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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

Isaiah 66.

(2015)

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But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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Isaiah 66.

Topics.

- Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."
- They have chosen their own evil ways doing evil in my eyes.
- Your brothers who cast you out for my name's sake shall be put to shame.
- Before Zion was in labour she gave birth; before pain she delivered a son.
- By fire the LORD will enter into judgment and those slain shall be many.
- The time is coming to gather all nations and they shall see my glory.
- God will send survivors to nations to bring brothers to His Holy Mountain.
- The New Heavens and New Earth shall remain, so shall your name remain.
- Their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION: Isaiah is the exciting story of the Old Testament and the New Testament compacted into one book. It covers the wonder and splendour of Bible prophecy and echoes of the Lord Jesus Christ resound throughout Isaiah's visions and his messages. It teaches history as it affects God's people and constantly points to a future age when righteousness, justice, joy and peace will be established on earth. Isaiah prophesied about 740–700 B.C. He lived during the decline of Israel in the shadow of the powerful Assyrian Empire. He spoke the word of God to a people who were "deaf and blind" (Isaiah 6:10) who refused to listen to his warnings of looming disaster.

Isaiah warned the people of Judah's that their sin would bring God's judgment (i.e., seventy-years captivity) and declared that God is sovereign and would use Cyrus the Persian to return the people from exile. He spoke also of a servant and man of sorrows who would be wounded for our transgressions faithfully accomplishing God's purposes of salvation (Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12). The final chapters give a beautiful description of a new creation in which Christ will rule as King, judging the wicked and establishing God's Kingdom on earth. Following are four points that will help the reader understand the book of Isaiah as they travel through it: -

1. The history of Israel and Judah. At this time in the story Assyria has taken the ten tribes of Israel in the land of Samaria into captivity and marched up to Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) to destroy it, but failed. Later in the story Babylon attacks Jerusalem and conquers the city and takes the people of Judah into captivity. After this victory Babylon conquers Assyria which resulted in Israel and Judah being brought under the submission of Babylonian rule and the tribes being brought together during the seventy year Babylonian captivity.
2. Many of Isaiah's visions are written as though they have already taken place, but a majority of these visions are predicting future events that are about to happen during Isaiah's generation while others will come to pass in a future age. Though these visions are of future events Isaiah speaks them in the present tense, because he spoke them as they came to his mind and as he saw the events unfolding before him. They are often spoken in this manner because of the certainty of it and because God had ordained them and revealed them to his prophets who spoke them to His people so they must come to pass, because God cannot lie.(Titus 1:2).

3. Though Isaiah is primarily speaking to Judah (the two tribes at Jerusalem) much of what he says applies to Israel (the ten tribes in Samaria) because both Judah and Israel are in the same corrupt spiritual condition.
4. All the promises to Israel are now in Christ. God's promises to Israel now include the Jews and the Gentiles. This is because under the New Covenant God is building an entirely new nation made up of Jews and Gentiles of which Christ is the head. In this new nation that God is creating in the Lord Jesus Christ Jews have no advantage over Gentiles since all are one in Christ Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote: Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus they have been brought to God by the blood of Christ. Jesus has made Jews and Gentiles both one by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances so that Jesus might create in himself one new man (i.e., one nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles).

In Jesus both Jews and Gentiles are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:1-22). The practical application of what this means, is that all the future and eternal promises God made to Israel through Isaiah also apply to Gentiles who by faith belong to Christ.

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth is my Footstool."

Isaiah 66:1-2 ----- ¹Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? ²All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

This is absolutely glorious, God takes our minds to the highest heights of the heavens and the absolute enormity of His greatness and His power and then brings our focus to fallen humanity and tells us that those He delights to look upon with favour are those who: -

- Are modest and humble and are void of arrogant pride, hypocrisy and pretence.
- Show respect towards others, meaning they treat all people (whether they are in God's Kingdom or not) with decency and fairness (i.e., honest justice).
- Are unassuming in attitude and behaviour, meaning they are not forceful, intimidating or dominating.
- Are willing to put another person's interests before their own interests, meaning they have empathy, understanding and compassion toward others.
- Hear and tremble at God's word, meaning they respect God's word, know that sin has consequences and that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God to give account of our lives.
- Are contrite in spirit, meaning they are deeply sorry for having behaved wrongly. It is a repentance and remorse arising from a sense of guilt stemming from and awareness of their-own sin.

These are the keys to pleasing and delighting the heart of God. Whoever desires to win God's favour and love should earnestly set their mind upon making these attitudes the foundation of their life and their behaviour.

What is the house that you would build for me: (v1) these words of the LORD clearly show that it matters not how majestic or beautiful a temple or church building made by human hands with bricks, stones and mortar maybe they count for nothing concerning God's love and favour toward us. The only thing God's eyes look upon is the attitude of the heart and mind and the behaviour that stems from them. This means no one is dependent upon church buildings or others to win God's favour and love every individual have this power within them.

Israel had great pride in their temple, but God has a heaven and an earth of his own making, He takes no satisfaction in a house made with men's hands, but in those who are faithful and humble in spirit and whose heart is truly sorrowful over sin: such a heart is a living temple for God.

They have Chosen their Own Evil ways Doing Evil in My Eyes.

Isaiah 66:3-4 ----- 3["]He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood (he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood in KJV); he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations. 4["]I also will choose harsh treatment 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."

He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man: (v3) is in the context of sacrifices, the following verses show that sacrificing an ox was a lawful thing and an acceptable offering under the Levitical law: -

- When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD. (Lev. 22:27).
- A firstborn of animals, which as a firstborn belongs to the LORD, no man may dedicate; whether ox or sheep, it is the LORD'S. (Lev. 27:26).
- They (the chiefs of Israel and the heads of the tribes), brought their offerings before the LORD, six wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for every two of the chiefs, and for each one an ox. They brought them before the tabernacle. (Num. 7:3).

It wasn't that it was wrong for Israel to be sacrificing an ox to the LORD, their sin was that they were prideful, hypocritical and living a lifestyle that was utterly corrupt before God. Their offering is such an abomination before the LORD that it is considered as sinful as deliberately murdering a man and the penalty for such a crime was death.

