

ISAIAH'S "NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH" (ISA 65:17; 66:22)

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The reference to YHWH's creation of "new heavens and new earth" in Isa 65:17 and 66:22 has received much attention, though scholars are widely divided over its interpretation. The eschatological locus and the creation language of the book of Isaiah seem to have significant bearing on the interpretation of the phrase. Accordingly, this article attempts to demonstrate, through contextual, linguistic, and structure analysis, that the "creation" of "new heavens and new earth" is a hyperbolic expression of the future restoration of the people of Judah after the captivity.

Key Words: Isaiah, new heavens and new earth, creation, figurative, hyperbolic, literal, eschatology, postexilic, apocalyptic

1. Introduction

In Isa 65:17, YHWH says he is about to "create new heavens and new earth."¹ This declaration is reiterated in 66:22. Scholarship is divided on the interpretation of the creation of "new heavens and new earth," a phrase which is found in the OT only in the book of Isaiah. The polarization of views on Isa 65:17 and 66:22 seems to result from the divergence of scholarly opinions regarding the nature of Isaianic eschatology, particularly that of the closing chapters of the book. Accordingly, any meaningful study of these verses must take the eschatology of the book into consideration. Relevant questions in this direction include the following: Is Isaianic eschatology to be understood in an apocalyptic sense or in a postexilic sense? In other words, does Isaiah envision YHWH's creation of "new heavens and new earth" on the same level, for example, as in the book of Revelation (Rev 21) or does Isaiah point to a period following the restoration of Judah after the captivity? How then are we to understand the creation of "new heavens and new earth"? Is it literal or figurative? These questions basically provide the contour of the discussion that follows. Methodologically, this investigation falls within the parameters of OT historical-grammatical exegesis rather than,

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this article are the author's.

technically speaking, biblical theology.² Specifically, the article undertakes contextual, linguistic, and structure analysis, the interest lying in the historical or contextual meaning of the texts in question.

2. Views on Isaiah's Eschatology

Generally speaking, Isaianic eschatology has been understood in two different ways: postexilic and apocalyptic. The postexilic view generally holds that the glorious future promises of the book of Isaiah, particularly those found in chapters 56–66, were meant to find fulfillment after the return from the Babylonian captivity. This position has several ramifications. First, some scholars believe that Isa 56–66 (so-called Trito-Isaiah) was written during, and reflects, the postexilic period.³ Accordingly, Isa 56–66 is a description of the current situation of the returned exiles,⁴ but that Trito-Isaiah

² Those employing biblical theology method, particularly the canonical approach, would, for example, bring into Isa 65:17 and 66:22 such considerations as the principle of double fulfillment and *sensus plenior*, suggesting thereby that Isaiah might have had in mind both immediate (postexilic) and remote (apocalyptic) fulfillment of the prophecy. While the canonical approach, especially as formulated by B. S. Childs (e.g., Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [London: SCM, 1985]; idem, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]), has considerable strengths, its tendency to stress or over-interpret textual relations (even when this is against compelling contextual factors) and its preference of multiple canonical possibilities as opposed to single normative reading of a text, among other presuppositions, advises the present writer against using this method in studying Isa 65:17 and 66:22 which, I believe, should be studied in their own context. Nonetheless, I do not discredit the efforts to compare Isa 65–66 to NT apocalyptic texts.

³ Page H. Kelly, "Isaiah," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 5: *Proverbs-Isaiah* (ed. Clifton J. Allen; Nashville: Broadman, 1971), 350–51, is to the point: "The circumstances reflected in these chapters are those that prevailed in Jerusalem following the return of the exiles from Babylon in 538 B.C.E. These arrived in Jerusalem with the promises of Second Isaiah ringing in their ears." See also Margaret D. Bratcher, "Salvation Achieved (Isaiah 61:1–7; 62:1–7; 65:17–66:2)," *RevExp* 88 (1991): 182–83; Jan Ridderbos, *Isaiah* (trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 508; Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah 56–66: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 34; John T. Willis, *Isaiah* (Austin: Sweet, 1980), 435; Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 334; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary* (trans. David M. Green; OTL; London: SCM, 1969), 310, 341; John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 20; Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 151; Wolfgang Roth, *Isaiah* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 176; Roger N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66* (NCB 23; Greenwood: Attic, 1975), 218.

⁴ See Roth, *Isaiah*, 176; G. A. F. Knight, *The New Israel: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 56–66* (ITC 23B; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 96, 117–18; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66: A Commentary* (WBC 25; Waco: Word, 1987), 353–54; Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. Raymond E.

misunderstood Deutero-Isaiah's references to "heaven" and "earth," thinking that the latter was referring to a new act of divine creation comparable to Gen 1-2.⁵ Within this purview, the creation of "new heavens and new earth" (66:22-23) is to be equated with the postexilic restoration of Judah (i.e., during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah).⁶ Second, other scholars maintain that Isa 56-66 is a preexilic text, though (some of) the predictions in these chapters were meant to be fulfilled following the return from exile.⁷ A literal creation of "new heavens and new earth" is not meant, but rather a transformation of the existing ones.⁸ Within this group are scholars who

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- Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy; 2 vols. in one; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1:348; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 246; J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 285-90.
- 5 Whybray, "Isaiah 40-66," 275, who agrees with Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, 341, that 66:17, 25 were added to the passage to give it a quasi-apocalyptic tone, and that while Isa 65:17 lacks the general marks of apocalyptic predictions, it marks the beginning of a "new radical theology, born of the despair of post-exilic life" which was later taken over by apocalyptic writers. See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 285-87.
- 6 In fact, Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 353, holds that the new age begins with the reign of Cyrus. See also Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66*, 132; Roth, *Isaiah*, 176; Willis, *Isaiah*, 473, 479; Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 456; Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 629; Stuhlmueller, "Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah," 348; Whybray, "Isaiah 40-66," 275-78; Odil H. Steck, "Der neue Himmel und die neue Erde: Beobachtungen zur Rezeption von Gen 1-3 in Jes 65,16b-25," in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A. M. Beuken* (ed. J. Van Ruiten and M. Vervenne; BETL 132; Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 349-66; Ulrich Mauser, "Isaiah 65:17-25," *Int* 36 (1982): 183.
- 7 For example, Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Isaiah: An Introductory Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 143; Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 129; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:427; "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (ed. Francis D. Nichol; 7 vols.; rev. ed.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 4:25-38; "I Create (Isa 65:17)," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (ed. Francis D. Nichol; 7 vols.; rev. ed.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 4:332-34. It should be noted that references from the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* will use the abbreviation *SDABC* henceforth.
- 8 Cf. Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66*, 132; Roth, *Isaiah*, 176; Willis, *Isaiah*, 473, 479; Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 456; Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 629; Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 363; Stuhlmueller, "Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah," 348; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 285-90. Although Bratcher, "Salvation Achieved," 182-83, holds to a postexilic date of Isa 56-66, she says that the creation of "new heavens and new earth" is a metaphor for the transformation of Jerusalem. See also Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 539, who suggests that here "the transformation of the new eschatological age" is expressed in "radical imagery" and that this "new creation" is identifiable with "the messianic hope of First Isaiah."

