

For behold, the LORD will come

1. In what times do we find ourselves most longing for heaven, to be with Him forever? In what times do we find ourselves most concerned for those who don't yet know God?

In this book, we have seen the Lord. He is "Holy, Holy, Holy," high and lifted up, His glory overwhelming and filling the earth. He is the Creator, the only God, Almighty Sovereign, Lord of Hosts: all nations and powers are as dust in His hand. He is the faithful Shepherd of Israel, the Comforter. We have seen the obedient, suffering Servant, bearing away the ghastly load of all sin. He is the Redeemer, lifting sinners from the pit, making them His own beloved ones, giving them His beauty and a new name. He is the eternal Righteous One, the final Judge, the King "in His beauty," bringing justice, destroying evil. He is the Savior and Prince of Peace.

In these last 2 chapters, the LORD gives the message that concludes all He has been saying through Isaiah. Final words are very carefully chosen and aimed, to have particular emphasis and power. These final statements are unmatched in their overriding authority and eternal significance.

Invitation to pray: Mighty God, Creator, Redeemer and Shepherd; give me ears that hear Your truth to me in these passages. Help me respond with my whole heart, for You are worthy. Amen.

2. In chapters 64-65, Isaiah spoke with the deep longing of the spiritually sensitive heart. He recounted Israel's history of continuing disdain for God in the face of His goodness, and told the inevitable results. **Skim 63:7-10, 64:5-9, note his final cries in 64:12.**

Scan Isaiah 65:1-7. Then re-read Isaiah 65:1-5 in the following RSV rendering.

1. 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 am I, here am I," to a nation who did not call on my name. 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 burning incense upon bricks; 4. who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; 5. who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am set apart from you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

3. Tell what you learn of God as He begins His response to the nation of Israel in vv.1-2a.

4. Paul quotes v. 1 as he describes the wonder of God's plan for the Gentiles, as prophesied. What is laid out here and in Ephesians 2:12-13, Acts 13:26-28, 38-39, 44-47, Romans 9:30-33, 10:19-21, 11:11, 25. (For great "dig deeper" reading, see Matthew 21:33-44.)

Returning to the message to Israel in ch. 65, this description of idolatry isn't meant to portray any one period of Israel's history, but is meant as a general description of an ongoing problem. (Notes: V. 3: pagan worship's sexual immorality often occurred in gardens. V.7: *each* unrepentant person of *each* generation will ultimately receive full payment for their sin.)

5. Remembering all God is and what He's been to them, comment on their choices and their end in 65:2-7, 66:17.

God has declared He will not keep silent—He will intervene in line with His promises and His warnings. **Read 65:8-16:** note how this will mean very different things to different people.

Verses 8-10, and 13-25, give once again the beautiful promise of the *remnant*. This was partially fulfilled in those who survived the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem under Hezekiah, and in those who lived to go into exile in Babylon. These words would be of great encouragement to the people of faith in Isaiah's day, before the Babylonian invasion, and those awaiting release from captivity in Babylon. As noted before, these prophetic words will be fully met at Christ's return.

6. a. Putting vs. 8-10 with Isaiah 10:20-23 and 29:23-24, list the significant characteristics of the remnant.

b. Note and define the name for the remnant that is stressed by repetition in 65:13-16. What background have we seen on this name in Isaiah 42:18-20 and 44:1-3, 21-23?

c. The remnant is a transformed people, true servants of God. How has this been made possible? See Isaiah 52:13-14 and 53:4-6,12.

For your own heart: As He contrasts them with idolators, the Lord repeatedly calls His own "my servants" in these last crucial words of Isaiah. He is also emphasizing the choice placed before us: it is a clear call to follow the Servant Savior *in His own footsteps*. *What would it look like, in your present circumstances/relationships, to be first and foremost the Lord's servant?*

Vv. 8-10 and also 13-25 look forward to a time of wondrous reward for the remnant of Israel when Christ comes to reign on earth and exalt the nation. These earthly joys also point to what heaven will fully bring to all who know the Lord as Savior. **Notice as you read these words how these future blessings show how intimately the Lord knows our present human cares, struggles and sorrows. As time permits, share your insights in your class.**

This next chapter has sections that all can understand, as well as those that have challenged Bible scholars for centuries. **Scan 66:1-6.** This seems to address the mixed group of all Jews practising and professing faith. It is intended not just for Isaiah's time, but for many generations to come.