Their sacrifices were offered with an attitude of mind as offensive to God as if they had slaughtered a man and they had been guilty of murder.

He who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck: (v3) under the Levitical Law it was not uncommon to break the neck of an animal offered for sacrifice: -

- Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. (Exod. 13:13) (Exod. 34:20).

The following verses show that concerning sacrifices the people of Israel held dogs in the greatest abhorrence so much so that the very price of a dog was forbidden to be brought into the house of the LORD.

- You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deut. 23:18).
- The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. (1 Sam. 17:43).
- After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! (1 Sam. 24:14).

No kind of sacrifice could have been regarded with higher detestation by a devoted Jew. Even in the New Testament dogs are associated with pigs as the following verses show: -

- Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (Matt. 7:6).

- What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the pig, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2 Peter 2:22).

The comparison between sacrificing a lamb and breaking a dog's neck shows God's utter detestation of ceremonial performances from those who confess to follow God, but live a lifestyle that is utterly contrary to His law and brings dishonour to His name.

He who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood: (v3) (he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood in KJV) oblation comes from the Hebrew word (*minchah*) it literally means to bestow a donation, present or gift, especially in a sacrificial offering (usually a bloodless and voluntary one). Grain offerings were part of the Levitical law that the people of Israel were commanded to do.

- When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it (Lev. 2:1).

The expression, "An offering to the LORD," means that after they had been offered before the LORD they became food for the high priest and the Levitical priesthood and their families. Almost all animal and grain offerings offered to the LORD became food for the priesthood and their families. In this way the priests were able to dedicate all their time to the service of the LORD, the Temple and the people.

The sacrifice of a pig was an utter abomination in the sight of the Hebrews and therefore the idea of offering pigs blood on the altar would be considered the most horrendous abomination of all abominations. When giving the law God told Moses and Aaron to tell the people of Israel that one of the animals on earth that they were not to eat was: -

- The pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. ⁸You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you. (Lev. 11:7-8).

The idea of the expression, "he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood," (v3) is that though it was right and proper according the Levitical law to offer grain offerings, the hypocritical spirit and attitude they offered them in made their offering an abomination before the LORD. No other expression than the words, "He who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood," could more emphatically express the abhorrence and loathing of God for the spirit with which they were making their offerings.

He who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol: (v3) making memorial offerings of frankincense was a Levitical law that the people of Israel were commanded to keep.

- When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it ²and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Lev. 2:1-2).

The LORD is not condemning them because they were making memorial offering of frankincense, but because they were making them with a wrong heart attitude. Instead of offering them from an attitude of gratefulness they were offering them because the law requires it.

They are simply formal acts of ritual that have to be done and not acts that stem from a heart of devotion and love. The expression, "He who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol," (v3) means that their offering of frankincense is as equally offensive to God as those who worship idols.

These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations: (v3) this is why all these offerings and sacrifices are such an offense to the LORD. Their own ways, were evil, and opposite to the ways of God, especially to the way of salvation.

They lived as they pleased and persisted in their wicked practises rather than heed the words of the prophets all the while expecting to win the LORD'S favour by adhering to their ceremonial observances and keeping their religious traditions.

OVERVIEW: God, by the prophet Isaiah, declares that these men's services were no more acceptable to him than murder and idolatry. They considered themselves holy by their ritual performances and their offering and their sacrifices and yet they had neither faith nor repentance they were simply formalities that had to be done as such things always are when those who perform them live and do as they please. They were not only sinning because of human frailty, but actually taking pleasure in their sins. To offer a sacrifice while the heart is set to deliberately continue on in sinful acts is to offer it with an evil mind.

God in these verses is shining a brilliant spotlight upon the truth that He detests Israel's ceremonies, ritual and sacrifice with the same distain that He has toward the sacrifices of the heathen who offered dogs and pigs to their idols and gods, which things were explicitly forbidden for Israel to do in the law. Those who murder, steal, swear and curse and lie, and commit adultery, and then come and stand before God in His House, which is called by his name to serve him in acts of worship, is a great abomination.

- To the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? ¹⁷For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. ¹⁸If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. (Psalm 50:16-18).
- Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? (Jer. 7:9-10).

Jesus said: -

- Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" ²³And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." (Matt. 7:21-23).

Jesus here shows that the external ritual worship, offered to God by hypocrites and the wicked, void of faith and virtue is as grievous to Him as sins deliberately committed against the commands of God's law and His will. It is often the case that the most prideful, hypocritical and offensive religious rulers and priests are often accompanied with great strictness in the performance of all the external duties of religion.

- The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. (Prov. 15:8).

Israel did not listen to God: even though the people of Israel confessed their faith in God, it meant nothing to Him because they did not listen to His word that came to them through the prophets, but instead went their own way and did what was offensive to the LORD. They eventually became so corrupt and offensive to the LORD, they were bringing a bad report to His name and to His character to the people and surrounding nations who did not know Him, so by their own corruptness they forced the hand of the LORD to be against them rather than for them.

Your Brothers who cast You Out for My Name's Sake shall be put to Shame.

Isaiah 66:5-6 ----- ⁵Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: "Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame. ⁶"The sound of an uproar (a voice of noise in KJV) from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!

The words, "you who tremble at his word," (v5) is the same as saying, you who fear the LORD," fearing the LORD has the following two aspects: -

1 **An eternal aspect:** wisdom teaches that mankind is separated from God because of sin and without God a person has no hope of eternal life and will be judged accordingly. The fear of the LORD in this context is wisdom because it motivates a person to seek God and eternal life. This is why the Bible says: -

- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Psalm 111:10) (Proverbs 1:7)

2 **An aspect for the present moment:** the fear of the LORD in the present moment motivates mankind to obey God's Ten Commandments which are all designed to protect the innocent from harm, physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally and spiritually. The fear of the LORD in this context is also wisdom because if everyone feared the LORD humanity would live in harmony with each other. Sadly there is very little fear of the LORD in the world today and so we see rampant rebellion, violence, crime and wars in most countries.

Having a fear of the LORD is having a fear of doing anything that is destructive and brings pain, hurt and harm to others. It means respecting the lives of others, respecting creation and doing what is right before God. The apostle Peter said: -

- In every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him. (Acts 10:35).

