

“Holier Than Thou”

Isaiah Chapter 65

Sunday, July 7, 2024

Widely printed and distributed, the *Geneva Bible* was at the foundation of the American Colonies. It was the Bible used in Jamestown and the preferred Bible of the early Pilgrim settlers of New England. The *Geneva Bible* was the Bible of the leading English writers John Bunyan (who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*), William Shakespeare, and John Milton (*Paradise Lost*).

When Mary Tudor became queen in 1553, many English Protestants fled to Europe, seeking refuge from religious persecution. By 1560, English exiles in Geneva produced a Bible in English especially designed for use by families and individuals. The translation, the first complete Bible into English from both the Hebrew and Greek, was excellent. Yet, the most important element of this Bible, which came to be known as the *Geneva Bible*, was its notes. Marginal notes included cross-references, alternative translations, and explanations of the “hard places” of Scripture. The notes provided a running commentary on Scripture and shaped the understanding of the Bible for generations of ordinary English-speaking people.

With widespread availability of the *Geneva Bible*, the Bible became the one book familiar to every Englishman. England became a people of a book – the Bible. The Bible was the literature of the people, molding their speech, shaping their language, permeating their thoughts, and changing the entire moral character of the nation.

In fact, the Geneva Bible was where we got several popular sayings. Here are just 5:

- 1 - “Out of the mouths of babes” - **Psalm 8:2**
- 2 - “My cup runneth over” - **Psalm 23:5**
- 3 - “A drop in the bucket” - **Isaiah 40:15**
- 4 - “A thorn in the flesh” - **2 Corinthians 12:7**
- 5 - “Fight the good fight of faith” - **1 Timothy 6:12**

The *Geneva Bible* notes always were against tyranny and did not support the divine right of kings so dear to James. When James became King James I of England, he authorized a Bible translation specifically to be without notes – the *King James Version* of 1611.

When the *King James Version* was published in 1611, it could not compete with the popularity of the Geneva Bible, the household Bible of the English. To encourage the production of his sponsored translation (which actually followed the *Geneva Version* in most places!), King James in 1616 banned the production of the *Geneva Bible* in England. When *Geneva Bibles* continued to be printed abroad and imported into England, Archbishop Laud banned the importation of the *Geneva Bible*. Even so, printers in Amsterdam printed *Geneva Bibles* for several decades.

We’ve come to the 65th chapter of Isaiah’s Old Testament prophesy. One more sermon after this one (**Chapter 66**). Let’s begin by reading the first 7 verses of Isaiah **Chapter 65**:

Isaiah 65:1-7:

1- “I was sought by *those who* did not ask *for Me*;
I was found by *those who* did not seek Me.
I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’
to a nation *that* was not called by My name.

2 - I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way *that is* not good,
according to their own thoughts;

3 - A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face;
who sacrifice in gardens,
and burn incense on altars of brick;

4 - Who sit among the graves,
and spend the night in the tombs;
who eat swine’s flesh,
and the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;

5 - Who say, ‘Keep to yourself,
do not come near me,
for I am holier than you!’
These *are* smoke in My nostrils (cause my wrath to smoke)
a fire that burns all the day.

6 - “Behold, *it is* written before Me:
I will not keep silence, but will repay—
even repay into their bosom—

7 - Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together,”
says the LORD,
“Who have burned incense on the mountains
and blasphemed Me on the hills;
therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom.”

Isaiah 65 must be considered in context with the last verse (12th) of **Isaiah Chapter 64**.
That verse consists of two questions that **Chapter 65** answers. They are:

- *Will You restrain Yourself because of these things, O Lord?*
- *Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?*

In the verses leading up to verse 12, Isaiah highlights the holy cities of God’s people being a wilderness, and the temple being burned up with fire, and all their pleasant things laid waste.

Verses 1 and 2 of today’s focus, **Chapter 65**, appear in the New Testament - **Romans 10:20-21** where the Apostle Paul writes quotes Isaiah,”

20 But Isaiah is very bold and says:

“I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.”

21 But to Israel he says:

“All day long I have stretched out My hands
To a disobedient and contrary people.”