Both Solomon's Temple and the later temple that rose in its place were rightly important to Israel, as were the clearly commanded rites and sacrifices that were to take place only there. Both temples were so magnificent and imposing, no one could imagine them being destroyed. Yet it would happen, as God had said (in 586 B.C. and then in 70 A.D.; note Matthew 23:37-24:2).

7. People easily get caught up and complacent in the round of even good religious activities. Here, it's as if God Himself suddenly breaks in, "lifts off the Temple roof," and makes His mighty voice heard.
 - a. According to 66:1-2, who is He revealed to be? (Stephen quotes this in Acts 7:47-51.)

 - b. Against all of the world's values, goals, and expectations—and perhaps against our own—we see God's assessment, in verse 2b. What does He say? Then, explain these words. (Note: the word translated contrite literally means *lamed, disabled*.)

8.
 - a. Now, how do the religious actions of the people in the first several lines of v. 3 appear to God (no matter how they may appear to others)?

 - b. What is the real truth about these people that God clearly sees, in vv. 3b and 4b (in contrast with the people described in v. 2)?

 - c. What continual reality and struggle is described in v. 5? (The quote here is probably sarcasm.)

 - d. What is the just fate of the unrepentant ones described in this section, according to vv. 4 and 6?

9. Many issues that we face every day have been discussed in this small section. What special significance do these verses have for you today? What is your prayer concerning this?

Scan through 66:7-13. Verses 7-10 are first of all referring to what will happen when the exiles get the news that Cyrus is freeing them and helping them to return (54:1-3, 49:19-21).

10. From a natural point of view, the event described in v. 7 was *an impossibility*. And so was the idea of Israel surviving as a nation (much less thriving again in their homeland!) after being exiled to Babylon. But that didn't matter! Why? (See vv. 8-9, 12a.)

Note: Some connect v.7 with the birth of Christ (Revelation 12:5, Micah 5:2-3). Some also see v. 8 referring to Israel seeing Christ's returning to earth as King and realizing He is the Messiah (Zechariah 12, Jeremiah 50:4).

11. Verses 10-12 picture Israel as being cherished and nourished with lavish abundance, with the nations also finding great delight in her and her marvelous God. What does the beautiful picture of v. 13 reveal?

Read 66:14-24. The clear meaning of some of these verses may not be evident to us as yet, but some messages come through very distinctly.

All that we are seeing here is the outworking of God's wondrous holiness. That holiness is the key to all that our God is. It is that holiness that makes Him our life, joy, peace, righteousness—our all.

12. As He draws all things to a close, what very different sounding things are mentioned practically in one breath, in verses 13-18?

Many scholars have concluded that verses 19-21 may well refer to the flow of believers carrying the gospel to the world since the death and resurrection of Christ, while others think perhaps it is something that happens among the Gentiles after Christ comes again.

13. Because of the outreaching love, power and grace of our holy Lord and the work of His arm, what will come to be? See vv. 22-23 (the days mentioned in v. 23 symbolize rest and rejoicing forever) and Revelation 7:9-11, 22:1-5.

This book ends with a terrible scene, perhaps meant to picture an understanding rather than an actual physical presence in heaven. It is clear that it is meant both to remind of great deliverance and to serve as a great warning—acts of deepest love. As you think of all those around you who don't know Him, remember: His great power is at work in, through, and for you.

14. Finish this time of studying God's Word by praising your Holy Redeemer and Mighty God. Read aloud Isaiah 25:1-9: Exalt His name!