise be expressed as I create Jerusalem to be a joy.
The first heavens and earth was created to be God's dwelling place with his people.
Jerusalem is the microcosm—the redemptive center of the first creation.
Now, when God creates a new heavens and a new earth,
Jerusalem becomes macrocosm.
No longer is the city of God the center of a tiny embattled remnant,
fighting a losing war against the mighty forces of evil and rebellion.
No, now the city of God IS the whole heavens and earth.

5') The Contrast between the New Creation and the Old--65:19-25

*¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;*

If the previous contrast in verses 13-16 focused on the new people and the old people,
now we see the contrast between the new creation itself with the former creation—
two different modes of life, as it were.

And the first contrast is found with God himself.

“I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people.”

God has been waiting a long time to say this.

He has been patient.

He has stretched out his arms, pleading with them to listen.

How do I dare to say this of the immortal God—

the God who certainly does not need us!?

Because Jesus looks out over Jerusalem and cries out:

“How often would I have gathered your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”

(Mt 23:37)

Reverently, humbly, and in wonder,

I say to you, God himself rejoices in you.

He delights to call you “my people.”

And because Jesus Christ is seated at his right hand,

never again will “my people” be cast aside.

His joy is complete—in you who are called by that new name—

the name that was before the foundation of the world,

but only revealed in these last days:

the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

And because God is now rejoicing in his people,
there are some obvious effects on them as well!

Read 19b-25

no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping

and the cry of distress.
²⁰ *No more shall there be in it*
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.
²¹ *They shall build houses and inhabit them;*
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
²² *They shall not build and another inhabit;*
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy^[e] the work of their hands.
²³ *They shall not labor in vain*
or bear children for calamity,^[d]
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,
and their descendants with them.
²⁴ *Before they call I will answer;*
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
²⁵ *The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;*
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
and dust shall be the serpent's food.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.

These are the blessings of the New Jerusalem—

the new creation where we now have our citizenship.

We have begun to taste of the powers of the age to come.

We taste the vineyard of the new creation at the Lord's Table.

We dwell in the house of the LORD,

as we ourselves are being built into that spiritual temple,
that heavenly city, where Christ dwells by his Spirit.

We enjoy the work of our hands

as the kingdom of God goes forth with power.

We do not labor in vain, nor bear children for calamity,

for our children are the offspring of the blessed of the LORD.

And God hears us—even while we are yet speaking.

Such is our direct access to the throne of grace!

And that is only the foretaste!

Doesn't that give you an appetite for more?