observe that although such glorious promises were intended to be fulfilled in restored Judah, yet, since literal Israel failed to keep their part of the covenant, the promises were transferred to spiritual Israel, the church;⁹ or that the bulk of the promises would remain unfulfilled, since these were specifically meant for literal Israel.¹⁰

The apocalyptic view of Isaianic eschatology maintains that the glorious promises of Isa 56–66 point either to an earthly millennial reign of the Messiah¹¹ or beyond¹² or both.¹³ While some advocates of this view think that some of the promises were to be fulfilled during the postexilic period, they believe that their true fulfillment will take place before or at the return of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ G. W. Grogan may well represent scholars of the apocalyptic view:

When a promise is made of conditions that fall short of perfection—as for instance when life is lengthened but death is not abolished (65:20)—this does not apply to the perfected church but is best related to millennial conditions. Also, pictures of judgment—even universal judgment—that threaten death to most, but not to all unbelievers (24:6–13), most relate not to the ultimate judgment of the second death but to a great

⁹ Cf. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 456; Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 629; Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody, 1981), 2:1334–39; Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, 580; Derek Kidner, "Isaiah," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (ed. D. A. Carson; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1994), 670; Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (trans. James Martin; 2 vols. in one; COT; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2:515.

¹⁰ "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *SDABC*, 4:30–38.

¹¹ E.g., Youngblood, *The Book of Isaiah*, 161; Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds., *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 653; Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 619–20; John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* (NIV Application Commentary 23; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 689.

¹² E.g., G. W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:315; Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, 571; Youngblood, *The Book of Isaiah*, 170; Kidner, "Isaiah," 669; Margaret Barker, "Isaiah," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 541.

¹³ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:514; Kidner, "Isaiah," 670; Pfeiffer and Harrison, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 654; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 656–57.

¹⁴ See Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:1306; Willem VanGemeren, "Isaiah," in *Evangelical Commentary* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 513–14; cf. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 656; Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:514; Kidner, "Isaiah," 670; Wann M. Farwar, "Creation in Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2001), 136–39, 191–97; Gerhard F. Hasel and W. G. C. Murdoch, "The Sabbath in the Prophetic and Historical Literature of the Old Testament," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (ed. Kenneth A. Strand; Washington, D.C: Review & Herald, 1982), 49.

judgment on earth. On the other hand, references to "new heavens and new earth" (65:17; 66:22) presuppose the advent of God's new order, where all will be perfect and which, according to Revelation 21–22, lies beyond the millennium.¹⁵

Other scholars note that although Isaiah refers to apocalyptic eschatological creation, he uses ordinary OT terms to describe such new creation.¹⁶ Further, Isaiah might not have known the sequence of the events he wrote, hence while such promises pertained to the remote future, he thought they would be fulfilled just after the return from captivity.¹⁷ Finally, it is held that Isa 56–66 addresses the postexilic community, yet some promises in this section are apocalyptic in the main.¹⁸ In light of the divergence of views on Isaianic eschatology and the creation of "new heavens and new earth," a reinvestigation of the subject is in order. The question of the eschatology of Isa 56–66 will be resumed in the course of the discussion.

3. Understanding the Context

Most scholars refer to Isa 56–66 as Trito-Isaiah,¹⁹ maintaining that this sec-

- 15 Grogan, "Isaiah," 14. Thus, he sees both (earthly) millennial and postmillennial dimensions in Isaiah's eschatological promises.
- 16 Kidner, "Isaiah," 669; Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2:515; George E. Ladd, "Eschatology," *ISBE*, 2:132; John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (NIBC 13; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 368–69. See also John A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 23, 522, 529–30, 543; P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 134–86.
- 17 Allen Ross, "The Glorious Messiah and the Messianic Age," n.p. [cited 20 October 2007]. Online: http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=2090.
- 18 Grogan, "Isaiah," 314, 322. Mauser, "Isaiah 65:17–25," 184, places Isa 65:17 between the postexilic and the apocalyptic: "As Isaiah 65 speaks of a new heaven and a new earth which are in one sense thoroughly earthly and yet in another sense largely devoid of any historical referent, it focuses on this place in the middle, the 'existence between the times'. It announced the new creation as the child of the earth but also as the bride of heaven." See also John W. De Gruchy, "A New Heaven and A New Earth: An Exposition of Isaiah 65:17–25," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 105 (1999): 65–74.
- 19 The division of the book of Isaiah into thematic units has been debated. Generally, the change of literary style starting with ch. 40 has led to the division of the book into two (1–39 and 40–66). Chapters 40–66 may further be divided into three (40–48; 49–57; 58–66), a division proposed by Friedrich Rückert, *Hebräische Propheten: übersetzt und erläutert* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1831) and defended by Franz Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über den Propheten Jesaja* (2 vols.; BCAT 3/1; Leipzig: Dörfpling & Franke, 1867–72). However, Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja: übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), suggested a twofold division: 40–55 and 56–66. More recently, John W. Olley, "'No Peace' in a Book of Consolation: A Framework for the Book of Isaiah?," *VT* 49 (1999): 351–70, has supported the tripartite division based on the versions and the refrain "no peace" in 48:22, 58:21, and a variation of this refrain in

tion was written during the exilic or postexilic period, either by a single author or by a group of prophets.²⁰ Contrary to this consensus in mainstream Isaianic scholarship, the 'gathering' motif (e.g., Isa 56:8–9; 57:14; 60:4, 9–22; 66:18) and the promises of restoration of the people after a looming calamity (58:12, 14; 61:4; 62:4, 10, 12; 65:17–25; 66:18–20), among other things, seem to suggest that the section was probably written before the Babylonian exile.²¹ Thus, chapters 56–66 may be read as a prediction of the future rather than a description of the present experience of returning captives.²² Isaiah 60–62, the climax of chapters 56–66,²³ indicates that the future restoration of Jerusalem is the focal point of the section. In order to locate the creation texts of Isa 65:17–18 and 66:22 in their appropriate context, the argument of chapters 65 and 66 may briefly be outlined.

66:24. Following William H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 247–59, some scholars see a different two-fold division of Isaiah: 1–33 and 34–66 (e.g., Avraham Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah* [New York: Hebraeus, 1994], 15, 37; Craig A. Evans, "On the Unity and Parallel Structure of Isaiah," *VT* 38 [1988]: 129–47). Still other scholars maintain a threefold division of the book as a whole, namely, Isaiah of Jerusalem (1–39), Deutero-Isaiah (40–55), and Trito-Isaiah (56–66). Cf. Willem A. M. Beuken, "Isaiah Chapters 65–66: Trito-Isaiah and the Closure of the Book of Isaiah," in *Congress Volume: Leuven 1989* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 43; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 204–21; Paul A. Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah* (VTSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 1995); Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 32–46.

²⁰ E.g., Kelly, "Isaiah," 351; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, 310.

