EBS13 Isa 65-66

**Lesson 13: Isaiah 65-66**

**New Heavens and New Earth**

**Objectives:**

1. The students will understand God’s response to the faithful and unfaith in Jerusalem.
2. The students will understand God’s intentions for the future.
3. The students will understand why Isaiah’s great vision for Jerusalem went unfulfilled.

**Preparation:**

1. Use a good Bible dictionary to look up the following terms:
   1. Fortune.
   2. Destiny.
   3. Sharon.
   4. Valley of Achor.
   5. Tarshish.
   6. Javan.
   7. Put.
   8. Lud.
   9. Tubel.
2. Review the outline of the vision for the new Jerusalem in Isa 60-62 in anticipation of Isa 65:17-25.

**Theme:** The God high and holy sends a preacher.

**Background:**

1. Isa 63-64 set the stage for the grand conclusion of Isaiah 65-66 by recounting these issues:
   1. Isa 63:1-6—God has come to establish justice.
   2. Isa 63:7-14—God has a long history of loyalty to Israel.
   3. Isa 63:15-64:4—The prophet appeals to God to come again to help Israel.
   4. Isa 64:5-12—The prophet confesses the sins of Israel.
2. Isa 65:1-16 responds to the call for God to come again.

**Learning Experiences:**

1. Isa 65:1-16—Here I am! Here I am!
   1. God responds to the prophet’s appeal in Isa 64:1 for God to come again by saying that he has come but the people have not listened.
      1. The repeated call of God to the people is the theme of the last two chapters:
         1. Isa 65:1: 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 that did not call on my name.
         2. Isa 65:12: 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.
         3. Isa 65:24: Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
         4. Isa 66:4: I also will choose affliction for them, and bring their fears upon them; because, when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes, and chose that in which I did not delight.
      2. A similar appeal is made in Isa 55:1.
      3. The regular theophanies in the book of Isaiah along with God sending the prophet to the people confirm God’s regular, consistent, insistent appeal and appearances to the people.
   2. The passage offers theological closure to one of the substantial issues of the book.
      1. God repeatedly speaks of a significant future for his people (cf. among many passages Isa 2:1ff; 4:1ff; 5:1ff; 35:1ff; 43:1-21; 56:1 and shortly 65:17ff).
      2. However, from the book of Isaiah, along with the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and from what we know from non-biblical historical sources, the great vision for Jerusalem was not fulfilled.
      3. The passage at hand indicates God was (and is) willing to bring about this kind of future, but the people were not seeking him.
      4. God appeared as a man shouting in the street, “I’m here. I’m ready to begin. I bring my power to build a wonderful community” but the people did not ask for him, seek him or call on his name.
      5. Clearly a small group did respond (the prophet and those making the appeal in Isa 63-64) and the group to whom God makes assurances in Isa 65-66, but the others followed their own way.
   3. Isa 65:1-16 identifies the qualities of the people who oppose God and lists their punishment and in addition identifies the qualities of those who follow God and their rewards.
      1. The wicked are described in the first part as “those,” “who” “they” and “their” while in the last part they are called “you. Together these words appear 28 times.
      2. The faithful are called by several names:
         1. Good grapes—v 8. This passage seems to quote a proverb or vintager’s song suggesting that the grapes are for good harvest.
         2. My servants—vv, 8-9, 13-15.
         3. Descendants of Jacob—v 9.
         4. Inheritors of my mountains—v 9
         5. My chosen—v 9.
         6. My people—v 10.
         7. Who have sought me—v 10.
      3. Isaiah lists at least 22 traits of those who did not ask, seek or call on God. Instead of choosing to covenant with the God of Israel who offered blessings and salvation, part of the Jerusalem population chose a different way.
         1. Did not ask for God—v 1.
         2. Did not seek God—v 1.
         3. Did not call on his name—v 1.
         4. Rebellious—v 2 (see the material in the previous lesson on Isa 62:10)
         5. Walk in a way that is not good—v 2.
         6. Follow their own devices—v 2.
         7. Provoke God—v 3.
         8. Sacrifice in gardens—v3.
