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Does Isaiah 65:17–25 Describe the Eschatological New Heavens and the New Earth?

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Introduction

This study focuses on the difficult passage of Isa 65:17–25 which is often applied by conservative evangelical authors to the description of the eschatological New Heavens and New Earth, and who claim that Isaiah portrayed it in the limited language of his time. “As

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1 This essay is dedicated to my friend and colleague Dr. Richard M. Davidson, who taught me how to understand and love the beauty of biblical typology. I am indebted to him for deep insights into type and antitype structures. I have traveled and lectured with him around the world and greatly appreciate his humble attitude toward God’s revelation, great desire to learn more about the goodness of our loving and holy God, and the sharing of this passion for truth with others. I identify with him in the mission of presenting the Lord and his character in a positive way to people that they may be attracted to the God of Scripture. It is possible only when they perceive the God of the Old Testament as the God of love, mercy, forgiveness, truth, and justice that this correct picture of God will lead them to love and obey him who loved us so much that he even died for us. I am always amazed how close Dr. Davidson and I are in our biblical and theological thinking. To work with him is more than joy because it brings inspiration, fresh new understanding of the Bible, surprising insights, deeper understanding of the excellent harmony of God’s revelation, and abundant fun.

2 See, for example, Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., Isaiah: God Saves Sinners (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 444–445; J. Alec Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and
Isaiah paints a picture of the new heavens and the new earth, to which God has been leading his people for so long, the prophet uses images from life as we know to communicate life as we’ll know it then (vv. 19–25). The crucial question is whether such an interpretation is in harmony with all the biblical data within the context of Isa 65–66. What kind of “new heavens and a new earth” does the prophet Isaiah describe? It is well documented that our text under investigation is echoed by Rev 21. Does that mean that this Isaianic passage portrays an eschatological description of the New Earth with the new conditions of life as revealed in the concluding chapters of the book of Revelation? A close reading of Isaiah’s text helps to determine its meaning.

Isaiah 65:17–25 forms a literary unit which is delimited in its immediate context by the specific theme of newness. This passage begins with God creating new things (65:17), and ends with a new and peaceful relationship in the animal world (65:25; see also 11:6). Under this umbrella, the new conditions of life on the new earth are described.

The literary structure of the whole book can be divided into three main parts: (1) Isa 1–35—God’s judgment upon his people and the nations; (2) Isa 36–39—historical transition: the example of God’s favorable intervention


3 Ortlund, Isaiah, 444.


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into human affairs; and (3) Isa 40–66—comfort and hope for God's people. In the book of Isaiah, salvation and judgment are presented together within a healthy tension. These three sections of material can be further divided into multiple specific literary subunits. Isaiah 65:1–66:24 forms the final climax of the book: the Lord will bring his faithful ones (after the deliverance and return from Babylonian exile), called his servants, into the New Jerusalem, and they will live under the new heavens and on the new earth, while the rest of humankind will meet God's dreadful judgment (65:12, 15; 66:24). Thus, Isa 65–66 presents God's faithful servants in contrast to the wicked and unrepentant, and this literary unit can be subdivided in the following chiasm:

A. The Lord's call to those who had not previously sought or known him (65:1).
B. The Lord's requital on those who have rebelled and followed cults (65:2–7).
C. A preserved remnant, his servants, who will inherit his land (65:8–10).
D. Those that forsake the Lord and follow cults are destined to slaughter because he called and they did not answer but chose what did not please him (65:11–12).
D'. Those who have chosen their own way and their improper worship. They are under judgment because the Lord called and they did not answer but chose what did not please him (66:1–4).
C'. The glorious future of those who tremble at the Lord's word, the miracle children of Zion, the Lord's servants (66:5–14).


7 Motyer, Prophecy of Isaiah, 522–523.
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A'. The Lord's call to those who have not previously heard (66:18–21).

Conclusion: Jerusalem, pilgrimage center for the whole world (66:22–24).

It is important to observe that our passage under the scrutiny is at the center of this chiasitic literary structure, which suggests its crucial importance. The literary context of our passage deals with salvation and judgment, and it needs to be remembered that Isa 65:17–25 is a part of the larger unit of Isa 65–66 which provides details as to what salvation looks like. It is also important to detect that this passage comes after “a pronouncement of coming judgment upon wrongdoers within the restored nation (65:11–16).”

“A new world order is promised to the faithful, wherein the latter days shall be similar to the antediluvian era.”

A Close Connection with the Book of Revelation

There are multiple Old Testament allusions in the book of Revelation. According to Fekkes, there could be as many as 638 of them in 404 verses. However, it is not easy to calculate them because there are no direct Old Testament quotations in the book of Revelation. Swete's statement that there are “278 OT allusions out of 404 verses” is often mentioned by scholars. Thus, it should be of no surprise that among these allusions are those from the book of Isaiah. Fekkes claims: “Of the approximately 73 potential Isaiah allusions examined, 41 were judged to be authentic; 9 were judged probable, though not certain; and . . . 23 were classed as doubtful.” This total does

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12 Jan Fekkes, Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions, 279. See also Jan Fekkes, “Isaiah and the Book of Revelation: John the Prophet as a Fourth Isaiah?” in “As Those Who are Taught”: The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL, ed. Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K.
not include repetitions. It is interesting to observe that Swete counts 46 allusions from Isaiah and Lestringent accepts 47 of them in the book of Revelation. Fekkes concludes in regard to our passage: “Similarities in theme, structure and vocabulary between Isa. 65:19–20a and Rev. 21:4b suggest that John has now returned to the New Jerusalem prophecy of Isaiah 65 with which he began his final vision.” The problem is that many Christian readers of the Bible often unconsciously project back to Isa 65 what they know about the New Earth from Rev 21–22.