²¹ For exhaustive arguments for the preexilic authorship of the book of Isaiah (including chs. 56–66), the reader is referred to John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 23–28; idem, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 3–16; idem, *Isaiah*, 33–41; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 25–33; Edward J. Young, *Who Wrote Isaiah?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958); idem, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:538–49; Oswald T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); J. Barton Payne, "Eighth Century Background of Isaiah 40–66," *WTJ* 29 (1967): 179–90; and further *WTJ* 30 (1967): 50–58; Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 333–50.

²² Robert E. Longacre, "Discourse Perspective on the Hebrew Verb: Affirmation and Restatement," in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (ed. W. R. Bodine; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 177–89; idem, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence, A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 65–136, has distinguished, based on the use of verb forms, several discourse types in the OT including narrative, predictive, procedural, instructional, behavioral, hortatory, and juridical. In Isa 65, *weqatal* verb forms, though relatively scanty, seem to convey the foregrounded/mainline predictions while other forms and constructions convey backgrounded predictions, activities, and setting. This, among other features, suggests that Isa 65 should be understood as a prediction.

²³ See Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 465; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 285–87; Childs, *Isaiah*, 533.

Isaiah 65–66 serve as YHWH's answer to the supplication for intervention made in the immediately preceding chapters (especially 63:15–19; 64:1, 10). Isaiah 65 opens with a castigation: Judah is obstinate, atrocious, idolatrous, and unclean (vv. 2–5). In this regard, YHWH's judgment upon the nation is inevitable (vv. 6–7), though there is hope for restoration where the righteous (the chosen/servants of YHWH) will possess the holy mountain (vv. 8–10)²⁴ while the wicked are destined for destruction (vv. 11–12). Verses 13–15 contrast the destiny of the righteous (peaceful life) with that of the wicked (death). The peaceful life of the righteous is clearly marked in v. 16: "for the past troubles will be forgotten and because they will be hidden from my eyes." The renewal announced in v. 16 is described magnificently in vv. 17–25.²⁵ YHWH is about to "create new heavens and new earth," and the "former" things will not be remembered anymore (v. 17). According to v. 18, YHWH's act of creation centers on Jerusalem. Verses 19–25 delineate the blessed and peaceful conditions of restored Jerusalem. It seems, then, that Isa 65:17–25 depicts the restoration of Judah after the exile (a time when the devastated shall be reinstated, 61:2–4; 62:4).

Isa 66 begins with the declaration that the heaven is YHWH's throne and the earth, his footstool (v. 1). He esteems the humble and contrite in spirit—those who obey him (v. 2). However, because the people of Judah (especially the leaders) have disregarded YHWH by engaging in abominable sacrifices (v. 3), he will bring calamity upon them (v. 4). The city and the temple will be destroyed (v. 6),²⁶ a punishment primarily directed at those who oppress the righteous (cf. v. 5). Nonetheless, the birth imagery of vv. 7–9 implies that YHWH will recreate Zion and a people for his glory. That restoration after destruction is here in view seems clear from vv. 10–11 which call the faithful to stop mourning and rejoice with Jerusalem. The faithful will rejoice when YHWH extends peace and overflowing prosperity to Jerusalem (vv. 12–14). However, in v. 15, YHWH announces the destruction of the wicked people who offer sacrifices in gardens or eat the flesh of pigs and other abominable things (v. 17). This exactly recalls Isa 65:3–5, suggesting that the two chapters be taken together. YHWH will come and gather all nations and tongues so as to reveal his glory to them (v. 18). He will set a "sign" among his people and send some of the "survivors" (Israelites) to

²⁴ Isaiah 65:8–10 convey YHWH's promise to preserve a remnant. Verse 9 is significant in that it sums up the destiny of the servants of YHWH in vv. 13–15 as well as the renewal in vv. 19–25.

²⁵ In fact, Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 522–23, sees Isa 65:13–25 as the center of chs. 65–66. It is also interesting to observe with Childs, *Isaiah*, 533; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 286–87; Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 160, that Isa 65:17–25 draws on chs. 60–62 (the climax of chs. 56–66) and chs. 40–48.

²⁶ The destruction hinted at 66:6 (cf. vv. 10–11) suggests that the passage is preexilic.

the nations to proclaim his glory and fame (v. 19; cf. 40:5). As a result of this proclamation, other Israelites ("your brothers") scattered among these nations as a result of their captivity will be brought back to Jerusalem as an offering to YHWH (v. 20), thereby punctuating the gathering motif of v. 18. Out of these YHWH will select priests and Levites (v. 21). Verse 22 states that just as the "new heavens and new earth" (cf. 65:17) YHWH is making will endure, so will the name and descendants of Judah endure. "All flesh" will come and worship before YHWH every New Moon and Sabbath (v. 23). The destruction of the wicked (cf. 1:31; 5:25; 65:1-7, 11-12, 15; 66:17) resurfaces in a more dramatic way that recalls the Valley of Hinnom (cf. Jer 7). "All flesh," again, will see the corpses of the wicked, who shall burn in an unquenching fire and with undying worms (Isa 66:24).

Before discussing the 'creation' of "new heavens and new earth," a brief statement on the eschatological context of Isa 65-66 is necessary. For many reasons including the following, I believe that Isaianic eschatology is to be understood in a postexilic sense (i.e., an extended period following the Babylonian captivity), though the book of Isaiah was probably written before the exile:

(1) The literary context of Isa 65-66, as highlighted above, seems to advise against understanding these chapters in a strict apocalyptic sense.

(2) YHWH's gathering of his people from captivity (65:9, 10; 66:18; cf. 56:8-9; 57:14) and their restoration to the land (65:17-25; 66:19-20; cf. 56:8-9; 57:14; 58:12, 14; 61:4; 62:4, 10, 12; 65:17-25; 66:18-20) are clearly marked.²⁷ In other words, throughout chapters 56-66 the primary concern is the restoration of Judah following the captivity, not the conditions of the eternal state.

(3) The peaceful conditions outlined in 65:19-25 are more of this life than the eternal state of incorruptibility, since, for example, death is not out of sight in the "new heavens and new earth" (v. 20; cf. 25:8).²⁸

(4) While Isa 65:17 says that YHWH is about to create "new heavens and new earth," v. 18 confines this creation to "Jerusalem" and her "people" (v. 18). In other words, the creation of the "new heavens and new earth" paral-

²⁷ Moreover, the references to destruction (66:6, 10-11), "survivors" (66:19), and "your brothers" (v. 20) imply that captivity and return are in view.

²⁸ Kelley, "Isaiah," 370, comments: "It should be noted that the future envisaged by the prophet is still very much this-worldly. It is a future which is completely earth-centered, where, for example, women still give birth to children (v. 23; cf. Gen 3:16); men still build houses, cultivate fields, and harvest crops (vv. 21-23; cf. Gen 3:17-19); and serpents still eat the dust of the earth (v. 25; cf. Gen 3:14). Most important of all, it is a future in which all must still die (v. 20)." See also Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 275. Neither is the destruction in Isa 66:24 descriptive of the future state of the new earth (cf. Rev 21). See "Look upon Carcasses" (Isa 66:24), *SDABC* 4:338-39."

lels the creation of "Jerusalem" and her "people" (vv. 18–25). This suggests that literal, cosmological creation on a universal scale is not in view.²⁹ In fact, the rebuilding of Jerusalem is the focal point of YHWH's creative activity (cf. 44:24–28; 54:11; 62:10; 65:18–25).³⁰

(5) The construction וַיִּבְנֶה + participle in 65:17–18 (also וַיִּבְנֶה + participle in 66:22) seems to suggest that YHWH's promised creation of "new heavens and new earth" lies in the immediate, not remote, future.