The disobedient and contrary people of **Romans Chapter 10** are also the rebellious people of **Isaiah 65:2**. Look at how they are further described in verses 2-4:

- They follow their own evil paths and their own crooked schemes;
- They insult God to His face by worshiping idols in their sacred gardens;
- They burn incense on pagan altars. At night they go out among the graves, worshiping the dead;
- They eat the flesh of pigs and make stews with other forbidden foods.

Verse 5 addresses “holier than thou” types. “Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you!’ These *are* smoke in My nostrils (cause my wrath to smoke), a fire that burns all the day. They are the self-righteous. Sin is far beneath them and they are far above the masses. They claim to represent God. Worse still, the worlds tends to believe them.

Application God sees through their charade. He despises such “holier than thou” types. It would be good for us to discern whether there is a self-righteous spirit in us. *Is there a holiness that we seek that is anything other than Christ-like love for God and others?*

Jumping ahead to verse 17, we’ll see another verse originally found in Isaiah but referenced in the New Testament. This is **Isaiah 65:17** - “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.” The apostle John in writing the Bible’s concluding book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, writes in **Revelation 21:1**, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.”

We’re headed for a new heavens and a new earth. Things that characterize life in this fallen world will be no more, including pain, grief, infant mortality, the trials of old age, economic hardship, and violence. Instead, God’s kingdom will be a place of peace, safety, prosperity, eternal life, and close fellowship with Him. But the truth is that the destination of faith’s journey is not so much a place as a Person, God Himself.

God’s covenant relationship with His people is first and foremost about His unfailing love. Though people may be obstinate and disobedient, a remnant will be saved, and through them, a Servant Messiah has brought and will bring hope and healing to the nations.

Application As we conclude our study of Isaiah with the next chapter, it would do us good to spend some extra time reviewing the themes and doctrines in this important book and thinking about our favorite verse or passage. You might want to memorize it, or put it on a notecard to review regularly. Most important, pray that your study will help you know and love God more deeply as you see His character revealed in the book of Isaiah.

Next, let's look at **Isaiah 65:18** - "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. **19** - I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying."

"God calls His people a rejoicing people. He also says that He will be glad in Jerusalem, so that not only His people rejoice in His salvation, He will rejoice with them. So great is His love for us that He delights in our happiness. His affections are powerfully moved toward us, so that He experiences not just joy at our happiness, but even grief and sorrow when we are in pain. Our Lord is not a distant, cold deity; He is a personal Being Who loves His people and rejoices when they delight in Him, and Who takes no delight in our suffering.

Application *Is your life as a Christian characterized by rejoicing and joy? Are you focusing on the difficulties of life instead of on Christ and His blessings?* If you have trouble knowing the joy that comes from Jesus, repent of whatever sin is hindering the proper emotional response to the beauty and blessings of Jesus.

Finally, let's look at verse 25 - "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust *shall be* the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," says the LORD."

When Jesus returns to earth a second, physical and visible time, His coming will wipe away all the confusion and ruin that now exists in human affairs. At that time, corruptions will be taken away, and the world will return to its original condition in all its order and beauty. God brings order.

Isaiah writes that when this happens, the lion will eat harmlessly and no longer will seek His prey. The lion and the lamb are representative of all creation. All that is disordered or confused will be restored to its proper order. Even the serpent will be satisfied with his dust, and no longer will cause pain and death by his venomous bite. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain."

Application As Christians, we are to begin cultivating peace now, even though the new heaven and the new earth have not yet arrived. *How can you cultivate peace in your own life, and in your relationships at home, at work, and among your extended family members?* Spend some time each day praying for God's peace in your life.

In his book *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn explains, "All our lives we've been dreaming of the New Earth. Whenever we see beauty in water, wind, flower, deer, man, woman, or child, we catch a glimpse of Heaven. Just like the Garden of Eden, the New Earth will be a place of sensory delight, breathtaking beauty, satisfying relationships, and personal joy."

We will not live in a sterile environment or float about among endless clouds with nothing to do. We will live on an all-new earth—just like this one, except free from storms, earthquakes, drought, floods, or any other disasters. Things will grow easily, and weeds and thorns will not exist. Animals will not harm us, but rather look to us benevolently as their leaders and benefactors.

I could taste more of that, couldn't you?