**Description of Life on the New Earth**

Childs rightly stresses: “The description that follows v. 17 and provides the context by which to understand the new heavens and earth is portrayed always in relation to God’s faithful people, who experience the entry of God’s rule within transformed Jerusalem. Smith fittingly divides the biblical passage under scrutiny into four parts:

1. God’s new creation (65:17)
2. Rejoicing and long life (65:18–20)
3. God’s blessing (65:21–23)

How does Isaiah describe the conditions of life on the new earth? Carefully study the following 12 characteristics:

1. **God’s Unique Creation**

   “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65:17a). This phrase is used by John in the book of Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1). The phrase “behold, I” underlines the amazement and surprise of God’s intervention. Isaiah three times in two verses (65:17–18) stresses that it is God who will “create” these new things. The verb *bara’* is used here in all three occurrences as a participle, indicating that it will be what God will do in the near future, and that it will be his continuous activity. This participial form is also used in Isa 40:28; 42:5; 43:15; 45:18; and in 57:19, but nowhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. “New” (Hebrew: *khadash*)

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indicates that God will “renew” things according to their original purpose; he gradually renews those things affected by sin, and reverses the situation.\textsuperscript{16}

When the verb \textit{bārā’} (“created”) is used in the Hebrew Bible (38 times in the Qal and 10 times in the Niphal stems),\textsuperscript{17} God is always the author of the described activity or the implied subject of the passive verb constructions. Creation and restoration are acts of God alone! The verb \textit{bārā’} stresses that God brought these new things into existence. Walter Brueggemann declares that Isa 65:17–25 is “the most extreme statement” of God’s “capacity for the recovery of creation” and “perhaps the most sweeping resolve of Yahweh in all of Israel’s testimony.”\textsuperscript{18} He further aptly states that “the poem is a declaration in the mouth of Yahweh, who publically and pointedly claims authority to replicate the initial creation, only now more grandly and more wondrously. . . . The newness of creation here vouchsafed touches every aspect and phase of life. All elements of existence are to come under the positive, life-yielding aegis of Yahweh.”\textsuperscript{19} God’s intention is to transform reality in different spheres of life: human personal and family life, human society, and the natural world.\textsuperscript{20}

This verse incorporates many allusions to “heavens” and “earth” in the book (see 1:2; 13:13; 24:4, 18, 21; 37:16; 40:12, 22, 26–28; 42:5; 44:23–24; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:13; 49:13; 51:6, 13, 16; 55:9). For example, Isaiah already in

\textsuperscript{16} One can speak about a gradual establishment of God’s kingdom. Roy Gane writes: “What we have here in Isaiah 65 is God presenting the creation of ‘new heavens’ and a ‘new earth’ as a process, [a] series of steps, that begins with the re-creation of Jerusalem. Compare Isaiah 11, where the Messiah would bring justice (vss. 1–5). Then, eventually, there will be peace on God’s worldwide ‘holy mountain’; the imagery used in Isaiah 11 is similar to what’s found in Isaiah 65: ‘The wolf shall live with the lamb . . . and the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . ‘ (Isa. 11:6, 7, NRSV). Although the Lord’s ‘holy mountain’ would begin with Mt. Zion at Jerusalem, it was only a precursor, a symbol, of what God promises to do, ultimately, in a new world with his redeemed people” (\textit{Isaiah: “Comfort My People,” Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide}, April–June 2004 [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2004], 150).

\textsuperscript{17} Qal: Gen 1:1, 21, 27 (three times); 2:3; 5:1, 2; 6:7; Num 16:30; Deut 4:32; Pss 51:12; 89:13, 48; Eccl 12:1; Isa 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7 (twice), 8, 12; 18 (twice); 54:16 (twice); 57:19; 65:17, 18 (twice); Jer 31:22; Amos 4:13; Mal 2:10. Niphal: Gen 2:4; 9:2; Exod 34:10; Pss 102:19; 104:30; 148:5; Isa 48:7; Ezek 21:35; 28:13, 15.


\textsuperscript{19} Brueggemann, ibid., 549.

\textsuperscript{20} Other biblical prophets envisioned the same radical activities of God in relationship to his people and nature. Ezekiel, for example, speaks powerfully in 36:22–36 about (1) the change of the human heart or transformation of our human nature by the power of God’s Spirit; (2) transformation of Israel’s society after returning from the Babylonian captivity; and (3) changes in nature, envisioning the land of Israel to be like the garden of Eden. See also Isa 2:2–5; 11:2–9; 35:1–2, 5–7; Ezek 47:1–12; Jer 31:31–34; Joel 2:28–29; Mic 4:1–5).
51:16 announces that God will do all these new things for his people after the exile (see vv. 12–15): “And I have put my words in your mouth and covered you in the shadow of my hand, establishing the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people’” (ESV).