(6) In restored Judah, YHWH's servants will still proclaim his glory to the nations and bring back other Israelite "brothers" to Jerusalem (66:19, 20). Such evangelistic mission would be unnecessary if a cosmological re-creation were meant.

(7) It should be noted that Isaiah is mostly poetic and, as a general hermeneutic principle, poetry is not intended to be interpreted in a strict, literal sense.

(8) The restoration of the people of Judah is imaged by Isaiah through several metaphors (e.g., 42:10–16; 48:6–7; 51:16). The creation of "new heavens and new earth" may be one such way of expressing this overarching aftermath oracle.

(9) Finally, Isaiah's prophecies should be studied together with other aftermath prophetic oracles. For example, if Ezekiel's prophecy of the future joining of the Northern and Southern kingdoms (37:15–28) and the vision of the temple (40–48) are not to be construed in an apocalyptic sense, Isa 65–66 should not be understood otherwise.³¹

The discussion that follows will further strengthen the modified postexilic view of the eschatology of Isa 65–66 and demonstrate a figurative understanding of Isa 65:17–18 and 66:22.

4. A Brief Overview of Creation in Isaiah

The book of Isaiah is replete with references to YHWH's creative activity, so much so that creation thought may justifiably be considered a fundamental

²⁹ Otherwise, one is forced to think that YHWH will literally create new human beings to inhabit Jerusalem. YHWH says, "what I will create" is "Jerusalem and her people" (65:18; cf. 44:23–45:25).

³⁰ Cf. YHWH's promise to renew his covenant with his people after the exile (e.g., Isa 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; cf. Jer 31:10–38; Ezek 36:21–38; Zech 1:12, 17; 2:12).

³¹ The overall nature of classical prophecies needs to be considered. It appears that most of these prophecies are conditional, even though conditionality may not be readily noticeable in the texts (e.g., see the intertextuality between Mic 3:12 and Jer 26:18). Those conditional prophecies meant for literal Israel should not be construed to apply to the Christian church.

concept of the book.³² Here, creation thought is expressed in specific creation vocabulary as in Gen 1–2, and imaged through certain metaphors.³³

The three principal words for creation, namely, ברא "create," יצר "form," and עשה "make," appear in Isaiah with considerable frequency. For space considerations, a brief overview of the use of ברא will suffice. Of the forty-eight occurrences of ברא in the OT, twenty-one are found in Isaiah (esp. in chs. 40–66). It is used in reference to YHWH's creation of cloud and fire (4:5), heaven and the starry hosts (40:26; 42:5; 45:18), the earth (40:28; 42:5), mankind (45:12), the call of Israel (43:1, 7, 15), righteousness and prosperity, and peace and calamity (45:7–8), light and darkness (45:7), the environment (41:20), new things (48:7), and new heavens and new earth (65:17–18). Wann Fanwar has broadly categorized Isaiah's use of ברא into three dimensions: cosmological creation (the world, 40:26, 28; 42:5; 45:18), historical creation (Israel, 43:1–7), and eschatological creation (new realities, 65–66).³⁴ These dimensions are also seen in Isaiah's use of יצר and עשה.³⁵

The usage of ברא (also יצר and עשה) in Isaiah indicates that the word does not always imply literal creation in an *ex nihilo* sense. Particularly instructive is YHWH's creation of Israel (43:1, 7, 15); this refers to his calling them to become his people rather than their creation in the sense of Gen 1. Redemption is also creation (Isa 43:3–7; 65:18). Thus, Isa 44:24–45:25 intricately connects YHWH's promised deliverance of Judah from captivity with his creation of heaven and earth. Further, in Isa 48:7 where YHWH creates "new things," the reference is to the impending salvation of Judah from captivity (vv. 8–20). As the use of ברא (also עשה in 66:22) suggests, the creation of "new heavens and new earth" (65:17) seems to belong to the eschatological dimension of creation. Yet, since this creation also involves "people" (65:18), a historical dimension of this creation cannot be overlooked. In sum, the usage of ברא in 65:18 and elsewhere (e.g., 43:3–7; 48:7) suggests that here the word is to be taken figuratively.

³² Traditionally, the book of Isaiah has been understood to be dominated by two major themes: judgment (chs. 1–39), salvation (chs. 40–55), and a juxtaposition of the two (chs. 56–66). However, some scholars have proposed that creation and salvation are the most fundamental ideas in Isaiah. See the discussion in Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah," 4–37, 148–91.

³³ For example, breath/spirit (2:22; 42:5; 57:16), work of YHWH's hand (5:12; 19:25; 29:23; 60:21; 64:7), and the heaven/earth merism including such expressions as spreading the earth, stretching out of the heavens, and foundation of the earth (13:10; 34:4; 37:16; 40:22; 42:5; 45:12,18; 65:17; 66:22).

³⁴ Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah," 58–59, 81–89. See also Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 124–26.

³⁵ See Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah," 60–68.

5. New Heavens and New Earth

The adjective חדש, which qualifies both שמים "heavens" and ארץ "earth" in Isa 65:17 and 66:22, is commonly translated "new." It may refer to something previously unknown or denote the state of being new, fresh, or different.³⁶ In Isaiah, חדש appears in several major theological contexts. First, "new things" are contrasted with "former things" (41:22; 42:8–9; 43:9, 18–19; 44:7; 46:9; 48:3, 6). The "former things" seem to refer to the former acts of YHWH's salvation in Israel's history. In Isa 65:16b reference is made to "former troubles" which will be forgotten with YHWH's new act of salvation. Probably, "new things" refers both to the different act of deliverance YHWH will work for Judah (e.g., 42:13–16; 43:19; 46:9,13) and the fresh conditions that will accompany such deliverance (cf. 65:19b–25). Second, Isa 65:17 and 66:22 refer to "new heavens and new earth." The "new heavens and new earth," like "new things," seems to contrast with "former things" (65:16b) and "former troubles" (65:17b), hence "new heavens and new earth" may be considered at least as a hyponym of "new things." Thus understood, the creation of "new heavens and new earth" may possibly parallel YHWH's creation of "new things" (Isa 48:7), where "new things" refer ultimately to the impending salvation of Judah from captivity (vv. 8–20). In any case, it is interesting to note that the Babylonian captivity with its attendant hardships forms the backdrop of the "new things" and "new heavens and new earth" in Isaiah as well as "new covenant" in Jeremiah (31:31) and "new spirit/heart" in Ezekiel (11:19; 18:30–31; 36:26). Taken together, these uses of חדש imply that the word does not always denote "new" in the sense of that which never existed.