False fear: is generated by the mind imagining and believing something terrible is about to happen in the future or imagining something is real and true that is not true. These kinds of fears produce real fearful feelings in the emotions even though the fears are fantasies of the mind. This is because our nervous system cannot tell the difference between a real event and a false event that is played out on the screen of our imagination and therefore our emotions respond according to the mental movies we play in our minds whether they are real or false.

Real fear: is fear that is generated by something real such as a family who loses their house in a bush fire and fear having absolutely nothing and no-where to live, or fear of jumping off a cliff and being hurt and such like things. These are very real and justifiable fears.

The Fear of God and Christians and Love.

- Jesus said: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Those in Christ understand this great love of God and no longer act from fear, but from love in the same way that a man in love with a woman does not do things to please her from fear, but from the love dwelling in his heart. Likewise it is with those who belong to the Lords global family.

Once a person is saved in Christ and experiences God's forgiveness and His love and grace their heart is transformed and the mind and passions are changed in such a way that they now desire from the heart to live in a manner that brings honour to God and a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their motivation to follow God is not from fear anymore, but from love because they now know, understand and experience the love God's has for them.

Trembling at the word of the LORD: (v5) means to fear God, because He has the power to judge wrongdoing, the LORD through Isaiah is comforting the faithful who do tremble at God's word. He is telling them that though they are being cast out of the temple by their prideful, hypocritical religious and legalist brothers who have the authority over the temple and believe they are doing the right thing before the LORD that it is actually those who are casting them out that the LORD will put to shame.

The sound of an uproar from the city: (v6) (a voice of noise in KJV), the word noise comes from the Hebrew word (*sha'own*) it literally means uproar and by implication destruction, to make desolate and lay waste.

It carries the idea of a horrible and tumultuous noise. Following are three things that should be noticed and will help understand this verse: -

- 1 It is recompense taken on the brothers who had cast out the faithful (v5)
- 2 It is vengeance taken upon those within the city and in the midst of the noise and uproar of destruction and not on enemies outside the city.
- 3 The noise and uproar of destruction comes both from the city and from the temple in which the formalists had gloried and set their confidence upon.

The statement “the sound of an uproar from the city,” is made in the context of the hypocritical religious rulers casting the faithful out of the temple and God telling the faithful that it is actually these wicked rulers that will be cast out. The noise is a noise of terror and destruction within the city of Jerusalem. The picture is of the LORD using Israel's enemies to bring His judgment upon the wicked inhabitants of Jerusalem and the hypocritical religious leaders. Isaiah in this prophetic vision is seeing the ruin of the city and the temple of the LORD that the prideful legalistic formalists had trusted in.

The noise is the noise of the battle cries of Israel's enemies who the LORD used to bring judgment upon the rebellious inhabitants of Jerusalem and of soldiers slaying the prideful legalistic formalists and of the people shrieking and crying out and especially of the voices of crying in lamentation when the city and the temple lays waste. It is the voice of the LORD that brings judgment upon those who would not have Him rule over them and who refused to hear the gentle voice of His prophets who called them to repentance, now hearing the terrible voice of the His judgment.

Amongst commentators there is a variety of ideas as to which enemy Isaiah has in focus the two most likely enemies are the Empire of Babylon and the Empire of Rome for the following reasons.

1 The Empire of Babylon.

Isaiah's primary focus in many of the previous chapters and especially the last few has been upon: -

- Israel's rebellion, gross sin and worship of idols and foreign gods.
- God using king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as His servant (Jer. 25:9) to bring His judgment upon Jerusalem.
- The armies of Babylon invading Jerusalem, burning the city, pillaging the temple of all its gold, silver and sacred vessels and taking the people captive for seventy years.
- God using Cyrus the King of Persia as His anointed shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) (Isaiah 45:1) to conquer the Empire of Babylon and set God's people free.
- Israel returning with triumphant joy to Jerusalem and rebuilding the city and the temple.

A noise of terror and destruction would have been loudly heard within the city walls when Babylon's mighty armies invaded Jerusalem and brought about God's judgment upon those who would not have Him rule over them and refused to hear the gentle voice of His prophets who called them to repentance.

NOTE: many of these previous chapters also carry within them an echo of the Lord Jesus Christ returning to Jerusalem.

1 The Empire of Rome.

The sound of an uproar from the city refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple when the city was taken by the Roman armies in 70 AD. This was also the LORD'S judgment upon the prideful hypocritical religious leaders who had not only cast out their brethren, but also plotted the murder of Israel's

Messiah. Truly the noise of shrieks and cries of those being slaughtered and fleeing in terror and the roaring sound of the Roman soldiers, triumphing and rejoicing over their victory would be clearly heard within the city walls.

Conclusion: in (v3-4) the LORD says that He will treat those who have chosen their own ways and delight in their abominations harshly and bring fear upon them because they did not listen when He spoke, but did what was evil in His eyes and therefore He will put them to shame.

Then in (v16-17) we read that the LORD will enter into judgment and those slain by Him will be many and that those who sanctify and purify themselves eating pig's flesh and abominations shall come to an end together.

With this in mind it seems best to accept that the enemy that the LORD uses to bring judgement upon Jerusalem can apply to both Babylon and to Rome since both nations brought the same terror upon the people of Israel and the same destruction to the city and the temple.

NOTE: when destruction and desolation are come upon any place, a voice or a cry is often said to come from it: -

- Hark! A cry (voice in KJV) from Horonaim (a town of Moab), "Desolation and great destruction!" (Jer. 48:3).

Before Zion was in Labour She Gave Birth; Before Pain She Delivered a Son.

Isaiah 66:7-8 ----- 7"before she was in labour she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.
8who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labour she brought forth her children (as soon as Zion was in travail she brought forth her children in KJV)

The mother: verse eight shows that Zion is the mother.

The man-child: born without the travail-pangs of sorrow is the new and faithful Israel of God.

Amongst comments there is a divide between whether these verses apply to Israel's sudden deliverance out of Babylon or to the sudden spreading of the Gospel and the rising of the church during the days of Jesus and the apostles, because of this we will look at both scenarios.