2. The Past of No Burden

“The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isa 65:17b). This text is echoed in Rev 21:1, 4b: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea . . . the old order of things has passed away.” What does it mean that “the former things will not be remembered”? It cannot refer to the loss of memory, because people with amnesia lose their own identity and become different persons with dissimilar behavior. In addition, if the redeemed do not remember the lessons learned from the Great Controversy, sin could enter the world again and the whole conflict between good and evil would be in vain. The former painful life will be no more, it is over. "A healed memory is not a deleted memory," the redeemed’s memory is at peace. Isaiah refers especially to former unpleasant things experienced during the Babylonian exile. With the new exodus and God’s intervention, the past is healed.

God will create new things because the old system has been marred and ruined by terrible problems and intense wounds (65:16b). He will accomplish it by creating a new order with the right content. It is a picture of restoration, not a description of totally new things from scratch. “Former things” means “past troubles” as mentioned in v. 16: “For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.” Watts explains that the former or first things are the things of “the past kingdoms of Israel under curse and judgment that were pictured in chaps. 1–39.” Lee states that the “former troubles” mean “the Babylonian exile” and that life in the New Jerusalem will erase the past, shameful history related to that exile. The former troubles will be forgotten, which means forgiven and reconciled, and will also be hidden from his eyes, i.e., the old order of things will pass away, namely the exile. This text flashes back to 43:18–19 where Isaiah underlines that God will do new things, will cause a new exodus for his people: “I am making a way in the

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23 Lee, New Jerusalem, 19.
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desert and streams in the wasteland” (cf. 43:5–7).

The mistakes of the past will no longer be a burden to his people. They will not be haunted, troubled, or bothered with their past sins, hurts, unfinished duties, and problems, because they went through a process of reconciliation. Harmony, peace, and joy are restored. They will no longer be slaves of their past transgressions and deep emotional wounds. No painful flashbacks will irritate them; the past things “will no longer distress or annoy the mind or cause feelings of remorse.”

3. A Place of Joy and Happiness

“But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy” (Isa 65:18). The wonder of God’s action should lead to excitement. The whole situation will change and be different. Jerusalem will be a place of joy and gladness, a delight for people, the city of enjoyment. “The pair of roots for gladness and rejoicing occurs three times in vv. 18–19, emphasizing how completely the wonder of God’s creative work will blot out all the memory of the former world. . . . The very nature of Jerusalem will be gladness, and the nature of her people will be joy.”

This positive imagery of rejoicing is saturated with a description of gladness in 49:13; 51:11; 61:10 (and possibly even 52:1; 54:1, 10).

It is important to notice that “Isa. 65.17–18 provides the threefold structural order for Rev. 21.1–2: (1) new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65.17a/Rev. 21.1a); (2) the former things (Isa. 65.17b/Rev. 21.1b); (3) and the city Jerusalem (Isa. 65:18b/Rev. 21.2).” The close parallels between these two passages expressed in the same sequence makes it clear that, without any doubt, John had Isa 65 in mind when he wrote about the New Jerusalem.

4. No Weeping or Crying

“I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more” (Isa 65:19). The text first expresses God’s joy over Jerusalem and his people, and then describes in a negative way what was said positively in the previous verse. It underlines that there will be no cause for weeping or crying, no more suffering and pain. There will be no hindrance to experiencing true joy; it means that no destruction or harm will take place. It is a reversal of the situation of God’s

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24 For these connections, see Mathewson, A New Heaven and a New Earth, 60–62.
25 SDABC, 4:333.
26 Oswalt, Book of Isaiah, 657.
27 Mathewson, A New Heaven and a New Earth, 33–34.
people before the Babylonian exile (Jer 3:21), where their crying is associated with God’s silence because of the people’s wickedness (Jer 3:21; Mal 2:13) and the destruction of their land (Jer 9:9; 31:15; 48:5), and is put in contrast to the prophet Jeremiah’s announcement that in Babylon will be crying, because destruction will come upon her (Jer 51:54). Because of this new situation made by God, his people rejoice, and there will be no more tears in Jerusalem (see God’s promise already in 25:8; 30:19; 61:3).

Pay also close attention to how John is using this Isaianic text. Besides repeating that there will be no weeping or crying in the New Jerusalem, he also adds that death will be there no more (something that Isaiah does not include): “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4 ESV). John expands the description and makes a universal, all-encompassing statement.

5. No infant Mortality or Miscarriages

“Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days” (Isa 65:20a). There will be no more infant mortality. Babies will be born healthy, and there will be no stillborn babies. Marriages will come to fruition and family life will be blessed. One of the visible signs of God’s blessing was many children and a harmonious family (Pss 112:2; 127:3–5; 128:3; Prov 13:22; 14:26; 17:6; 20:7; 31:28). “The first quality of the new city, stated negatively and then positively, is a stability and order that guarantees long life. . . . Moreover, it is possible to think that infant mortality is an index of the quality of community life.”