The heaven/earth collocation appears several times in Isaiah.³⁷ The pair is summoned to witness Israel's sin (1:2) and to sing or rejoice because YHWH is restoring his people Judah (44:23; 49:13). Heavens and earth shake at YHWH's wrath (13:13) and arise at his call (48:13). There are several references to YHWH's creation of the heavens and earth (37:16; 40:12, 22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12, 18; 48:13; 51:13).³⁸ In these instances the context is not creation per se but rather YHWH's ability to restore Judah after the calamity.³⁹ Stated differently, because YHWH is the creator of the heavens and earth, he is ca-

³⁶ Pieter A. Verhoef, "חדש," *NIDOTTE* 2:30, 36.

³⁷ See Isa 1:2; 13:13; 14:12; 24:18, 21; 37:16; 40:12, 22; 42:5; 44:23, 24; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:13; 49:13; 51:13, 16; 55:9, 10; 65:17; 66:1, 22. See also Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah," 76–81, for a discussion of the heaven/earth merism in Isaiah.

³⁸ Apart from the references to YHWH's primordial creation, the territorial sense is also present (14:12; 24:21; 55:9).

³⁹ Similarly, Isa 44:24–45:25 links YHWH's future deliverance of Judah from captivity with his creation of heaven and earth.

pable of delivering his people from captivity. In a context of restoration or salvation, the heavens are called to rain down righteousness and the earth, receive it (45:8). Again, rain and snow descend from the heavens and water the earth (55:10; cf. 24:18–20).

From this brief overview, it is clear that “heavens” and “earth” may be used figuratively (rhetorical personification, 1:2; 13:13; 44:23; 49:13). In most cases, the collocation appears in restoration contexts, and so is Isa 65:17 (cf. 66:22). More relevant for understanding 65:17 is 51:16, where ‘replanting the heavens and establishing the earth’ is closely connected to the restoration of Zion (cf. 14:32). It seems appropriate to submit that the creation of “new heavens and new earth” in 65:17 (cf. 66:22), taken figuratively, encapsulates the whole process of YHWH’s restoration of the people after the captivity. Several facts corroborate this observation. First, Isaiah’s eschatology is to be understood in a ‘modified postexilic’ rather than apocalyptic sense. That means that the creation of “new heavens and new earth” (however it may be understood) was meant to take place following the return from captivity. Second, as seen above, *ברא* has a figurative meaning in Isaiah (e.g., 43:1–7; 45:7–8), hence we need not attach a strictly literal sense to the word in 65:17–18. To the contrary, its use in reference to the creation of the “people” of Jerusalem, its threefold repetition, and the explicit parallelism in 65:17–18 suggest that here *ברא* be taken figuratively. Third, the heaven/earth merism in Isaiah can equally assume figurative meaning (1:2; 13:13; 44:23; 45:8; 49:13). Fourth, Isa 65:17–18 (cf. 66:22) seems to parallel several other texts in the book such as 51:16: YHWH’s deliverance of Judah is expressed metaphorically both as replanting the heavens and reestablishing the earth (51:16), and creating “new heavens and new earth” (65:17; 66:22). Finally, as will be argued below, a scrutiny of the immediate contexts of 65:17 and 66:22, the structure of 65:16–19, and the overall structure of the book of Isaiah—also the envelope function of chapters 1–5 and 60–66—all buttress the basic thesis of this study.

6. Syntax and Structure in Isa 65:16–19

We already noted that Isa 65:13–15 contrasts the destinies of the servants of YHWH and the wicked. In each of the four contrastive sentences of vv. 13–14, the ordering is “my servants... but you⁴⁰ ...,” whereas in v. 15 it is “you... but my servants....” This switch in v. 15 allows vv. 16–25 to be unmistakably understood to refer to the “servants” of YHWH.⁴¹ Verse 16a states

⁴⁰ Although “you” is not lexicalized, it is clearly understood.

⁴¹ This is further supported by the fact that v. 16 begins with a relative-participial clause (אֲשֶׁר הִמְתִּירָדָה), the antecedent being עַבְדֵי יְיָ (v. 15c).

that these servants will invoke blessings and swear by the true God, that is, they will live peacefully. The logical ground for the statement in v. 16a is given in v. 16b (introduced by logical/causal כִּי "for"): "for the former troubles will be forgotten." Overall, the peaceful life of YHWH's servants in vv. 13–16a seems to be reverberated in vv. 19–25, with vv. 16b–18 giving the explanatory causality and logical basis for vv. 13–16a and vv. 19–25.

Verse 17 reads, כִּי־יִהְיֶה בֹרָא שָׁמַיִם חֲדָשִׁים וָאָרֶץ חֲדָשָׁה וְלֹא תִזְכָּרְנָה הָרָאשׁוֹנוֹת וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עַל־לֵב תִּתְעַלְתֶּה.⁴² The construction כִּי־יִהְיֶה occurs only twice in Isaiah (65:17, 18) and eleven more times in the OT. It is interesting to note that in all the passages where it occurs, the context is the exile and YHWH is always the subject of the כִּי־יִהְיֶה clauses. Although YHWH will punish the people by means of captivity (Jer 1:15; 8:17; 45:5; Amos 6:14; Hab 1:6), he promises to restore a remnant after the captivity (Jer 30:10; 46:27; Ezek 36:9; Zech 2:13, 14 [ET vv. 9, 10]; 3:8). In some cases, figurative language is present (Jer 1:15; 8:17; Zech 3:8). Apart from the copula clause of Ezek 36:9b, כִּי־יִהְיֶה occurs with a participle, emphasizing the immediacy or certainty of YHWH's action. Besides כִּי־יִהְיֶה which occurs twice in Isa 65:17–18, הִנֵּה כִּי (i.e., without the pronominal suffix) appears four times in Isaiah (3:1; 26:21; 60:2; 66:15). The context is either a looming judgment (3:1; 26:21; 66:15) or salvation after judgment (60:2).

In 65:17–18, the two כִּי־יִהְיֶה clauses introduce YHWH's creative activity in the context of the future restoration of Judah. The idea of immediacy seems to be marked especially by the use of כִּי־יִהְיֶה with the participle.⁴³ The imperatives of v. 18, namely, שִׂישׂוּ "rejoice" and גִּילוּ "shout for joy" may equally emphasize the certainty of the promise. The particle כִּי which begins v. 17 may be an equivalent of exclamatory interjection, expressing confirmation to the statement in v. 16.⁴⁴ In such asseverative use, כִּי may be rendered

⁴² The LXX renders vv. 17–18 as follows: ἔσται γὰρ ὁ οὐρανὸς καινὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καινὴ καὶ οὐ μὴ μνησθῶσιν τῶν προτέρων οὐδ' οὐ μὴ ἐπέλθῃ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ' εὐφροσύνην καὶ ἀγαλλίαμα εὐρήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ ὅτι ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ποιῶ Ἰερουσαλημ ἀγαλλίαμα καὶ τὸν λαόν μου εὐφροσύνην. Thus, the LXX ἔσται paraphrases כִּי־יִהְיֶה in v. 17. It fails to translate בֹּרָא in v. 18a, but renders בֹּרָא in v. 18b with ποιῶ. This possibly suggests that the LXX translators understood the creation of "new heavens and new earth" not in a literal sense.