1 The Empire of Babylon.

Israel's deliverance from their seventy years in bondage to the authority of the Empire of Babylon was without struggling and without any pain. During this seventy years their cities including Jerusalem were in ruin and their entire land lay waste. Archaeologists have found that at this time all of the cities of Judah were completely destroyed and that the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon was brought to an end.

Observers would have said that the Hebrew nation was annihilated. Many of the other nations conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians did cease to exist, but the prophets proclaimed a better hope for the chosen people. "A remnant shall return" Isaiah had said, and in time this remnant, purged and returned, became the basis on which a new Israel would be built. It would be right and proper to say that at this time Israel no longer existed as a nation on the face of the earth.

However at the end of the seventy years God used Cyrus king of Media Persia to bring the Empire of Babylon to ruin and set the people of Israel free from the bondage and captivity of Babylon. The following verses of the prophet Isaiah show that God not only called Cyrus (the secular king of Persia) His anointed shepherd and called him by name, but also show that God equipped Cyrus for battle and took him by the right hand and went before him opening all doors that no man could shut while Cyrus the king of Persia subdued all nations.

- The LORD says of Cyrus, “*He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfil all my purpose,*” saying of Jerusalem, “*She shall be built,*” and of the temple, “*Your foundation shall be laid.*” (Isaiah 44:28).
- Thus says the LORD to *his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped*, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed. (Isaiah 45:1).
- I (*the LORD*) will go before you (*Cyrus king of Persia*) and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, *who call you (Cyrus) by your name.* ⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, *I call you by your name, I name you,* though you do not know me. (Isaiah 45:2-3).
- I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; *I equip you (Cyrus) though you do not know me,* ⁶that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, there is none besides me; I am the LORD, there is no other. (Isaiah 45:5-6).
- Thus says the LORD: “The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, *men of stature, shall come over to you (Cyrus)* and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying: ‘*Surely God is in you,*’ and there is no other, no god besides him.” (Isaiah 45:14).

God used Cyrus King of Persia as His anointed shepherd to set His people free. Cyrus after conquering the mighty Empire of Babylon gave Israel written permission to return to their beloved city and rebuild the Temple of God. At this time it would be fitting to say that a land was born in one day and a nation was brought forth in one moment for as soon as Zion (symbolising Jerusalem) was in labour she brought forth her children, meaning her streets were filled once again with multitudes of inhabitants and Jerusalem didn’t do anything to bring these children forth, (i.e., she suffered no birth pains). The man-child in this scenario would be the faithful Jews that came out of Babylon and returned to Jerusalem.

2 The sudden Spreading of the Gospel and the Rising of the Church.

Isaiah’s message transcends the era of Isaiah and Cyrus and echoes the rapid growth of the church through a future King who the LORD also calls His anointed shepherd, and his name is not Cyrus, but the Lord Jesus Christ, in who God speedily brought multitudes of new converts into the Kingdom of Zion. Zion in these verses is represented as mother of spiritual children as the following verses show: -

- Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD. (Isaiah 54:1).
- The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears: “The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in.” ²¹Then you will say in your heart: “Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?” (Isaiah 49:20-21).

In this scenario the expression, “before she travailed, she brought forth,” (she being Zion signifying the faithful of God), carries the idea is that there would be a great and sudden increase of Zion’s numbers. It would be as if a child were born without the usual delay and pain of labour. This would refer to the day of Pentecost spoken of in Acts chapter two when those in the upper room were filled with the Holy Spirit and multitudes came together from every nation under heaven and Peter stood up and proclaimed: -

- God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (meanings Jews and Gentiles) and that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord would be saved.

- The death and resurrection of the Christ and that he was exalted to the right hand of God.
- That they should repent and be baptized every one of them into the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- That the promise of salvation was for them and for their children and for all who are far off.

After Peter had finished proclaiming this message three thousand were baptised and added to the church in a single day (Acts 2:38-41) and through the apostles preaching there was a rapid growth of new converts into the church (symbolised by Zion) and great revivals of faith which followed and the rapid spread of the Gospel throughout much of the known world and forever after an ongoing increase of faithful converts from generation to generation.

The man-child: in this scenario would signify the new faithful converts to the early Christian church. The whole verse is expressive of a great and sudden salvation, which God would work for his church, like the delivery of a woman giving birth to a man child before her labour and without pain. The expression, "before she travailed, she brought forth," carries the idea that the restoration of the church would be so sudden and contrary to all expectations that it could be compared to a woman that is delivered of her child without the pain of labour and before she expected it.

Shall a land and nation be born in one day? (v8) In this verse the usually slow, natural and gradual processes of national development, of childbirth and of the earth bringing forth its vegetation are contrasted with the supernatural rapidity of the birth and growth of the new Israel. The idea is that unlike the slow growth of nations, the gradual birth of a child and the slow development of the earth being covered with grass, flowers and trees there will be a remarkable day when Zion will suddenly increase in a single day. This remarkable and rapid increase will be an event that will be as wonderful as if a woman brought forth her children in one day and as surprising as if the earth would flourish in lush grass, flowers and trees in a single day. This verse can apply to Israel's return from Babylon and to the rapid growth of the church.

1 Israel's Return from Babylon.

The question, "shall a land and nation be born in one day?" (v8) can apply to the painless deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. As soon as they began to move out of the captivity of Babylon, God put it into the hearts of multitudes that had been scattered throughout the surrounding nations during the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions to go up to Mount Zion and Jerusalem. Under Ezra and Nehemiah God brought Israel and Judah back to their beloved city Jerusalem as one united nation faithful to only one God, the LORD their God, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Israel never turned to idols or pagan gods again)

Multitudes of Jewish families who had been scattered throughout the nations returned to Jerusalem and the land of Israel with triumphant joy and rejoicing. When the temple of God was completed their faith was once again established and a golden time of prosperity and peace followed in the land of Israel. It would be right and proper to say that at this time a new land and nation had been born, especially when it is considered that Archaeologists have found that at this time all of the cities of Judah were completely destroyed and that the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon was brought to an end and those looking upon the land of Israel would have said that the Hebrew nation was annihilated.