6. Longevity of the Faithful but for Sinners Premature Death

“Or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed” (Isa 65:20b). This text is quite difficult to translate and understand, but the main idea and meaning seems to be clear. People will live long like mighty trees (i.e., survive for many generations, see v. 22; cf. Ps 92:13–15), and they will live several hundred years. They will die in a mature patriarchal age and length of years; but more than that, they will live long like God’s faithful ones in the time of patriarchs or even before them (see genealogies of God’s people in Gen 5 and 11). If someone would die at the age of

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of a hundred, that person would be considered a mere youth, because he/she would not come to maturity of life, but would die prematurely as a young person. However, a death at such a young age would mean that the person was an unrepentant sinner and accursed, i.e., sinful. Observe that according to this verse, curse, sin, sinners, and death exist in the new Isaianic earth. These are surely surprising elements. Note that Isaiah does not say here that God’s faithful will live eternally and that death will be no more as is stated in the apocalyptic-eschatological section of Isa 24–27 called the “small apocalypse” (see especially 25:8–9; 26:4, and 26:19) and in Rev 21:4.

Debate continues in regard to the literal translation of Isa 65:20: “No more will be (from) there an infant [but a few] days, or an old man who does not fill out his days. If someone will die at a hundred [he will be considered as] the youth. [For the young man will die one hundred years old], but the sinner, (being) one hundred years old, will be [declared, reckoned, considered] accursed.”

An alternative interpretation has been proposed by Motyer, who explains Isa 65:20 in the following way: “Throughout this passage Isaiah uses aspects of present life to create impressions of the life that is yet to come. It will be a life totally provided for (13), totally happy (19cd), totally secured (2–23) and totally at peace (24–25). Things we have no real capacity to understand can be expressed only through things we know and experience. So it is in this present order of things death cuts life off before it has well begun or before it has fully matured. But it will not be so then.” And he continues: “No infant will fail to enjoy life nor an elderly person come short of total fulfillment. Indeed, one would be but a youth were one to die aged a hundred! This does not imply that death will still be present (contradicting 25:7–8) but rather affirms that over the whole of life, as we should now say from infancy to old age, the power of death will be destroyed. . . . ‘But the sinner, a hundred years old, will be accursed’ . . . Of course, there will be no

\[^{29}\text{Compare with the following translations: “No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed” (ESV); “No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; nor the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed” (NKJV); “No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days; for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed” (RSV); “No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed” (NASV).}\]
sinners in the new Jerusalem (6–7, 12, 15c). Once more metaphor is being used, but the reality is that if, per impossible, a sinner were to escape detection for a century the curse would still search him out and destroy him. Thus verse 20 expresses a double thought: death will have no power and sin no more presence.”\textsuperscript{30}

However, this interpretation goes against the flow of thoughts in Isa 65. Even if it would be a hypothetical case, it still reflects the reality of earthly life even though in a more ideal situation. The apocalyptic passage of Isa 25:7–9 describes the situation of the second coming of Jesus when this eschatological event will destroy death as our enemy and expresses victory over sin which will be no more, but Isa 65–66 is a classical prophecy of the restoration of Israel and speaks about the earth’s situation in Israel after the return of the remnant from the Babylonian exile. It does not describe life without death. As Mathewson correctly observes: “Isa. 65:20 refers to the absence of death, but the absence of untimely death, whereas John refers to the absence of all death. It appears then that John has brought in Isa 25:8 to expand the death referred to in 65:20 to exclude all death in the new creation.”\textsuperscript{31}

7. Creative Work

“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit” (Isa 65:21). Creative work and enjoyment of its results will exist in the New Earth. No one else will destroy or possess what God’s people have built or produced.

8. Peace and Prosperity

“No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands” (Isa 65:22). God promises constant security and long prosperity because life will be sustained. This picture not only includes good health but also a promise of no wars, military attacks, robberies, threats to life, or fear of an enemy. Nothing and no one will destroy or threaten their peace. God’s faithful servants will enjoy their own work.

9. Life Under God’s Presence and Blessing

“They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for

\textsuperscript{30} Motyer, Prophecy of Isaiah, 530.

\textsuperscript{31} Mathewson, “Isaiah in Revelation,” 203.
they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them” (Isa 65:23). God’s blessing will be with his people, their children, and posterity. “Verse 23 sums up 21 and 22 in a negative manner. The labor the people will expend will not be for vanity (i.e., in vain; cf. 49:4).”

10. Prayers Answered

“Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (Isa 65:24). The prayers of God’s people will be heard and quickly answered by the Lord—no more delays or silence. God’s people will enjoy God’s Presence. The covenant relationship between God and his people is cultivated and strengthened.

11. New Conditions in Nature

“The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD” (Isa 65:25). The aggressive and peaceful animals will live together in harmony with no more devouring of other creatures. The strong and carnivorous animals will not harm domesticated ones, and the wolf and lamb will live side by side as well as the lion with the cattle, which are a natural prey for them. In Isa 11:7–9 the picture of peace in the animal world is depicted in the context of a Messianic prophecy (see statements about “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” [Isa 11:1; see also v. 10]). The Messiah will rule in justice and will accomplish all things by the Spirit of the Lord.

12. Reversal of Curses into Blessing

The overall picture of Isa 65:17–25 is about blessings that come as a fulfillment of God’s covenant Presence (see Lev 26:1–13; Deut 28:1–14) and as a contrast and reversal of curses (see Lev 26:14–39; Deut 27–28). God’s intervention on behalf of his people goes beyond these Pentateuchal blessings because God’s promise to create a new heavens and new earth is language

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33 Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 21, states emphatically: “The blessings in the New Jerusalem/the New Creation [of Isa 65:19–25] are largely described as the reverse of the covenant curses found in Deut. 28.” Deuteronomy 28:30 contains the specific curse: “You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not begin to enjoy its fruit” and this curse is negated in our Isaianic passage. Leviticus 26:22 describes the curse of being killed by wild animals, but see God’s promises of safety when wild animals will no longer hurt (Isa 11:6–9; Ezek 34:25, 28; Hos 2:18).
that was not used in Leviticus or Deuteronomy.

