

Fundamentals of Our Faith from the Beginning

Frameworks and the Future

Isaiah 65-66 and Revelation 21 and others

1. Key questions to be answered:

- a. Does Isaiah 65-66 teach that there will be an earthly millennial kingdom either prior to or following Christ's return characterized by global peace, prosperity, health, longevity of life, and potentially even changes in nature?
- b. What role does the New Testament play in our interpretation of prophetic texts like this one?

2. A comparison between Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21 (with other references) and observations:

- a. See table and Scripture comparison.
- b. The new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21 are the same new heavens and new earth that Peter says we are looking for "according to His promise" (note also "by His word" v.7).
- c. Both Peter and John had Isaiah's prophecy in mind and were explicating the "glories to come" found there in light of Christ's redemptive work (see 1 Peter 1:10-12).
- d. Paul seems to allude to a related fundamental nature change at "the revealing of the sons of God" in Romans 8:18 and 21.
- e. Genesis and Revelation form a whole Bible *inclusio* with the creation and the garden of Genesis 1-2 at the beginning and the new creation and new garden in Revelation 21-22 at the end.

3. How does each position understand this prophecy?

- a. Premillennialists argue that this is a description of the millennial kingdom after Christ's return and is an "intermediate kingdom" or transitional period with features of the eternal state.
- b.
 - i. Some postmillennialists argue that this is a description of the "golden age" prior to Christ's return that will be ushered in as the gospel prevails on the earth.
 - ii. Some understand it in an entirely spiritual way—the description is of the spiritual entailments of the gospel and the changed animal behavior refers to the changed nature of regenerate peoples (some amillennialists would agree).
- c. Amillennialists argue that this is a description of the eternal state using imagery and terminology that would communicate ultimate blessedness in a way understood by the readers but that is clarified and filled out for us in the NT.

4. A closer look at Isaiah 65-66.

- a. It is likely that Isaiah intentionally framed these chapters in the literary structure of a chiasm with verses 13-25 at the apex, meaning that what comes before and after lead to the consummation of the new heavens and new earth much like in Revelation.
 - i. In 65:1 the Lord calls to a nation and allows Himself to be found by those who did not ask for Him; and in 66:18-21 He gathers all nations and brings them to Himself, even making some priests and Levites (cf. Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10).
 - ii. In 65:4-6 the Lord pronounces judgment on idolators (e.g., "those who eat swine flesh"); and in 66:15-17, He does the same (v 17), saying He will rebuke them with fire (v. 15).
 - iii. In 65:8-10 the Lord saves His servants from the wrath to come and promises to bring forth offspring and to shepherd them; and in 66:9 and 12-13 He promises to bring sons to birth and to succor and comfort them.
 - iv. In 65:11-12 the Lord again pronounces judgment on idolators (those who "did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight"); and in 66:3-4 He does the same (v 4).
 - v. In 65:13-25 the servants are blessed and the wicked are cursed (13-16) and the former troubles are forgotten "for behold I create new heavens and a new earth..."
 - vi. 66:22-24 are the conclusion and contrast the new heavens and new earth (the place of blessing) with the place of eternal judgment.

- b. What follows v 17 is a description, in some sense, of the new heavens and new earth, and 66:22-24 repeat the idea (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-13 and Rev. 19 and 21) and conclude the book.
 - c. The new heavens and new earth are “created.” Isaiah uses the same word as Genesis 1:1. Revelation 21:5 uses the same word that the Septuagint uses in Gen. 1:1.
 - d. Verse 18 also indicates that this is the new Jerusalem (cf. Heb. 12:18-29; Rev. 21:2).
 - e. The new heavens and new earth will be characterized by the following:
 - i. The former things will not be remembered or come to mind (cf. Rev. 21:1 and 5).
 - ii. There will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying (cf. Rev. 21:2 and 4).
 - iii. There will be no infant mortality.
 - iv. People will live extraordinarily long lives.
 - v. There will be extraordinary security and prosperity.
 - vi. The Lord will hear the people before they call out, indicating His presence (cf. 66:20 and Rev. 21:3).
 - vii. The nature of the animals will revert to pre-fall conditions seemingly removing or greatly diminishing the curse of sin (cf. Genesis 9:1-2; Rev. 22:3).
 - f. Judgement surrounds this middle section with fire being a key feature in 66:15-16 and 24.
 - g. Jesus quotes Isaiah 66:24 in Mark 9:48 and equates this with hell and eternal damnation (cf. Rev. 20:11-15).
5. What are some of the difficulties each position must answer?
- a. Pre and postmillennialists must give an account for NT writers’ interpretation of Isaiah’s new heavens and new earth as the eternal state.
 - b. Amillennialists must give an account as to why Isaiah included childbirth and death in his description of the eternal state.
 - c. Pre and postmillennialists must account for the continuing presence of death and the curse of sin (cf. Romans 5:12-14) considering the following:
 - i. Weeping and crying are no longer heard, but death and sin still exist which implies that people will no longer weep for those who die nor weep and mourn over their sin (cf. Matt. 5:4; John 11:35; and James 4:8-9).
 - ii. The “former troubles” and “former things” (v 16-17) will not be remembered which is tied to judgment of sin and implies forgiveness and a removal of evil (cf. Acts 3:19; Rev. 21:4, 5 and 22:24-27).
 - iii. The change in the nature of animals suggests the removal of the curse and restoration to Eden (cf. Rev. 22:14-15), but sin and death are still present, meaning curse is still present.
 - d. Premillennialists must explain if and how this text applies to us and to all who have preceded us who will have been resurrected and glorified but who will not die in the millennial kingdom, i.e., is this text applicable only to a far future people or to all of God’s people?
 - e. Pre and postmillennialists must explain how Satan will be loosed to ravage this idyllic state, seeming to require another new heavens and earth (Rev. 20:7-15, esp. v11).