2 The Rapid Growth of the Church.

Who hath heard such a thing? This question carries the idea that it surpasses the natural capacity of man to see such a multitude that will come up at once. This refers to those who came out of the world and into God's Kingdom under the preaching of the Gospel of which those who came out of Babylon were a sign.

- God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. (Col. 1:13).

All Jews and Gentiles that received Christ were gathered together making the two one in Christ.

- Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off (Gentiles) have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both (Jews and Gentiles) one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, (Ephes. 2:13-15).

The rapid progress of the Gospel in the times of the apostles and Paul and the growth of the early church was as sudden and as remarkable as if a whole nation had started into existence in a moment. Numerous and wonderful conversions like this had never been seen in the world before, such amazing and astonishing growth of God's Kingdom was unheard of. The Jews and Gentiles in Christ were the children that Zion gave birth too, through the Gospel flowing out from Jerusalem: -

- Many peoples and nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:3) (Micah 4:2).

Prior to Jesus ascending to heaven he said to the eleven and those gathered together with them: -

- These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44-45)

As soon as Zion was in labour she brought forth: (v8) (as soon as Zion was in travail she brought forth in KJV) the word travail comes from the Hebrew word, (*chuwil*) it means to writhe or fall grievously in pain or fear, figuratively it carries the idea of waiting, bearing and bringing forth. This shows that some travail (i.e., pain) was involved, however the idea is that whatever travail there may have been it was very short lived in fact so short that it was as if though there was none.

The primary focus is not that such a miraculous event would be without any pain at all, but that the birth was not a long drawn out event, but speedily came about in such a remarkable manner that it had never before been seen. The most fitting event for such an amazing event is the rapid growth of the early Gospel church during the time of Jesus, the apostles and Paul.

The following verses of this chapter show that there is no reason to limit verse seven and eight to the time of the early church and the following revivals and its growth. They can also be applied to that glorious time when the Lord Jesus Christ suddenly returns in glory as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16) to rule and reign from God's Holy City Jerusalem (on Mount Zion God's Holy Mountain) to destroy the antichrist and his kingdom and establish God's Kingdom on earth during his glorious millennial reign. At this time the following prophetic words of Zechariah will be fulfilled: -

- On that day (the day the Lord protects the inhabitants of Jerusalem) I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. ¹⁰"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. ¹¹On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great the priests will mourn by themselves and each family will mourn by themselves (Zech. 12:9-14).

The dead in Christ (Old and New Testament) and the faithful, who are alive, will be gathered together in this first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6) to rule and reign as kings and priests with the Lord over those nations who are left outside the Holy City of God. Truly the question, "Who has heard and seen such a thing a nation brought forth in one moment?" (v8) will be perfectly fulfilled when these amazing events come to pass.

Rejoice in Jerusalem that You May Delight from Her Glorious Abundance.

Isaiah 66:9-12 ----- ⁹shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?" says the LORD; "shall I who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?" says your God. ¹⁰"rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; ¹¹that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance." ¹²For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees.

This group of verses applies firstly to the end of Israel's seventy year captivity, and their return to their homeland and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple of God. At this time multitudes of Jewish families that had been scattered throughout the surrounding nations during the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions returned to Jerusalem.

Amongst these families there would have been many mothers carrying their babies on their hip as they journeyed with great joy to their beloved city. During this period of time Jerusalem abundantly prospered and a time of peace followed and her glory was a delight to her inhabitants.

Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth? (v9) the LORD certainly brought this to pass through Cyrus who He used as His anointed shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) (Isaiah 45:1) to conquer the Empire of Babylon and set the people of Israel free and fill Jerusalem which had laid in ruin and practically empty for seventy years with an abundance of children.

Shall I who cause to bring forth, shut the womb? (v9) clearly the LORD has not shut the womb of Jerusalem God's message of salvation is even today drawing people into God's Kingdom from every nation and country of the world.

All you who love her; rejoice with her in joy: (v10) there is no other nation on earth that loves their city as much as Israel loves Jerusalem likewise there of no other people on earth that mourn over their city as Israel mourns over Jerusalem.

You may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast: (v11) all the returned Jews were abundantly blessed by Jerusalem's prosperity, priests, scribes and prophets.

However Isaiah's words are not limited to the generations of Cyrus and Israel's return to Jerusalem, but only pause there for a time and then take up wings and soar through history and time until they reach John, a godly man isolated on the island Patmos who the LORD gave the most glorious visions concerning the New Jerusalem the Holy City of God.

Naturally as the reader of the Bible travels through biblical prophecy and approaches the end of their journey the visions of the prophets become clearer and more detailed, so it is not surprising that when we arrive at the Book of Revelation we see that John has a clearer and far more detailed vision of Isaiah's prophecy. These visions of John shine far greater light and give much more detail of Isaiah's vision hundreds of years ago.

- I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:2-4).

- I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.
²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (Rev. 21:22-24).

In these verses we see that the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the light of the holy city, New Jerusalem and that the faithful in Christ will dwell safely and secure within the city with the Lord Jesus Christ and God himself will be with them as their God and death will be no more. In Isaiah chapter sixty-six verse nine the LORD says, "Shall I shut the womb," this carries the idea that Jerusalem will be as a woman who constantly gives birth to new generations of sons and daughters.

Even today Jerusalem is still giving birth, she is giving birth every day through all those who belong to Christ (Jerusalem's true child) and who testify of him and in these spectacular verses of John we see the ultimate glory of the holy city, New Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is personified as a woman carrying the nations on her hip: Isaiah has such an amazing vision, what a beautiful picture of the New and Holy City of Jerusalem, personified as a loving caring mother carrying her child referring to all those in Christ on her hip. When Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth Jesus the King and his government will not be rule by domination and oppression, but as those who nurse a wounded child.

By Fire the LORD will enter into Judgment and those Slain shall Be Many.

Isaiah 66:13-16 ----- ¹³As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies. ¹⁵for behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶for by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many

The LORD is telling those dwelling in Jerusalem that He will comfort them in the same way that a mother comforts her children

Your bones shall flourish like the grass: (v14) this carries the ideas of abundant life, vitality and joy, it means that the LORD will multiply and prosper those dwelling in Jerusalem and that her streets will again be filled with joy and laughter.

The hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants: (v14) this truly came to pass when the returned exiles had rebuilt the temple and establish their true faith the LORD'S blessing and favour abundantly prospered their city, their livestock, orchard, vineyards and all they put their hand to.

He shall show his indignation against his enemies: (v14) Israel's seventy years under the oppression and authority of the Empire of Babylon was God judgment upon the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah for their rebellion and gross wickedness. When this period came to an end God turned His judgment upon their enemies and those nations who had mocked and scorned them.

Behold, the LORD will come in fire and his chariots like the whirlwind: (v15) to bring this to pass the LORD not only took the right hand of Cyrus the king of Media Persia who he called His anointed shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) (Isaiah 45:1) but also equipped him to fulfill His purpose which was to subdue nations and kings and level the exalted places.

After equipping Cyrus the LORD went before him opening doors and gates of cities that no one could close. No doubt so Cyrus's armies could march in and get the victory. The LORD used Cyrus in such a might way so that people would know that Israel's God is the LORD and that there is no other. (Isaiah 45:2-3) (Isaiah 45:5-6) (Isaiah 45:14).

The greatest Empire in the world: Cyrus reign lasted between 29 and 31 years, he is commonly known as the great King of Persia and was notable for embracing various civilizations and becoming the largest empire the world had ever seen. He built his empire by firstly conquering the Median Empire, then the Lydian Empire and eventually the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He led an expedition into central Asia (either before or after Babylon), which resulted in major campaigns that were described as having brought "into subjection every nation without exception."

He respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered and at the end of his rule, the Achaemenid Empire (also called the First Persian Empire) stretched from Asia Minor in the west to the north-western areas of India in the east. It is said that in universal history, the role of the Achaemenid Empire founded by Cyrus lies in its very successful model for centralized administration and establishing a government working to the advantage and profit of its subjects. There is no question that God used Cyrus, his armies, chariots and swords to render His judgment in fury and his rebuke with flames of fire (v15) against all Israel's enemies and those who had mocked and scorned them.

NOTE.

Loving Jerusalem does not simply mean loving the architecture and the beautifully engraved bricks and stones that the literal city is built of, it embraces the idea of loving God, loving His word and loving everything that is dear to Him.

By fire will the LORD enter into judgment: (v16) this statement is not limited to Cyrus only, but also applies to another King who God calls His anointed Shepherd whose name is the Lord Jesus Christ, he will also come in glory with the fire of God's judgment against the wicked, the corrupt and against those who are God's and His peoples enemies.

The Time is coming to Gather all Nations and they shall See My Glory.

Isaiah 66:17-18 ----- ¹⁷"Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens (behind one *tree* in the KJV) following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice (the mouse in KJV), shall come to an end together, declares the LORD. ¹⁸"For I know their works and their thoughts and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory.

Those who sanctify and purify themselves: (v17) is not referring to those who are sanctified by the Spirit God and by the grace of God, but to pagans who attempt to sanctify themselves by their own religious practises and ceremonies and to the people of Israel who have blended their religion with the religion of the pagans. This was common amongst both Israel and ancient religions; those of pagan faiths would adopt much of Israel's religion, but still hold fast to their own rituals and gods.

This was especially true if Israel's armies had great victory over an enemy, that enemy would then credit Israel's God for giving Israel the victory and therefore add Him and the Jewish ceremonies to their gods and their rituals. Likewise when Israel saw the surrounding nations prospering they credit their gods for their prosperity and therefore added them and their rituals to their faith.

The gardens: (v17) (behind one *tree* in the KJV) the word tree is not in the original manuscript, amongst commentators there is a variety of ideas what it may mean, but they are all speculations. However we do know that pagans did establish beautiful sacred gardens for their idols. These gardens were surrounded with thick trees and had within them altars to offer sacrifices on and pools that they used for washing and purifying themselves in preparation for idol worship much like the priest of God was to wash himself.

- The priest shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. (Num. 19:7).

The people of Israel often blended their religious practices with the idolatrous customs of the pagans which were performed in their sacred gardens with fountains, pools, ponds, altars and idols established for the sole purpose of washing, worshipping and sacrificing to idols

- 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; ³A people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; ⁴who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels (Isaiah 65:2-4).

Since many of these scared gardens were in private locations hidden from the public view it is possible that the expression, "behind one tree," simply carries the idea of secrecy, meaning they kept their idolatrous practises secret from those who faithfully attended to the Levitical law and temple worship.

Following one in the midst: (v17) meaning in the middle of the sacred garden, it most likely means that the idol or altar was in the middle of the garden and the trees surrounding it and that the idolatrous worshippers formed in a sacred circle and marched in procession one after another around the altar or idol chanting or singing songs of praise or worshipping while the priest performed the sacred rites.

Eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice: (v18) (the mouse in KJV). Not only was eating pigs flesh forbidden by the Law of Moses, but it was also forbidden for a Hebrew to touch the carcass of a dead pig.

- Because the pig parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and it does not chew the cud, it is unclean to you. (Lev. 11:7).
- Because the pig parts the hoof but does not chew the cud it is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. (Deut. 14:8).

The mouse: (v17) particular kinds of mice were eaten by idolaters, the Romans and Arabians. During the institutions of the ancient religion idolaters and occultists used mice in their incantations, sacrifices and idol feasts along with pigs. This kind of superstition and idolatry was forbidden under the Mosaic and Levitical law. The mouse under the Levitical law was an unclean animal to Israel: -

- These are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm on the ground (the creeping things that creep upon the earth in KJV): the mole rat, the mouse, the great lizard of any kind. (Lev. 11:29).

Though mice were an unclean animal and these kinds of practises were forbidden to Israel apostate Hebrews often forsook their faith and fully embraced them or blended their Jewish religion with these pagan practises.

The abomination: (v17) Hebrews considered mice to be an abomination because they were an unclean animal under the Levitical law. Two other reasons they may have been considered such an abomination maybe because pagan religions used them as idols and for their sacrifices and because of their destructive and disease carrying nature.