Isaiah 65:17–25 is a poignant passage that eloquently depicts a harmonious, peaceful, and fulfilling place that has no parallel in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is a reverse of the post-fall situation and a return to Edenic conditions (Gen 1:30). These verses powerfully hint at a totally new eschatological (even apocalyptic) transformation of life including the animals’ behavior.

Where and When?

Where will such new conditions be experienced with a “new heavens and a new earth”? God’s Holy Mountain. Isaiah asserts at the beginning of our section that it will be in Jerusalem (65:18–19), because “the creation of the ‘new heavens and a new earth’ parallels the creation of Jerusalem,”34 and at the end of the passage that it will be “on all my holy mountain” (65:25). These two expressions need to be taken as complementary, so the focus is on the land of Israel. This becomes clear when studying how Isaiah uses the following expressions: (1) “The mountain of the Lord”—“Go up to the mountain of the Lord’s temple . . . all nations will stream to it” (Isa 2:3–4); “your hearts will rejoice as when people playing pipes go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel” (Isa 30:29). 35 (2) “My holy mountain”—“They [the cobra or viper] will neither harm or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isa 11:9); “you [Israelites] . . . will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem” (27:12–13); “These [eunuchs, foreigners, all who keep the Sabbath] I will bring to my holy mountain” (56:7); “But the man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain” (57:13); “And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem” (66:20). The expression “my holy mountain” is also used twice outside the book of Isaiah: (1) “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain” (Ps 2:6); and (2) “For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there

34 T. Desmond Alexander, From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 53. It is significant that the sentence “I will create new heavens and a new earth” (v. 17) is in parallel with “I will create Jerusalem” (v. 18). This means that creating a “new heavens and a new earth” equals the creating of “Jerusalem.” As a result the Lord “will rejoice over Jerusalem” (v. 19). See also, Jon D. Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 89–90.
35Outside the book of Isaiah, this phrase is employed in Gen 22:14; Num 10:33; Ps 24:3; Mic 4:2; and Zech 8:3.
the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things” (Ezek 20:40; NASB).³⁶

**The Big Picture**

On the basis of these different texts, one can conclude that the holy mountain refers, first, to the Temple mountain in Jerusalem, but in a larger sense also to Jerusalem and then to the land or territory of Israel where worshipers should come and serve the Lord. Many passages in Isaiah describe the glory of God’s Temple, new conditions in the land of Israel, and the faithfulness of God’s people. Nations would come to Jerusalem to learn about the true God and worship him (Isa 11:1–10—Messianic context; Isa 35:1–10—joy and praises of the redeemed; Isa 56:1–8—“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (v. 7); see also Isa 43:18–21; 60:3–5 and compare with Mic 4:1–3; Zech 14:16). Jerusalem should become a mega-capital city where people would come to learn about the true, living God (Isa 2:1–5; 56:1–8; 66:19–20; Mic 4:1–4; Zeph 2:11; 3:8–10). In such a setting, the new conditions in the land of Israel would affirm the truth about the greatness of the living God. This Isaianic picture is magnificent: Assyrians and Egyptians along with Israel would serve the Lord together (Isa 19:23–25)! However, the ultimate picture included the whole earth, because God wanted all people to serve him (Isa 66:22–24). From the Old Testament perspective, it should have been a growing reality that the kingdom of God would continue enlarging until the Lord reigned as the King and everyone would come to worship him (Zech 14:1–21).

The overall picture of the restoration prophecy of Isa 65:17–25 seems clear. It points to the restoration of Judah to their land after the Babylonian Exile. The faithful remnant would experience what was never experienced in Israel: God’s blessing of longevity, prosperity, peace, and joy. The messianic kingdom in Palestine/Judah (“on the holy mountain of God”) is pictured in connection with it, according to Isa 11. Isaiah 65:17–25 presents the ideal description³⁷ of what God wanted to do for and through his people in order

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³⁶ See also Ezek 28:14 where the expression “my holy mount” refers to the heavenly mountain of God (compare with Isa 14:13): “You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.”

³⁷ Watts, Isaiah, 925–926: “The new order promises security and longevity in contrast to the history of some three centuries past. It promises a receptive religious climate. Then, for at least the third time, the Vision of Isaiah presents a picture of an idyllic existence that has no violence of any kind. The picture should be read against a background that gives only partial or
for them to be the light for the whole world and attract people to the true worship of God in Jerusalem. This passage describes what would have happened, and would have been brought about by God himself, had Israel remained faithful to God and fulfilled the divine commission to be a light to the world (Isa 42:6). It would have been a miniature model, *Vorbild*, or a living example, for the nations of what it meant to serve the Lord and what God could do for them, as well. Ultimately, the temple mount is also a symbol for the transformation of the whole world, because the Temple represents the entire world. Jon Levenson declares: “The reconstruction of the temple-city was not a recovery of national honor, but also a renewal of the cosmos, of which the temple was a miniature.”