            1. This practice and the incense burning may refer back to the pagan practices described in Isa 57:3-8.
            2. These two practices may be reflected in the pagan worship of Isa 66:3, 17.
            3. Whatever their exact origin they were detested by God.
         9. Burn incense—v 3.
         10. Sit in tombs—v 4.
         11. Spend the night in secret places—v 4.
         12. Eat abominable things—v 4.
         13. Keep others away—v 5.
         14. Revile God on the hills—v 7. See Isa 57:3-8.
         15. Forsake the LORD—v 11.
         16. Forget God’s holy mountain—v 11.
         17. Set a table for Fortune—v 11.
         18. Fill cups of wine for Destiny—v 11. Fortune and Destiny may refer to the Syrian, Phoenician and Arabian gods.
         19. Did not answer God’s call—v 12.
         20. Did not listen to God—v 12.
         21. Did evil in God’s eyes—v 12
         22. Choose what God does not delight in—v 12.
      4. Isa 65:1-16 lists God’s response to those to whom he called who did not answer:
         1. They are smoke in his nostrils (not sweet smelling odor from sacrifice, but an obnoxious stink)—v 5.
         2. They are a fire that burns all day—v 5.
         3. God will repay—v 6.
         4. God will measure payment—v 7.
         5. They are destined for the sword—v 12.
         6. They will bow down to the slaughter—v 12.
         7. They will be hungry—v 13.
         8. They will be thirsty—v 13.
         9. They shall be put to shame—v 13.
         10. They shall cry out with pain—v 14.
         11. They shall wail with anguish—v 14.
         12. Their names will be cursed—v 15.
         13. God will slay them—v 15.
      5. Isa 65:1-16 also lists the rewards for the servants. Note especially the “behold…but” poem in Isa 65:13-14.
         1. Blessing—vv 8, 16.
         2. Not destroy them—v 8.
         3. Give them descendants—v 9.
         4. Allow them to inherit God’s mountain—vv 9-10.
         5. Allow them to dwell in God’s mountain—v 10.
         6. Give them Sharon as a pasture—v 10.
         7. Give them the Valley of Achor—v 10.
         8. They shall eat—v 13.
         9. They shall drink—v 13.
         10. They shall rejoice—v 14. See the recurrent theme of rejoicing in this section: Isa 65:18-19; 66:5, 10.
         11. They shall sing—v 14.
         12. They shall swear by the God of truth—v 16.
         13. Their former troubles will be forgotten—v 16.
2. Isa 65:17-25—The new heavens and the new earth.
   1. Isa 60-62 contained the lofty vision for post-exilic Jerusalem and now Isaiah gives lofty vision of the new heavens and the new earth (Isa 65:17) which involves creating Jerusalem (Isa 65:18). There are several ways to understand the passage about the new heavens, earth and Jerusalem.
      1. Stress on creation. The use of God as creator for the future draws on Isaiah’s regular citation of God’s work in creating the original earth (cf. Isa 42:5; 45:7, 12, 18, etc.) showing that the power of God expressed in creation of the original earth, animals and people is available for future use. The God who calls “here am I” now says “here’s what I can do.”
      2. Stress on Jerusalem. The reference to the new Jerusalem aims to draw on the promises of Isa 60-62 in a more powerful way. The creation theme does not appear in God’s promises of Isa 60-62 but now God raises the strength of his intent by an even greater assurance of what he is able and willing to do with post-exilic Jerusalem.
      3. Stress on end times. In the Book of Revelation, John uses Isaiah’s images to describe the reality of heaven, the afterlife of Christians. On that basis, some argue that Isaiah intends to describe the same experience. This view calls for a metaphorical interpretation of all the images so that the houses, vineyards, and lifespans of 100 are all images of the eschaton and not of an earthly Jerusalem.
      4. Stress on both Jerusalem and end times. This way of understanding sees Isaiah speaking to the people in post-exilic Jerusalem about his plans for earthly Jerusalem (taking the images in a more literal way) with the understanding that despite the expected lack of human cooperation, God’s plans for the future are constantly pushed into the future until they finally are pushed into beyond the end of time. The emphasis in this view is that human cooperation is needed to accomplish God’s earthly vision.