⁴³ It is widely observed that the use of הִנֵּה with a participle points to the immediacy of the action of the verb. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 674–78; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158–59; Takamitsu Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 138–40; Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribners, 1971), 168.

⁴⁴ Contrary to most scholars who see v. 17 as beginning an entirely new section (e.g., Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 654; Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 351; Bratcher, "Sal-

“surely, indeed, truly.”⁴⁵ The particle may also serve to introduce v. 17 as the evidence,⁴⁶ explanatory causality,⁴⁷ or logical ground⁴⁸ for v. 16. In v. 18b כִּי immediately introduces the reason or logical ground for v. 18a. On the other hand, the presentative particle הִנְנִי, both in v. 17a and v. 18b, seems to focus the reader’s attention on the content of the clause that follows, and may, together with כִּי, logically connect vv. 17–18 with v. 16b.⁴⁹ הִנְנִי may also function as a presentative exclamation, emphasizing the vivid immediacy (especially with the participle) or significance of the clauses it modifies.⁵⁰

In the light of the above usages of כִּי and הִנְנִי, the function of כִּי־הִנְנִי in v. 17 is probably to introduce the logical basis or evidence for the assertion that the תְּרַחֲמָת הַרְאֲשֹׁנוֹת “former troubles” (v. 16b) will be forgotten: YHWH is

vation Achieved,” 182–83; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 529–30), I see vv. 17–25 as intimately connected to v. 16b. For reasons including the following, v. 17 may not be taken as beginning a new unit: (1) that v. 17 opens with כִּי־הִנְנִי is not enough to mark a subunit, otherwise v. 18b, which equally begins with כִּי־הִנְנִי should be seen as marking another unit; (2) הִנְנֵה may mark a subunit, yet it does not seem to have that function in Isa 65:13–18; (3) the reference to “former” in v. 17 directly harks back to, and takes its meaning from, the “former” of v. 16b (cf. Mauser, “Isaiah 65:17–25,” 184, who seems to take v. 16 as beginning a subunit). The alternating nature of the subject matter of Isa 65:1–25 (i.e., vv. 1–7 and vv. 11–12 concern the destruction of the wicked, and vv. 8–10 and vv. 16–25 talk about the salvation/restoration of the servants, while vv. 13–15 contrast the destinies of the wicked and the servants) demand that the chapter be read as a single unit.

⁴⁵ The asseverative use of כִּי is generally recognized. See, for example, Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (2nd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 72–73; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew*, 159–60; Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; Subsidia Biblica 14/I–II; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 617; Duane A. Garrett and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Classical Hebrew* (2d ed.; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, forthcoming), 38.

⁴⁶ According to Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 149–50, כִּי can present the “evidence or motivation that lies behind a statement, rather than presenting the cause of an action or situation. Thus, the causal link is with the action of speech, not the contents of speech; the focus is not on what is spoken but on the reason the speaker is saying something.” Similarly, Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 638, notes that “in some cases what follows כִּי is not a logical cause of an event or circumstance, but evidence of, or an argument for the preceding assertion.”

⁴⁷ Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 637.

⁴⁸ Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 663–65.

⁴⁹ For this use of הִנְנֵה, see Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew*, 138–40; Garrett and DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, 38; Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 157–58; Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 300, 578.

⁵⁰ See Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 674–78.

about to create "new heavens and new earth."⁵¹ In other words, v. 17a is logically subordinated to the parallel, coordinated subordinate clauses of v. 16b which in turn are subordinated to the independent clauses of v. 16a.⁵² That v. 17a provides a logical basis or evidence for v. 16b is clear from v. 17b which formally and semantically parallels v. 16b. Verse 18b is also subordinated to v. 18a but seems to parallel v. 17a semantically. Thus, the בְּיָהֲנִי clauses of vv. 17a and 18b do not only logically connect with v. 16, but also have 'conjunctive-sequential' function,⁵³ introducing the fact upon which the statements of vv. 17b and 19a are based respectively.⁵⁴ The asseverative nuances of כִּי and הֲנִי further support this.

As hinted above, the formal and semantic parallelism between v. 16b and 17b suggests that הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת "the former" in v. 17b refers back to הָעָרוֹת הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת "the former troubles" in v. 16b rather than implying former heavens and earth.⁵⁵ Further, the conditions outlined in vv. 19b–25 seem to represent a reversal of הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת הָעָרוֹת (v. 16b) or הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת (v. 17b). This is intimated by the similarity of thought in vv. 16b, 17b, and 19b (cf. 60:18).⁵⁶

⁵¹ Cf. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:513.

⁵² Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 635, note that like ו, הֲנִי may conceal the logically subordinate relationship of the clause which it modifies.

⁵³ See Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 169.

⁵⁴ As noted earlier, Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence*, 107, has observed that in a predictive discourse *wegatal* verb forms stand on the line of prediction. Since Isa 65:16–18 are participial and הֲנִי+participial clauses, it can be argued that these clauses do not belong to the primary line of prediction but rather backgrounded activities or, specifically, a predictive reason paragraph.

⁵⁵ That הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת of v. 17b refers to הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת הָעָרוֹת of v. 16b is suggested not only by the structure of 65:16–19, but also by the grammatical rules of concord. The word הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת in v. 17b is an adjective used as a substantive. Because this form is feminine plural, the noun which it implicitly modifies should equally be a feminine plural. The dual form שָׁמַיִם "heavens" always takes plural masculine adjectives and אֶרֶץ "earth" is feminine singular. An adjective qualifying a masculine noun and feminine noun takes the masculine gender, that is, *genus potior* (Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 549). Therefore, if הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת הָעָרוֹת וְאֶרֶץ הַדְּשָׁנָה "new heavens and new earth" were meant here, the masculine adjective הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת (cf. 61:4) would more probably be used. In 65:16, 17 הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת refers to the "troubles" Judah encountered (perhaps, in relation to neighboring kingdoms). Some think, however, that the "former" here refers to the present heavens and earth. See for example, Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:514; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 656–57.

⁵⁶ Several historical issues seem to give background to these "former troubles" in Isaiah. These include, for example, the Syro-Ephraimite crisis which led to the captivity of Israel (Isa 7:1–6; 2 Kgs 15:19; 16:10; 17:3–6; 18:9–11), Sennacherib's invasion of Judah (2 Kgs 18:13–37; Isa 36:1–37:13), Merodach-Baladan's envoy (2 Kgs 20:12–15; Isa 39:1–4), and the captivity that awaited Judah (2 Kgs 20:16–18; Isa 39:5–8).

