

### 13. Rebirth of Planet Earth (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

**Biblical Material:** Isa. 65:17–25, Isa. 66:1–19, Isa. 66:19–21, Isa. 66:21, Isa. 66:22–24.

#### Quotes

- Leave the broken, irreversible past in God's hands, and step out into the invincible future with Him. Oswald Chambers
- Through salvation our past has been forgiven, our present is given meaning, and our future is secured. Rick Warren
- The best is yet to come! No need for bucket lists, because the adventures awaiting us in the New Heavens and on the New Earth will far exceed the greatest thrills of this life. *Randy Alcorn*
- Creative experience foreshadows a new Heaven and a new Earth. *Nikolai Berdyaev*
- With every righteous action, we prepare the way for the New Earth on which righteousness will dwell. And bringing justice to those who suffer violence means to bring the light of God's future to them. *Jürgen Moltmann*
- The people of God are not merely to mark time, waiting for God to step in and set right all that is wrong. Rather, they are to model the new heaven and new earth, and by so doing awaken longings for what God will someday bring to pass. *Philip Yancey*

#### Questions

Why is the promise of the future so important to us? Isaiah uses ideas that make sense to his hearers—would it be different if written today? How? Does God wipe our minds so we don't remember the past? What would be wrong with that? Can we enjoy eternity if we are plagued by ideas from the past? What of vegetarian lions? What does God really want (see Is. 66)?

#### Bible summary

Isa. 65:17–25 describes God's creation of the new heavens and the new earth. Isa. 66 is a mixture of messages, some regarding a wonderful future, and some regarding the evils of idol worship and formalism. Some people were following the ritual requirements but their worship in God's eyes was as bad as offering unclean animals. The conclusion however is that "As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, will last forever, so your descendants and your reputation will also last forever, says the Lord. Everyone will come and worship me, from one New Moon to the next, and from one Sabbath to the next, says the Lord." Isa.66:22-23 FBV.

#### Comment

God promises a new heaven and a new earth. Much of the New Testament imagery of the future comes from the Old Testament, an expression of what was wonderful for those of that time. No doubt the Bible writers would have used modern metaphors if they had been aware of them. The most important assurance is however the presence in eternity of our loving Lord.

But what will this experience be like? Is it a time of endless harp-playing? And what of our memories? If it is true that the former things will not come to mind, how will we know who we are, and know each other? More importantly even than this self-awareness is the awareness of sin and its consequences, gained at such dreadful cost. Is such evidence to be so quickly erased?

The significance of these words surely points to the experience of unqualified happiness, rather than divinely-engineered amnesia. We will *know* what sin has done, and will continue to

*choose* God's way of truth and right. That is what makes God's government secure for all eternity. The alternatives are either continual sin, or the destruction of freedom and choice.

The images of tranquillity and bliss are very much from a pastoral background. Even the savage animals that were feared are now docile and tame. The fear that someone else would benefit from your house and crops is ended. In so many ways the future life is simply described as the opposite of life here—no wrong, no pain, no death etc. But God's eternity is to be seen as the extension of all that is positive, and unlimited in time and scope.

In Isaiah 66, the last chapter, what God truly wants is spelled out. It is not a question of formal obedience, or of rituals and sacrifices. On the contrary, God speaks strongly against those who rely on such mechanical aspects of religious observance. Ending as he began, Isaiah points out the futility of sacrifices to achieve a saving relationship with God. God's "requirement" is spelled out simply and briefly: "Those I look favorably on are humble and repentant," (66:2 FBV). This contrasted with the one who sacrifices, who is likened to a murderer and one who offers pig's blood!

Once again God is pleading for a true and honest and open relationship that is not confined by meaningless rituals and false ideas of worship. God seeks an intimate relationship of love, trust and confidence in the present that will continue throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

### **Ellen White comments**

Fellow pilgrim, we are still amid the shadows and turmoil of earthly activities; but soon our Saviour is to appear to bring deliverance and rest. Let us by faith behold the blessed hereafter as pictured by the hand of God. He who died for the sins of the world is opening wide the gates of Paradise to all who believe on Him. Soon the battle will have been fought, the victory won. Soon we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence the trials and sufferings of this life will seem as nothingness. The former things "shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "Israel shall be saved . . . with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Isaiah 65:17; Hebrews 10:35-37; Isaiah 45:17. {PK 731-2}

In the Bible the inheritance of the saved is called "a country." Hebrews 11:14-16. There the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God's people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.

"My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise." "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: . . . Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." Isaiah 32:18; 60:18; 65:21, 22. . . And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. {GC 675-8}