At various times in history a great portion of Israel cast aside their conscience and the law of God concerning the Levitical laws. They no doubt considered them to be trivial and unimportant matters and were so spiritually blind that they believed that there was some advantage in adopting the superstitious pagan rituals and eating forbidden creatures including the mouse which even nature abhors to be eaten.

- If anyone touches an unclean thing, whether human uncleanness or an unclean beast or any unclean detestable creature (abominable unclean thing in KJV), and then eats some flesh from the sacrifice of the LORD's peace offerings, that person shall be cut off from his people. (Lev. 7:21).
- Every swarming thing that swarms on the ground is detestable (an abomination in KJV); it shall not be eaten. ⁴²Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, any swarming thing that swarms on the ground, you shall not eat, for they are detestable. (Lev. 11:41-42).

I know their works and their thoughts: (v18) it seems that these apostate Hebrews blended there Jewish faith with the rituals of pagan religions.

It is most likely that they practised their superstitious and idolatrous ceremonies in secret and while in public openly practised their Jewish faith to appear Holy and righteous before their peers. This is of course is absolute foolishness, they may have been able to hide their idolatrous practises from those around them and dress themselves in religious garments, pomp, and ceremony and thereby deceive others that they were righteous and holy by their outward religious appearance and deeds, but no one can deceive or hide anything from God.

He knows all our works and all our thoughts and will judge each one accordingly. Many considered the chief priest, Pharisees and scribes of Jesus generation to be the most holy men of Israel and yet they behind closed doors plotted the murder of Jesus and led the entire nation to destruction.

The time is coming to gather all nations and they shall come and shall see my glory: (v18) prior to this verse we have just read about those who go into the idolatrous gardens and join in the rituals of pagans eating pig's flesh and mice offered to the idol and god. Immediately after this the LORD declares, "These things shall come to an end." This means that God's glory in this context is His judgment. The LORD is saying that the nations are going to see His righteous and Holy Judgment on His people.

The LORD values the honour of His good name, but Israel by their gross wickedness has brought such a great reproach against Him and especially to the surrounding nations that they have by their own actions forced God to bring His judgment upon them. Those who confess to belong to God are a reflection of Him on earth they can be a good or a bad reflection. When His nation Israel became become so grossly corrupt that they brought shame to His name He is forced to bring judgment upon them to protect His Holy name and His Holy character of love and justice.

God used Babylon: God sent prophet after prophet to warn Judah and Israel of impending doom if they did not change their wicked ways, but they set their hearts diamond hard against the word of God's prophets (Zech. 7:12). The LORD through the faithful prophets told them to surrender themselves to the King of Babylon and God would nurture them while in Babylonian captivity and deliver them.

But they continued to rebel against the word of the LORD and turned to other gods and entered into gross sin so the LORD used Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon (who He called His servant (Jer. 25:9) to bring the curses of the covenant upon them. The curses of the covenant are found in (Deut. 28:15-68) and the blessing of the covenant in (Deut. 28:1-14).

The fierce armies of Babylon invaded the land of Judah, laid their farm land waste, attacked Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) and pillaged the temple. Zedekiah was blinded and carried to Babylon, and the great bulk of the population was taken in chains there with him (around 587 B.C.). Later Babylon conquered Assyria who had previously taken Israel (the ten tribes in the land of Samaria) captive. They went into captivity to the Empire of Babylon as two rebellious nations who had turned from God to idols and were even sacrificing their own children to pagan gods. They were under Babylonian rule for the next seventy years.

Archaeologists have found that at this time all of the cities of Judah were completely destroyed and that the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon was brought to an end. Observers would have said that the Hebrew nation was annihilated. Many of the other nations conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians did cease to exist, but the prophets proclaimed a better hope for the chosen people. "A remnant shall return" Isaiah had said, and in time this remnant, purged and returned, became the basis on which a new Israel would be built. (Israel never turned to idols or pagan gods again)

God will send Survivors to Nations to bring Brothers to His Holy Mountain.

Isaiah 66:19-21 ----- ¹⁹and I will set a sign among them. and from them (Judah and Israel) I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰and they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an

offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. ²¹and some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

Tarshish: possibly in Spain, North Africa, Sicily etc.

Pul: a tribe or place in Africa, named between Tarhish and Lud.

Lud: it could be a kingdom in Asia or Africa.

Tubal: traded in the markets of Tyre.

Javan: Greece.

The Coastlands: nations along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

I will set a sign among them: (v19) it does not tell us what this sign might be, amongst commentators there are various ideas. Perhaps in the scope of the chapter it may refer to one of the following: -

- To the nation being brought forth in one moment (v7-8).
- To God's work of judgment by fire (v15-18).
- To the survivors of the Babylonian captivity God sent to declare His glory and fame to the nations (v19).

I will send survivors to the nations: (v19) the survivors here refer to those who survived the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and the oppression of the seventy year captivity.

They shall declare my glory among the nations: (v19) these survivors that returned to Jerusalem and established their true faith will travel to nations that have not heard of the LORD'S fame or seen His glory. The LORD'S fame and glory in this context refers to the entire nation of Israel being delivered from the seventy year Babylonian captivity.

They shall bring your brothers from the nations: (v20) many Jews in these foreign nations upon hearing of the LORD'S fame and glory (Israel's freedom and return to Jerusalem) will return to God's holy mountain Jerusalem on horses and mules with offerings for the LORD.

Some of them I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD: (v20) some of those that return will be Levites who the LORD will establish once again in the priesthood.

These verses came to pass at the end of Israel's seventy year captivity in Babylon, when they triumphantly returned to Jerusalem and restored the city of Jerusalem, re-built the LORD'S Temple and their houses that had been burned by Babylon's fierce armies. Multitudes of Jews who had been scattered throughout the land because of the invasion of Assyria and Babylon returned to help rebuild the city and many remained to dwell within its walls and the surrounding pasturelands. Their true faith was established and they never again returned to idol worship.

However contained within the language of these prophetic words of Isaiah is an echo not only of Christ the ultimate sign God said he would set amongst His people (v19), but also of the apostles and his disciples bringing the Good News of the Gospel to all nations (Jews and Gentiles) proclaiming the Gospel message that salvation is available through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and God's grace to Jews and Gentiles and that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:13).

