

# Explore the Bible: God Restores

November 9, 2020

- *The Explore the Bible Lesson for Nov. 29th focuses on Isaiah 65:17-25.*

We are now in our final lesson from Isaiah, with our text taken from the book's penultimate chapter. It is fitting, then, that our text is concerned with "new heavens and a new earth."

Much of Isaiah concerns itself with historical events in the near future or a few centuries down the road. Many of Isaiah's prophecies concern the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the return from exile, etc. But Isaiah's vision of the future in the final chapters of this book is different.

The conclusion of Isaiah focuses on the far future, on a point in time which cannot be pinned down to any historical events known to us. In some ways, you could call Isaiah's vision of the future a vision of history's end rather than a vision of one more event within history.

## New Heavens and a New Earth

Our text paints a vivid picture of a universe made new. And that phrase, "made new," is vitally important. We should not approach this text with the assumption that God is going to simply "throw away" the old world and replace it. Rather, God is going to radically transform this present creation. He will redeem and refine it into something gloriously new.

The pain and woe of this present evil age will be gone forever, lost to memory (65:17). The city of Jerusalem will be restored, full of joy and mutual delight between God and his people (65:18-19). There will be no

more premature death (65:20). Life will be defined by prosperity and fruitful labor (65:21-23). God will communicate freely and constantly with his people (65:24), and even animosity between predator and prey will disappear (65:25).

For the people of Israel struggling under the weight of poverty, Persian control, spiritual malaise, and the general vagaries of life, these words of promise would have come as a profound encouragement, a promise of a wonderful future. This is no temporary or partial solution; this is a world finally free from everything that causes pain and harm.

## **Death remains?**

Verse 20, however, might confuse many Christians. The prophet says, “the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.” This would seem to imply there will still be death in the new heavens and new earth.

What should we make of this? It turns out that this single verse is one of the most hotly contested passages in Isaiah among evangelical scholars. So, any answer I propose is an answer I hope to propose with humility.

Many faithful Christians believe that there will be a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth before the final resurrection, judgment and consummation of all things. These Christians base this view on their interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, and they argue that Isaiah 65:20 refers to death during this millennial kingdom.

But I respectfully disagree with this view of the millennium and therefore do not believe that argument solves the conundrum. Much of Isaiah 65:17-25 unambiguously refers to the new heavens and the new earth, and there is no mention in the text of any “intermediate period.”

Instead, I would argue that Isaiah 65:20 simply uses figurative language. Isaiah is *poetically* expressing the truth that there will be no more premature death in the new creation—because there will be no more death! (See Isaiah 25:7-9 for comparison.) All of Isaiah 65:17-25 is referring to the new creation, which the rest of Scripture is clear will not include death.

For a more detailed analysis of the problem, see biblical scholar G.K. Beale's [article](#) in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* or pages 529-530 of J. Alec Motyer's *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*.

## Revelation 21

For Christians, it is impossible to talk about the new heavens and the new earth without discussing Revelation 21. While it does not directly quote Isaiah 65, Revelation 21 uses much of our text's language practically verbatim, heavily alluding to this passage from the Old Testament.

The text from Revelation describes “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1) in which there is no more death, pain, or sin and in which people will have perfect fellowship with God (21:3-4). There also will be “the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:10).

The overlap between Revelation 21 and Isaiah 65 is significant and demonstrates how the Bible ultimately holds together. Jesus fulfills the promises laid down in the Old Testament, but he does so in unexpected ways that push past the bounds of human imagination. And for all of us who struggle in this current life, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth awaits.

I believe this promise is especially encouraging in the age of the coronavirus pandemic. As this dreaded disease takes its toll on the world, I long for the day when God will make all things new, finally removing all

disease and death from his creation.

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