      5. Stress on the vision’s role for earthly Jerusalem. Instead of the present human activity determining Jerusalem’s future, this view holds that God’s vision for the future determines what people do in the present. Isaiah depicts God’s vision which has the effect of raising the bar on what humanity must do to rise up to God’s hope for the world. This interpretation seems to most fully embrace the call for justice and righteousness first expressed in Isa 56:1 which provides continuity for most of the material in Isa 56-66. Isa 65:17-25 then shows what a community of righteousness and justice looks like in practical terms.
   2. Qualities of the new Jerusalem.
      1. A place of rejoicing (4 times)—vv 18-19. See Isa 66:5-10.
      2. No more weeping—v 19.
      3. No cries of distress—v 19.
      4. No infant mortality—v 20.
      5. No premature death—v 20.
      6. Children living to old age—v 20.
      7. Adults living to over a hundred—v 20.
      8. Build and live in houses—v 21.
      9. Plant and eat from vineyards—v 21. See the treatment of the vineyard theme in Isaiah in EBS 11, Additional study.
      10. No more building and not living in what is built—v 22.
      11. No more planting and not eating from the crop—v 22.
      12. People live as long as trees—v 22.
      13. No more vain birth labor—v 23
      14. No more calamity with regard to the birth of children—v 23.
      15. Offspring blessed by God—v 23.
      16. People with their children with them—v 24.
      17. Wolf and lamb feed together—v 25.
          1. The wolf, lamb, lion and ox also act this way in Isa 11:6-9.
          2. This image may be a hyperbole in which the future is expressed in extravagant terms in order to help us move beyond our human thinking into the realm of God’s possibilities.
      18. Lion will eat straw like the ox—v 25.
      19. The serpent will eat dust—v 25. This reference may fulfill Gen 3:14.
      20. There will be no hurt or destruction on God’s holy mountain—v 25.
3. Isa 66:1-24—Assurance and Judgment.
   1. The book of Isaiah closes with a series of short passages that alternate between two poles. The entire book has alternated between these two responses to God and the rapid alteration at the end has a sense of an ellipse….that the response to God throughout history alternates between these two poles.
      1. Assurance to the faithful.
         1. 66:1-2.
         2. 66:5-14a.
         3. 66:18-21.
         4. 66:22-23.
      2. Judgment on the unfaithful.
         1. 66:3-4.
         2. 66:14b-17.
         3. 66:24.
   2. Assurance to the faithful: God cannot be confined to the temple—Isa 66:1-2.
      1. Isaiah describes God’s view of the world and of worship.
         1. World—God sees heaven as his throne with his feet resting on the earth.
         2. Worship—God cannot be confined to the temple or to any human worship.
      2. Despite God’s ability to transcend human existence, God confirms his presence with the humble and contrite (Isa 57:15) who trust his word.
   3. Judgment on the unfaithful: Those who chose their own ways—Isa 66:3-4.
      1. Isaiah again describes a series of actions that God finds offensive. List the 8 actions and compare them with Isa 58 and following judgment passages in Isa 66.
      2. God announces judgment in terms of affliction and the realization of their fears—v 4.
      3. Ultimately the unfaithful do not respond when God calls. Isa 66:4 repeats Isa 65:12.
   4. Assurance to the faithful: warning and promise—Isa 66:5-14a.
      1. Isaiah returns to the importance of the word of God (Isa 66:1-2)—v 5. The faithful tremble at the word because of its dependability, a theme of the entire book of Isaiah.
      2. Isaiah warns the faithful to be aware of the false boasts of their enemies. The enemies are quoted in v 5 as ones who press the faithful to see quick action from God.
      3. Instead the faithful should listen for the uproar when the enemies are put to shame and recompensed.
      4. Two extended metaphors offer the faithful assurance
         1. Quick birth—Isa 66:7-9.
            1. The speed and ease with which God can act is compared to a woman who has a baby before she goes into labor.
            2. The land can be reborn in one day.
            3. The use of healthy birth returns to the same image of the new Jerusalem in in Isa 65:20, 23.
         2. Nurturing mother—Isa 66:10-14a.
            1. The care the people receive is compared to the care a baby receives from its mother while nursing.
            2. The metaphor is used in two ways:

Jerusalem will be the nursing mother to the nations. The nations will benefit from the blessings given to Jerusalem. The amount of nourishment moves from the mother’s milk to a flowing stream drawing on the image in Isa 48:18; 60:4-14; 61:5.

God will be the source of nourishment to Jerusalem. God’s offer to comfort Jerusalem recalls Isa 40:1. No metaphor is spared in the book of Isaiah to describe the wonders of God. Feminine images used to describe God do not mean he is a woman, just that he had qualities that are compared to feminine characteristics.

* 1. Judgment on the unfaithful: The warrior God will execute judgment –Isa 66:14b-17.
     1. Isaiah often pictures God as a warrior (Isa 40:10; 59:16ff; 62:11; 63:1-6).
     2. This text mentions the negative response of God to those who reject him:
        1. Indignation—v 14.
        2. Anger—v 15.
        3. Fury—v 15.
        4. Rebuke—v 15.
        5. Will come to an end—v 17.
     3. The judgment will include:
        1. Fire—vv 15-16.
        2. Chariots—v 15.
        3. A stormwind—v 15.
        4. Sword—v 16.
        5. Slay their flesh—v 16.
     4. The sins of the enemies include:
        1. Those who use the gardens—v 17 (cf. Isa 65:3-4).
        2. Those who eat swine, the abomination and mice—v 17.
  2. Assurance to the faithful: Gathering the nations—Isa 66:18-21.
     1. A prose passage outlines a sequence God plans for the future.
        1. God knows the nations—v 18.
        2. God commits to gathering all the nations to see his glory—v 18.
        3. God sends a sign and survivors to the nations—v 19.
        4. Brethren from all nations will come as an offering to God in Jerusalem—vv 19-20.
        5. The nations will join Israel who brings appropriate vessels—v 20.
        6. God will make some of the brethren from the nations into priests and Levites—v 21.
     2. The section includes a list of the nations which seem to represent the four compass points:
        1. Tarshish, perhaps in Spain.
        2. Javan, another name for Greece.
        3. Put in Northern Africa.
        4. Tubel in Asia Minor.
     3. The passage also lists the transportation methods used by the arriving nations:
        1. Horses.
        2. Chariots.
        3. Litters.
        4. Mules.
        5. Dromedaries
     4. Isa 56-66 begins and ends with inclusion.
        1. Isa 56:1 calls for a community of justice and righteousness.
        2. Isa 56 cites the inclusion of eunuchs and foreigners.
        3. Isa 58 calls for the poor, hungry and homeless to be addressed by the community.
        4. Isa 61 has the poor becoming oaks of righteousness and priests.
        5. Isa 60-62 includes foreigners helping rebuild Jerusalem.
        6. Isa 66:18-21 envisions a gathering of the nations in Jerusalem.
           1. They are called brethren.
           2. Non Jews minister in the temple.
     5. The passage may be understood in several different ways:
        1. It affirms God’s mission to all people of faith which was established in Isa 56.
        2. It looks far into the future.
           1. The future is perhaps the church which takes up a world-wide mission (Mt 28:18-20) and practices the brotherhood and priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9-10).
           2. The future is perhaps heaven where the saved (brethren) from all nations (Mt 25:32) will gather and many will minister before God (e.g. Rev 4:10).
        3. The survivors could refer to the remnant which is mentioned throughout Isaiah (see additional study) or to missionaries in a NT sense.
        4. The inclusiveness of God’s intent is contrasted with God’s own exclusiveness in separating the assurances to the faithful from the judgment on the unfaithful.
  3. Assurance to the faithful: Recap of newness—Isa 66:22-23.
     1. A final reassurance recaps the new heavens and new earth of Isa 65:17.
     2. A final reassurance recaps the never ceasing time table of the gathering of the nations in Isa 66:18-21.
  4. Judgment on the unfaithful: Faithful view the corpses of the unfaithful—Isa 66:24.
     1. The final verse provides a recap for the unfaithful.
        1. The fate of the rebellious recaps Isa 65:2ff.
        2. The coming fire recaps Isa 66:15-16.
     2. Just as Isa 66:18-21 may describe a heavenly scene, the last verse may describe the scene in hell which the saved view from afar (Lk 16:23).
     3. The Book of Isaiah ends with the destruction of the wicked. Although the description is revolting, it represents good tidings to those seeking justice and righteous. Good triumphs over evil. The oppressed are set free. The oppressors receive their due.