**A New Heavens and a New Earth**

What are the new heavens and the new earth in v. 17 to which Isaiah is referring? It is noteworthy to observe that Isaiah repeatedly declares that God creates heaven and earth and pairs these two key words even though sometimes quite loosely (see 1:2; 13:13; 24:4, 18, 21; 37:16; 40:12, 22, 26–28; 42:5; 44:23–24; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:13; 49:13; 51:6, 13, 16; 55:9), and they are often mentioned in the context of his power to save his people. To create new heavens and earth is figurative language for restoration. God stated previously in Isaiah that he is the Creator and will establish a “new” heavens and earth: “I have put My words in your mouth and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, ‘You are My people’” (Isa 51:16 NASB). Only two times in the Hebrew Bible is it stated that the Lord creates “the new heavens and the new earth,” and it is only in Isaiah (65:17 and 66:22). The only other reference is in the book of Revelation (21:1).

Well, then to what situation or event does Isa 65:17–25 refer? Is this a

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38 Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 24: “[Isaiah] 65:16–25 focuses on the New Creation and particularly, the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the center of the New Creation; the New Creation is the setting of the New Jerusalem. Life in the New Jerusalem means life in the New Creation, which consists of the just reward of labor, and longevity, which are summarized as productivity in work and childbearing, perfect communication with God and restoration of peace in the Garden of Eden by harmony and safety in the natural world.”


40 Levenson, *Creation*, 89–90.
picture of life on the New Earth identical with life on the New Earth according to Rev 21–22? Isaiah 65–66 does not describe the eschatological New Earth of Rev 21–22 (because death, sin, curse, marriage, birth of babies are included), but paints the new conditions on the sinful earth in Israel if the people of God would live according to God’s Word after returning from the Babylonian captivity.41

God’s kingdom will be manifested in Israel, the knowledge about the true God will grow, and the acceptance of the Messiah will secure it even further. In view is the growing establishment of God’s values until he will bring the eschatological “new heavens and a new earth” (the establishment of God’s justice on earth by the Messiah is likewise a gradual reality—the kingdom of grace is followed by the kingdom of glory until even nature will be universally transformed to reflect the Edenic sinless conditions).

“New heavens and a new earth” is an idiomatic, figurative, or hyperbolic expression which means in its context new conditions of life on earth which are described in the verses further in Isa 65:18–25, and points to the restoration of Judah after returning from the Babylonian captivity. It describes the ideal conditions for God’s people in their land of that time expressed in the contemporary language that speaks about longevity (not eternity), prosperity, peace, joy, security, and happiness in family life. Isaiah 65 is a pre-picture or type of the eschatological New Heavens and New Earth! Isaiah 65:17–25 is the Vorbild of Revelation 21–22. In Isa 65 we have only a foretaste of the apocalyptic New Heavens and the New Earth, a glimpse of things to come.

Classical Prophecies and Transformation

This passage (Isa 65:17–25) belongs to the classical biblical prophecies of restoration (like Messianic prophecies or covenant-centered kingdom prophecies/restoration prophecies) even though it contains many eschatological-apocalyptic features. It might have been literally fulfilled if God’s people had been faithful. This prophecy concerning the new heavens and the new earth could occur exactly as predicted and one can envision the

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41 Mathewson aptly explains the typological correspondence between exodus from Egypt and eschatological exodus: “Following their deliverance from Babylon ([Rev] chs. 17–18), in a new exodus ([Rev] 21:5a; Isa. 43.19) the saints are restored to their homeland, a new heaven and new earth ([Rev] 21.1; Isa. 65.17–18), with the restored bride-new Jerusalem at its center ([Rev] 21.2; Isa. 52.1; 61.10) where God establishes his dwelling with his people in a renewed covenant relationship ([Rev] 21.3; Ezek. 37.26–7), the very goal of the first exodus (cf. Exod. 6.7; 15.17; 25.8)” (A New Heaven and a New Earth, 63).
historical, literal fulfillment of this prophecy in the context of the Messianic expectations and Israel’s faithfulness to God’s leadership and his word. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that many Old Testament classical prophecies were conditional, and because “the conditions were never met the predictions were not fulfilled in literal Israel. Nor can all the details be projected into the future so as to have a fulfillment then. Only those features reiterated later by sacred writers can be taken positively to have future application.”

The prophet Ezekiel in chap. 36 unfolds a threefold transformation of God’s people after the Babylonian exile: (1) God promises to restore his people to their land and for them to be his witnesses to the nations (vv. 24, 28, 33–36); (2) God promises to give them a new heart and a new Spirit in order to move them to obey him and his laws (vv. 25–27); and (3) God promises to bless his people—it will become like the garden of Eden (vv. 29–30, 35). Because the divine conditions and described background were not fully met so also the prophecy was not literally fulfilled.