Verses 17a and 18b seem to share a common referent, the latter being a hyponym of the former. Both clauses have the same introductory formula, the same number of clause tagmemes, and share some common lexical items, though each has a different grammatical object. In other words, the close similarity between *בִּיהֲנִי בּוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ תְּדַשָּׂה* (v. 17a) and *כִּי הֲנִי מְשׁוֹשׁ בּוֹרָא אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַיִם גִּלְתָּ וְעָמָה מְשׁוֹשׁ* (v. 18b) suggests that these clauses semantically parallel each other. This is to say that the creation of “new heavens and new earth” in v. 17 is the same as the creation of “Jerusalem and her people” in v. 18b. Verse 18a, “Rather,⁵⁷ rejoice and shout for joy forever (in) what I am about to create,” seems to give further support in that it encapsulates vv. 17a and 18b. While *אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי בּוֹרָא* (v. 18a) may refer back to v. 17a, it may also point forward to v. 18b, thereby enabling the author to restate v. 17a in v. 18b with poetic variation, a common phenomenon in Isaiah.⁵⁸ Thus, the creation of “new heavens and new earth” and the creation of “Jerusalem and her people” should be seen as equated, not successive events. The following structure of 65:16b–19 may summarize this argument:⁵⁹

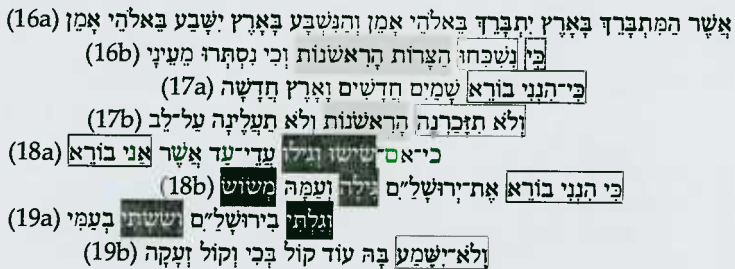


Figure 1: Structure of Isa 65:16–19

This structure suggests that v. 16b parallels v. 17b and, v. 17a parallels v. 18b, and v. 18a parallels 19a. Verse 19b recalls vv. 16b and 17b (“former troubles”). As stated above, the new conditions outlined in vv. 19b–25 represent a reversal of the “former troubles” (vv. 16b, 17b). Thus, what vv. 17–

⁵⁷ The *כִּי־אֵם* clause of v. 18a seems to be a positive counter-statement to the preceding negative clauses of v. 17b. Usually after a negative clause, *כִּי* is restrictive and may be translated “rather” (see Waitke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 671).

⁵⁸ Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah*, 32.

⁵⁹ As already noted, the division of Isa 65 into units is a matter of debate. Some proposals include (1) vv. 1–16 and vv. 17–25 (e.g., Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 654); (2) vv. 1–16, vv. 17–18, and vv. 19–25 (e.g., Fanwar, “Creation in Isaiah,” 133); (3) vv. 1–16, vv. 17–19a, and vv. 19b–25 (e.g., Bratcher, “Salvation Achieved,” 183), and (4) vv. 1–7, vv. 8–16, and vv. 17–25 (e.g., Childs, *Isaiah*, 533). Cf. the redaction-critical segmentation of Isa 65–66 by Beuken, “Isaiah Chapters 65–66: Trito-Isaiah and the Closure of the Book of Isaiah,” 204–21.

18 announce, vv. 19b–25 describe. The idea of joy is emphasized in vv. 16b–19. In view of the deliberate parallelism in vv. 17–19, as made explicit by the above structure, creation in these verses is not to be taken literally. In sum, vv. 17–18 hyperbolically portray the salvation and restoration of Judah as the creation of “new heavens and new earth” and creation of “Jerusalem and her people.”⁶⁰ Isaiah 65:17–18, then, recall several other passages including 35:10, 48:6–7, 51:11–16, 52:9, and 62:1. When restored, Judah will be at peace with God and with the environment (vv. 24–25).⁶¹

Moreover, it appears that the conditions in vv. 19b–25 are an expansion of the peaceful life of YHWH’s servants outlined in vv. 13–16a. Both vv. 13–16a and vv. 19b–25 hinge on the assertion that the “former troubles” will be forgotten (vv. 16b), and vv. 16b–18 provide the logical ground for this assertion. If vv. 19b–25 reverberate the destiny of the righteous in vv. 13–16a, and vv. 13–16a flow directly from vv. 8–10 where YHWH promises to preserve a remnant for Judah, then the postexilic eschatology of Isa 65–66 is further strengthened.

The reference to the “making” (הָעֹשֶׂה) of “new heavens and new earth” in Isa 66:22 is found within the context of restoration (vv. 12–14b, 18–23) and judgment (vv. 14c–17, 24).⁶² Obviously, as the Hebrew construction itself makes clear,⁶³ creation in 66:22 readily harks back to 65:17. As already noted, the birth imagery of vv. 7–9 and the gathering of Israel from the nations after the calamity (vv. 18–21) suggest that the postexilic restoration of Judah is in view (cf. vv. 12–14b). That YHWH’s people will re-inherit the land in line with the covenant promises is highlighted in v. 22: just as “the

⁶⁰ See also Bratcher, “Salvation Achieved,” 183, who, while dating Isa 56–66 to the post-exilic period, notes briefly that vv. 17–25 (which is an announcement of salvation [vv. 17–19a] and description of the salvation [vv. 19b–25]) is “a powerful metaphor for the complete transformation of Jerusalem within history.” Cf. Childs, *Isaiah*, 539.

⁶¹ In this light, compare the creation of the “new heavens and new earth” (65:17–25; 66:18–24) with other texts such as Isa 2:2–4; 4:2–6; 11:2–10; 61:1–3; 62:10. Isaiah 65:17–25 is no more eschatological than 11:1–9, since the former demonstrably echoes the latter. For similarities between 65:25 and 11:6–9, see also J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, “The Intertextual Relationship between Isa 11:6–9 and Isa 65:25,” in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honor of A. S. van der Woude on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst, and Caspar J. Labuschagne; VTSup 49; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 31–42.

⁶² Thus, the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is sustained: as “the new heavens and the new earth” and the “name and offspring” of the righteous will endure forever, so will the corpses of the wicked burn forever (66:22–24).

⁶³ For example, the phrase “new heavens and new earth” occurs only twice in Isaiah (65:17; 66:22) and 66:22 presupposes that the reader knows of this phrase already in 65:17. This receives further support from the use of the definite article in 66:22 which is lacking in 65:17.

new heavens and the new earth" YHWH makes shall "stand," so shall the name and descendants of Judah "stand" (cf. 1:26; 61:6; 62:2, 4, 12). The focus of 66:22 lies in the apodosis of the comparison, namely, the continuity of the covenantal promises, not the newness of the creation.

7. Overall Structure of Isaiah

Out of the several proposals made on the structure of Isaiah,⁶⁴ Avraham Gileadi's bifid structure seems to be helpful for this study, though it too has some generalizing tendencies:

- Ruin and Rebirth (1–5 and 34–35)
- Rebellion and Compliance (6–8 and 36–40)
- Punishment and Deliverance (9–12 and 41–46:13b)
- Humiliation and Exaltation (13–23 and 46:13c–47:15)
- Suffering and Salvation (24–27 and 48–54)
- Disloyalty and Loyalty (28–31 and 55–59)
- Disinheritance and Inheritance (32–33 and 60–66)⁶⁵

Figure 2: A Bifid Structure of Isaiah

According to this structure, Isaiah divides into two: 1–33 and 34–66. The pair of sections for each major theme contains parallel elements, meaning, for example, that elements in chs. 1–5 (ruin and rebirth) may be found in chs. 34–35.⁶⁶ Further, the chiasitic structure of the book according to Gileadi's bifid shows that the elements in theme I recur in theme VII. Though with some reservations, this structure seems essential for understanding the book of Isaiah as a whole. Gileadi seems correct in realizing that "what Isaiah says in one context, he usually says, with appropriate variation, in

⁶⁴ See the discussion in Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah," 81–89.