**Continuities:**

1. God claims repeatedly in Isa 65-66 to call on humanity with no response. Does God still make these calls? Do people now do better than the unfaithful response described in Isaiah?
2. Isa 65-66 offers several descriptions of God’s judgment on the wicked. Many in contemporary society object to such passages. What do they find offensive? What information or perspective might help them see the passages in a different light? Do people believe God will really carry out this judgment? Do Christians really believe God will carry out this judgment?
3. Review the ways in which children are used in Isa 65-66. Why does Isaiah frequently use children as illustrations? What other uses are made of children in the Bible? How does the use in Isaiah compare with these others?
4. Discuss the description of the new heavens and the new earth. Which interpretation makes the most sense? Discuss the description of the ingathering of the nations in Isa 66:18-21. Which interpretation makes the most sense?
5. Discuss the ending of the book of Isaiah. Why did the prophet end the book in this way? How would you have ended the book? Many Jewish services where this text is read finish the book by reading Isa 66:24 and then rereading Isa 66:23. What motivates them to repeat v 23?

**Additional Study:**

1. Servant and Servants.
   1. Previous lessons give considerable attention to the appearance of some of these concepts in Isaiah.
   2. Note the way in which these words appear in Isaiah

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number of occurrences of | Isa 1-39 | Isa 40-55 | Isa 56-66 |
| Servant | 3 | 20 | 1 (Isa 63:11) |
| Servants | 5 | 1 (Isa 54:17) | 9 |

* 1. The word servant appears in Isa 56:6; 63:17; 65:8-9; 13-15; 66:14.
  2. The range of meaning is significant
     1. A person who serves another.
     2. Israel as God’s chosen messenger.
     3. The teaching and suffering servant.
     4. The followers of God in post-exilic Jerusalem (the “servants” in Isa 56-66).

1. The remnant.
   1. Isaiah frequently mentions the remnant: Isa. 10:19ff; 11:11, 16; 14:22, 30; 15:9; 17:3; 28:5; 37:4, 31f; 46:3.
   2. Much of his theology is capsulized in the name of his son Shearjashub (Isa 7:3) which means a remnant will return.
   3. Remnant refers to God providing a future for his people. See Gen. 45:7; Deut. 3:11; Jos. 10:20; 12:4; 13:12; 23:12; Jdg. 5:13; 2 Sam. 14:7; 21:2; 1 Ki. 22:46; 2 Ki. 19:4, 30f; 21:14; 1 Chr. 4:43; 2 Chr. 30:6; 34:9; Ezr. 9:8, 13ff; Isa. 10:19ff; 11:11, 16; 14:22, 30; 15:9; 17:3; 28:5; 37:4, 31f; 46:3; Jer. 6:9; 8:3; 23:3; 24:8; 25:20; 31:7; 40:11, 15; 42:2, 15, 17, 19; 43:5; 44:7, 12, 14, 28; 47:4f; 50:20; Ezek. 11:13; Amos 1:8; 5:15; 9:12; Mic. 2:12; 4:7; 5:7f; 7:18; Hab. 2:8; Zeph. 1:4; 2:7, 9; Hag. 1:12, 14; 2:2; Zech. 8:6, 11f; 9:7; Rom. 9:27; 11:5.