**Typology as the Key Interpretive Tool**

However, when one has a potential historical fulfillment, one encounters a type (the similar typological structures one encounters in Ezek 38–39; Ezek 40–48; and Zech 14). Some kinds of predictions are made through typology that can be called “mute” prophecies. How does typology work? Typology is based on a relationship between type and antitype. Type can be a person, event (place), or institution, and must be always rooted in the biblical text. Type is also a historical figure. For our purpose, the most important feature is the so-called “Steigerung” principle, i.e., the antitype is always bigger, larger, greater, and more universal than the type.
example: The second Adam, Jesus Christ, is bigger than the first Adam; Jesus as the antitypical fulfillment of the sacrificial system surpasses all sacrifices or priestly Levitical ministry; the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. was a local event which is the type for a universal antitypical spiritual Babylon of the end-time; etc.48

The classical conditional prophecies 49 have a factual historical fulfillment (see, for example, Nebuchadnezzar’s madness in Dan 4, the drying of the Euphrates River, the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.), or potential historical fulfillments (see the Gog and Magog prophecy in Ezek 38–39; the vision about the new temple, land, and city in Ezek 40–48 and Zech 14). Conditionality of these prophecies is the crucial issue to recognize. These potential historical fulfillments become types for events related to the eschatological end of time. The eschatological-apocalyptic elements/features integrated into these prophecies provide the needed hints for such an interpretation together with the later inspired authors who use these prophecies in the typological sense. This is also true for the restoration prophecy of Isa 65:17–25.

I want to propose that one can understand the relationship between Isa 65:17–25 and Rev 21–22 as typology. The typological relationship between these two texts is type—Isa 65 and antitype—Rev 21–22. The fundamental question is what can be applied from Isaiah 65 (type) to the eschatological New Earth (antitype)?

Three Key Intertextual Principles

One needs to implement three principles in order to understand what will and what will be not present in the eschatological New Earth from Isa 65.

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48 Jesus Christ used typology as is demonstrated in the following examples: Jesus is bigger than Jonah (“Now something greater than Jonah is here”; Matt 12:41), is greater than Solomon (“Now something greater than Solomon is here”; Matt 12:42), and greater than the temple with its sacrificial system (“I tell you that something greater than the temple is here”; Matt 12:6). It means that Jesus is more than all these earthly types; he is surpassing them and superior and greater: he is the Prophet, the King, and the Priest.

Principle #1: What is not denied remains.

Descriptions of the new earth of Isa 65:17–25 that later inspired biblical writers (A) either confirm, support, and/or repeat, (B) or do not deny or comment on, are valid and thus applicable to the eschatological New Earth. To say it simply: What is not denied will be there, because it is automatically transferred and its validity continues.

What is, then, applicable? What will be in the New Earth that is described in Isa 65:17–25? What is confirmed or not denied by other biblical writers? One can clearly state that the following good qualities of life are retained and present: joy, happiness, security, peace, prosperity, creative work, new relationships in the animal world, no more crying, pain, sorrow, suffering, or the past as a burden, and God’s abundant blessings. No later inspired author is against these crucial characteristics of life or denies them. On the contrary, these values are endorsed.

Principle #2: What is denied is not transferred.

What later biblical authors oppose or explicitly deny from the description of Isa 65:17–25 does not apply to the eschatological New Earth. In other words, from Isa 65:17–25 the aspects of life that contradict other places of the Holy Scripture about the life on the New Earth will not be included. So what will not be there? What is denied, discontinued, annulled, and not transferred to life on the eschatological new earth?

Death

Isaiah has death in view (after productive, blessed, and prosperous life), but John explicitly renounces it: “He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:4).

Sin, Sinners, and Curse

Isaiah mentions “curse” and “sinners,” but John clearly proclaims that nothing sinful will enter the New Earth: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Rev 21:8). And in another text he openly states: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27); and in the last chapter of the Bible, he flatly declares: “No longer will there be any curse” (Rev 22:3).
Marriage and Birth of Children

Isaiah underlines that on “the new earth” there will be no miscarriages or infant death which implies that meaningful marriages with abundance of children as expression of God’s blessing will be there. However, when Jesus was asked about the resurrection and the life afterwards, he responded that marriage and childbirth will be not part of eternal life: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matt 22:29–32). What God prepares for his children will be much better and more fulfilling than what we can experience today in the best, happiest, most harmonious, and meaningful marriage! One does not need to hurry into marriage because it will not be a part of life in heaven. God will give the redeemed something better and even more satisfying. Jesus points out that humans will be “upgraded,” because he discloses that we “will be like angels in heaven” in that reality of life. We need to wait for this surprise because we know nothing about the (family) life of the angels. We should guard ourselves against all sorts of speculations; silence in this matter is the best explanation and attitude to many complex questions.

This point is also clearly supported by the writings of Ellen G. White. She unequivocally states:

There are men today who express their belief that there will be marriages and births in the new earth; but those who believe the Scriptures cannot accept such doctrines. The doctrine that children will be born in the new earth is not a part of the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19). The words of Christ are too plain to be misunderstood. They should forever settle the question of marriages and births in the new earth. Neither those who shall be raised from the dead, nor those who shall be translated without seeing death, will marry or be given in marriage. They will be as the angels of God, members of the royal family.

I would say to those who hold views contrary to this plain declaration of Christ, upon such matters silence is eloquence. It is presumption to indulge in suppositions and theories regarding
matters that God has not made known to us in His Word. We need not enter into speculation regarding our future state.⁵⁰

On another occasion Ellen White made the following strong statement:

Every conceivable fanciful and deceptive doctrine will be presented by men who think that they have the truth. Some are now teaching that children will be born in the new earth. Is this present truth? Who has inspired these men to present such a theory? Did the Lord give anyone such views?—No; those things which are revealed are for us and our children, but upon subjects not revealed, and having nought to do with our salvation, silence is eloquence. These strange ideas should not even be mentioned, much less taught as essential truths.

