In or Out? Eating in Isaiah 65–66 as a Conclusion to Isaiah

Isaiah 65–66 brings the book of Isaiah to a close with some decisive proclamations related to eating: “my servants shall eat... my servants shall drink” (65:13); “they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit” (65:21). Additionally, God’s people anticipate being nursed by Mother Zion (66:10–13), and the nations even stream to Zion for festal celebration (66:23). These positive announcements contrast with indictments against those feasting in idolatrous cults (65:4, 11; 66:3, 17). The aim of this chapter is to pursue the significance of the food and drink theme in Isa 65–66 in light of their role as concluding chapters to both Isa 56–66 and the entire book from a sequential-synchronic perspective.

Food and Drink in Isaiah 65–66

Previous studies on Isa 65–66 have uncovered many elements that contribute to the coherence between these chapters, conveying a message about the contrasting destinies of the apostates and YHWH’s servants.1 Chief among these are (1) YHWH speaking throughout both chapters, initially to the wicked (65:1–66:2a) and then to the servants (66:2b–24);2 (2) both chapters responding

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1 Approaching these chapters as a unity is a great contrast with the previous tendency to fragment texts. See Claus Westermann, Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 398–429, who identifies seven separate units in these chapters (65:1–16a, 17–25; 66:1–4, 5, 6–16, 17, 18–24).

to the preceding lament;³ (3) recurring vocabulary and concepts between the various sub-sections of Isa 65–66, such as cultic terms,⁴ call and response language,⁵ terms for joy in contrast to shame,⁶ and references to the righteous as servants and chosen.⁷ Of most interest to our study is that though


⁴ BACK (swine) occurs three times (65:4; 66:3, 17). In the first and last instances, swine coordinates with the verb אכל and the noun בשר. As many note, this unites the message of Isa 65–66 as addressing a community involved in syncretistic worship. Repeated cultic terms like לבן (65:3; 66:3), שקד (65:5; 66:17), גנות (65:3; 66:17), and זבח (65:3; 66:3) within these verses further wed these sections together around the issue of false worship. See Dim, Eschatological Implications, 45 fn. 58; Paul A. Smith, Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth and Authorship of Isaiah 56–66, VTSup 62 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 131; Stromberg, Isaiah After Exile, 48.

⁵ The call (קרא) and response (שמע, ענה) schema also occurs in the major sub-sections of Isa 65 (1–7, 8–16, and 17–25) as well as in Isa 66 (cf. 66:4). The use of שנדר in 65:3, where YHWH claims to have made himself available to be sought (Niphal tolerative), coordinates with 65:30, where God’s people are clarified as those who sought (נדד) him. See Dim, Eschatological Implications, 43; Smith, Rhetoric and Redaction, 131; Stromberg, Isaiah After Exile, 48. See also, Hanson, The Dawn, 135, who limits his comments to Isa 65.

⁶ Clusters of terms for joy (גיל, שה, משוש) recur in both chapters (see 65:8, 10, 14; 66:5, 10, 14), occurring with Jerusalem in 65:9 and 66:30. Stromberg notes that the mocking request by the wicked to see the “joy” (שמח) of the servants in 66:5 presupposes knowledge of the promise of joy (שמח) in 65:3. This point is strengthened when in both verses this prospect of joy for God’s servants contrasts with the shame (보호) awaiting the wicked (65:3; 66:5). See Stromberg, Isaiah After Exile, 48–49. Furthermore, the sword (חרב) awaits the wicked as an alternative to joy for God’s people in both chapters (65:12; 66:16).

⁷ References to the righteous as “servants” (עבד) in 65:8, 9, 13[3x], 14, 15; 66:14) and chosen ones (חיים; 66:9, 15, 22) occur in both chapters. Stromberg, Isaiah After Exile, 48. The shift