⁶⁵ Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah*, 15. See also Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*, 247–59; Evans, "On the Unity and Parallel Structure of Isaiah," 129–47.

⁶⁶ Similarly, the structure suggests that Isa 32–33 shares the same themes with 60–66. In 32–33, a contradistinction between the wicked and the righteous is prominent and this contrast is completed by the dispossession and inheritance of the land. Isaiah 60–66 continues this winnowing process. Here too, there is a decisive covenantal separation between the wicked and the righteous; this separation heightens in chs. 65–66.

another."⁶⁷ This is true even within Isa 65–66 (e.g., 65:3–4, 13, 17–19, 21–25; 66:1, 3, 10, 17, 22).⁶⁸

Further, a reading of chs. 1–5 and chs. 60–66 shows that these chapters envelope the book of Isaiah as a whole.⁶⁹ Features of this envelope structure include, for example, the flowing of nations to Zion (2:2; 60:5; 66:12), the heaven-earth merism (1:2; 64:1; 65:17; 66:1, 22), earth's fruit (1:19; 3:10; 4:1, 2; 5:17; 62:9; 65:4, 13, 21–25; 66:17), unburied corpses (5:25; 66:24), new moon and sabbath (1:13b–14; 66:23), sacrifices (1:10–15; 66:3,4), summons to hear (1:10; 66:5), oaks and gardens (1:29; 65:3; 66:17), apostasy (1:2–4; 66:3–4), unquenching fire (1:31; 66:24), desolation of the earth versus its new creation (1:7; 5:5, 6, 9 and 65:17; 66:22), captivity and return (5:13 and 65:9–10; 66:6, 10, 20); famine/thirst versus plenty (5:13 and 65:13, 21; 66:11), and sheol (5:14).⁷⁰ In fact, Isa 66:1, 3, 24 and 1:2, 31 form an *inclusio* and thus constitute the borders of the envelope structure of the book of Isaiah. If this observation is correct, one may say that the prophecies outlined in chs. 65–66 need to be understood as a reversal of the conditions in chs. 1–5. This may suggest that the creation of "new heavens and new earth" (65:17; 66:22) is another way of expressing the certainty of the restoration of the people and the city following the period of calamity.⁷¹ The deplorable conditions out-

⁶⁷ Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah*, 32. For the repetition of elements within Isa 56–66, see Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 14; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 461; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 465, who also observes that Isa "65:17–66:24 seems to be a summarizing conclusion to chs. 56–66." Isaiah 56:1–8 and 66:18–24 form an *inclusio* for chs. 56–66.

⁶⁸ See also Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 522–23.

⁶⁹ Edmund Jacob, *Esaië 1–12* (CAT 8A; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1987), 18, has proposed an envelope structure for the book of Isaiah. In chs. 1 and 66, there is a high frequency of common linguistic and literary elements as well as shared themes. These chapters then form an *inclusio* to the book. See also Marvin A. Sweeney, "Prophetic Exegesis in Isaiah 65–66," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; 2 vols.; VTSup 70; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:455, 472; William J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah," *TynBul* 36 (1985): 112. Cf. David M. Carr, "Reaching for Unity in Isaiah," *JOT* 57 (1993): 73–75; Anthony J. Tomasino, "Isaiah 1:2–2:4 and 63–66, and the Composition of the Isaianic Corpus," *JOT* 57 (1993): 84–98; Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah," 82; Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:27.

⁷⁰ For more on the thematic parallels within these sections of the book, see Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah*, 33–40, 45–248; Evans, "On the Unity and Parallel Structure of Isaiah," 129–47.

⁷¹ There glorious covenantal heritage in 60–66 may buttress this point. Within these chapters, the covenantal promise of the land is highlighted. After the calamity, the righteous will inherit the land (60:21; 61:7)—a land newly restored (60:10; 61:4), regenerated and beautified (60:13, 17), where YHWH himself dwells (60:1–2, 9, 13–14; 61:9), righteousness rules (60:17), creatures live in harmony (65:25), and so on.

lined in Isa 1–5⁷² seem to call for redemption. The creation of “new heavens and new earth” (65:17), further defined as the creation of “Jerusalem and her people” (v. 18), sums up this redemption.⁷³

8. Summary and Conclusion

This study has yielded several conclusions. First, the eschatology of Isa 65–66 is basically postexilic (i.e., an extended period following the return from captivity), since these chapters demonstrably concern the future restoration of Judah after the Babylonian exile. Second, *עשה* and *ברא* (words used in 65:17–18 and 66:22 respectively) do not always refer to literal, cosmological creation. Third, like *ברא* and *עשה*, the heavens/earth merism in Isaiah can assume a figurative sense especially in connection with the future deliverance of Judah from captivity. Fourth, the creation of “new heavens and new earth” in 65:17 is semantically and structurally equivalent to the creation of “Jerusalem and her people” in v. 18. Fifth, the making of “new heavens and new earth” in 66:22 clearly echoes 65:17.

In sum, analyses of the literary context of Isa 65–66, the relevant linguistic features of 65:17–18, the clause structure of 65:16–19 (with its explicit parallelism), the overall structure of Isaiah, and comparison with other texts in Isaiah (e.g., 35:10; 48:6–7; 51:11–16; 52:9; 58:12, 14; 61:1, 4; 62:4, 10, 12; 66:19–20) lead to the conclusion that the creation of “new heavens and new earth” (65:17; 66:22), paralleled by the creation of “Jerusalem and her people” (v. 18), is a hyperbolic expression of the future deliverance and restoration of Judah after the captivity. Isa 65:17 and 66:22 should not, therefore, be read directly into or through such NT texts as 2 Pet 3:13 and Rev 21:1–2, the linguistic parallels notwithstanding.

⁷² The land is ruined and cities burned (1:7; 3:26); mountains and hills have been made low (2:13–16); Jerusalem and Judah lack food and leadership, hence their collapse (3:1, 8); there is destitution and mourning (3:26); YHWH’s vineyard has become a desolation (5:6); mountains quake and corpses lie in the streets (5:25). However, in the latter days, nations will flow to Zion (2:2–3) and earth’s fruit will be the pride and glory of the remnant (4:2). This anticipates the concluding section of Isaiah, especially 65–66.

⁷³ Mauser, “Isaiah 65:17–25,” 181, similarly observes that Isa 65:17–25 “draws together themes which contributed much to giving the whole of Isaiah its distinctive character.” See also Sweeney, “Prophetic Exegesis in Isaiah 65–66,” 455, 472–74.