We have reached a time when things are to be called by their right name. As we did in the earlier days, we must arise, and, under the Spirit of God, rebuke the work of deception.⁵¹

Ellen White further explains in her correspondence with a minister who was fantasizing regarding a woman not his wife, with whom he was sentimentally involved and thought of living and having children by her in heaven, the unbiblical ground and sinfulness of such thinking. She underscores:

I have much to say to you. You have been represented to me as being in great peril. Satan is on your track, and at times he has whispered to you pleasing fables, and has shown you charming pictures of one whom he represents as a more suitable companion for you than the wife of your youth, the mother of your children. Satan is working stealthily, untiringly, to effect your downfall through his specious temptations. He is determined to become your teacher, and you need now to place yourself where you can get strength to resist him. He hopes to lead you into the maze of spiritualism. He hopes to wean your affections from your wife, and to fix them upon another woman. He desires that you shall allow

your mind to dwell upon this woman until through unholy affection she becomes your god.

The enemy of souls has gained much when he can lead the imagination of one of Jehovah’s chosen watchmen to dwell upon the possibilities of association in the world to come, with some woman whom he loves, and of their raising up a family. We need no such pleasing pictures. All such views originate in the mind of the tempter. We have the plain assurance of Christ that in the world to come, the redeemed ‘neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they die anymore; for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection’ (Luke 20:35, 36).

It is presented to me that spiritual fables are taking many captive. Their minds are sensual, and, unless a change comes, this will prove their ruin. To all who are indulging in these unholy fancies I would say, Stop, for Christ’s sake, stop right where you are. You are on forbidden ground. Repent, I entreat of you, and be converted.

**Principle #3: New things will be included.**

In the eschatological New Earth, there will be new surprising things that were not mentioned in Isa 65:17–25. In the Isaianic type or pre-eschatological picture are missing items that later inspired writers stress will be there and are included in Rev 21–22. These new items were also not present in the Garden of Eden of Gen 2, because they are introduced only after the sin problem occurred and the final solution was brought through Jesus Christ. What is new in Rev 21–22 that was not mentioned in Isa 65? At least three magnificent realities will be there:

1. **The New Jerusalem descends from heaven.**

   “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God’” (Rev 21:2–3).

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2. The throne of God with the living water will be in the city.

“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (Rev 22:3). “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1).

3. God himself, his physical, visible, and constant Presence, will dwell with his people.

“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 22:4–5)

Beloved author and preacher Dean Farrar was a personal friend and chaplain of Queen Victoria in the 1870s. Sometime during the queen’s reign, she discussed the second coming of Christ with Farrar. Reportedly she had heard a message at Canterbury Cathedral on this topic and was greatly moved. When she spoke to Farrar about the sermon, she said, “Oh, how I wish that the Lord would come during my lifetime.” “Why does your Majesty feel this very earnest desire?” asked the great preacher. With deep emotion the queen of England replied, “Because I should so love to lay my crown at his feet.”

The concluding remarks of Isa 66:22–24 break into the eschatological time when all the servants of the Lord will be in the New Jerusalem living under the new conditions described as the new heavens and the new earth (66:23). The final outcome is that the faithful servants of the Lord are in the New Jerusalem, but those outside are under the divine judgment of condemnation and total destruction (66:24). This cosmic picture is the last picture of Isaiah where the new life is rid of the wicked people so that peace and harmony will be never again be disturbed by sin. This result comes after intense evangelistic activities among the nations (Isa 66:19–21), and many are reinstalled not only into God’s people but also receive special positions of honor, respect, and service. They are part of the eschatological kingdom of God.

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Conclusion

Does Isa 65:17–25 project an eschatological picture of the new earth and the new heavens? This Isaianic text is best understood in a typological way according to the type-antitype structure. The double fulfillment of this classical prophecy\(^\text{54}\) (some features break into apocalyptic genre) may be best understood if this prophecy is interpreted first in its original setting as predicting the ideal earthly kingdom of Israel had they be faithful to the Lord after returning from Babylonian captivity and then eschatologically in principle. The historical fulfillment never happened, but the potential historical fulfillment provides the basis for an antitypical fulfillment. Isaiah 65:17–25 serves as a *Vorbild* for full-fulfillment as seen in Rev 21–22. It provides an appetite for better things to come, a foretaste of the heavenly reality, a miniature pattern for eschatological antitypical fullness. The three principles discussed above can guide the student of the Bible in how to apply the studied Isaianic passage in its larger context to the establishment of the ultimate “new heavens and a new earth” at the end of time.

The anticipation of the Old Testament Church was splendid. It was a view forward—to the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God, of the new heavens and the new earth! In linear time perspective—from Creation to de-Creation, and then finally to re-Creation. Texts like Isa 65:17–25 as well as Dan 2; 7–9; Isa 24–27; Ezek 38–39; 40–48; Joel 3; Mic 4; Zech 14 provide important glimpses to this Old Testament hope. This church was expecting, waiting, and anticipating outstanding things to come—the Messiah and the establishment of God’s kingdom.

\(^{54}\) Double historical-eschatological fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecy can also be discerned in Ezek 38–39 and Matt 24.