In Christ Gentiles are engrafted into the Commonwealth of Israel and adopted as sons and daughters of God and become partakers with faithful Israel of all God's promises made to them.

I will send survivors to the nations: (v19) the survivors in this context would refer to faithful Jews who survived the wars through the dark ages and the Roman persecution against followers of Jesus and the persecution of the religious leaders of Jesus generation (the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes) who set about to destroy the early church.

They shall declare my glory among the nations: (v19) firstly refers to the apostles who took the Gospel to Jerusalem and turned many Jews and Gentiles to the Lord Jesus Christ and secondly to all the faithful (Jews and Gentiles) who travelled to Gentile nations that had not heard of the Lord Jesus Christ's fame or seen His glory and proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel.

They shall bring your brothers from the nations: (v20) refers to the apostles and Jesus disciples bringing men and women from foreign nations into God's Kingdom (symbolised by Jerusalem) through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

Some of them I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD: (v20) from those who God delivers from the domain of darkness and transfers to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13) He will take (or call) certain ones for ministers and preachers of the Gospel.

The New Heavens and New earth shall Remain, so shall Your Name Remain.

Isaiah 66:22-23 ----- ²²"For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. ²³From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.

These verses apply to Israel's return to their beloved city Jerusalem and to the rebuilding of the city and the LORD'S Temple that had lain in ruins for seventy years and the united nation of Israel establishing their true faith. At this time kings, nobles and people from all nations not only travelled up to Jerusalem with presents and gifts to offer to the LORD, but also to worship Him.

During this particular period of time in Israel's history it would be biblically right to say that God had established New Heavens and a New Earth that will remain before Him from Sabbath to Sabbath,

However Isaiah's vision is not limited to Israel's return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the city and the temple, but only pauses there for a time and then takes up wings and soars thousands of years through time and history until his prophetic words arrive at the book of Revelation where we see a godly man named John spending his time with the LORD and writing down the amazing and wonderful visions God is giving him of another city called the, "New Jerusalem the Holy City of God" where there will be no need for any natural light, concerning this vision and this city John wrote: -

- No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:3-5).

Their Worm shall Not Die and their Fire shall Not Be Quenched.

Isaiah 66:24 ----- ²⁴"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

The, they in (v24) refers to the survivors and those who come to Jerusalem from all nations and their offspring. In the previous verses Isaiah's focus was set upon the New City of Jerusalem (v8-13) (v20-23). His focus is now turned back to those who delight in their abominations and do what was evil in the LORD'S eyes and those who entered the idolatrous gardens and eat unclean foods (i.e., pigs and mice) offered to idols and worship foreign gods spoken of in (v3-4) (v15-16) and the LORD'S judgment that will come upon them.

Their worm shall not die: (v24) it should be highlighted here that the person is dead. It is the worm and the fire that is spoken of as not dying. This does not mean that there are worms that have eternal life. Isaiah is simply saying that as long as there are people who rebel against the LORD there will be death and decaying bodies. During these ancient times dead bodies were often left on the surface of the earth or if there was multitudes of them (i.e., after a battle) gathered together and thrown into pits in both cases worms would constantly be present or they would be burned by fire. It is in this sense that Isaiah is saying that the worms and the fire would never cease, because as long as there was death there would always be worms and fire.

To a Jew for a dead body to be left on the surface of the earth as a prey to wild animals, birds and worms was an absolute sign of disrespect and dishonour. Isaiah is simply using lofty and graphic language to depict the utter disdain the LORD has toward the hypocritical, evil and wicked people spoken of in this chapter and the fact that they will not even be respected or honoured in death. John in the following verse gives us further insight into the Holy City Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

- Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (Rev 21:9-11).

The New Jerusalem is made up of Jews and Gentiles from the Old and New Testament (Rev 21:12-14) (A Gentile is anyone who is not a Hebrew or a Jew). In Revelation chapter twenty-one the Holy City New Jerusalem is described in the following manner: -

The wall is built of jasper: (v18) symbolising the cities stunning and glorious beauty to outsiders looking upon it.

The city is pure gold, clear as glass: (v18) symbolising the pure holiness of the city and its transparency, meaning within its walls there will be no form of deceit, dishonesty, lies or deceptions.).

The foundations of the wall: (v19-20) is adorned with twelve kinds of jewels, jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, amethyst. (v19-20) signifying the faithful of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The twelve gates: (v21) are each made of a single pearl, signifying the twelve apostles and by extension all the faithful who belong to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The street of the city: (v21) is pure gold, transparent as glass, symbolising the holiness of all who dwell in the city.

The temple of the city: (v22) is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (there is no man made temple).

The light of the city: (v23) is the glory of God and the Lamb (there is no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it).

Nations outside the city: (v24) and kings will walk in the light of the city.

Access to the city: (v25-27) will be by day and by night its gates will never be shut to those who want to enter. However only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will actually dwell in the city.

Safety of the city: (v27) there will only be joy and peace within the city nothing harmful or corrupt will ever come near it.

An overview: all of these precious stones, jewels and pearls are the most valued stones and jewels on earth, men will spend much labour tunnelling deep into the

darkness of the earth and put their lives in great danger to find these precious stones, jewels and pearls. All of these precious stones are symbols of how much value God places on those who are devoted to Him in love and trust Him for their eternal salvation.

When anyone today who believes in Christ doubts God's love all they have to do is think of these precious jewels and look back to the bloodstained cross of Calvary and see what it cost the heart of the Father to save us and how much his Son suffered to redeem us and spiritually crown and cloth us with his royal robe of righteousness so that we could be justified and granted eternal life in everlasting glory apart from self-effort and strictly adhering to ceremonial rites and holy days or keeping religious customs and traditions.

This truth should comfort every faithful brother and sister in Christ since it is certain if God was prepared to sacrifice his Son for us, while we were indifferent and apathetic toward Him and uninterested and unconcerned about what honoured Him and what didn't He will with great joy do everything to keep us for eternal life now we love His Son. (He does this by daily lavishing us with grace)

- God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8).

End.