ISAIAH 65:17-25:

THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

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by
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Introduction

Anyone who has believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life is able to have hope for the future because they are assured that they will live with Him forever. This hope also extends to the nation of Israel, which will experience national deliverance and salvation in the future. Although such passages are often neglected, the Bible has much to say about the various events that will take place in the future. One future aspect of life for both Israel and the believer is a new heavens and a new earth, which is described in part in Isa 65:17-25:

17 For behold, I am creating a new heavens and a new earth,
   And the former ones will not be remembered, nor will they ascend upon the heart.
18 But exult and rejoice forever in what I am creating,
   For behold, I am creating Jerusalem as rejoicing, and her people as exultation.
19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in My people,
   And the sound of weeping and a sound of distress will not be heard in her any longer.
20 There will not be from there any longer a nursing infant of a few days,
   Or an old man who does not fill his days.
   For the youth will die at one hundred years old, but the sinner who is one hundred years old will be considered accursed.
21 And they will build houses and they will dwell in them, and they will plant vineyards and they will eat their fruit.
22 They will not build and another dwell; they will not plant and another eat.
   For like the days of the tree, so will be the days of My people, and My chosen ones will fully enjoy the work of their hands.
23 They will not toil in vain, and they will not give birth for terror,
   For they will be the seed blessed of YHWH, and their offspring with them.
24 And it will be before they will call, I Myself will answer; while they are still speaking, I Myself will listen.
25 A wolf and a lamb will graze as one, and a lion will eat straw as the cattle, but the serpent’s food will be dust. They will not do evil, and they will not destroy on all My holy mountain, says YHWH.

This passage is found near the end of Isaiah’s book, which was written from 739-681 B.C. Isaiah prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa 1:1). During these years, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria (722 B.C.), and pressure was put on Judah, as well. Martin notes: “In this political struggle and spiritual decline Isaiah rose to deliver a message to the people in Judah. His message was that they should trust in God who had promised them a glorious kingdom through Moses and David.”

While the first thirty-nine chapters of the book focus on the judgment of God that had come upon Judah, hope is interspersed throughout. Chapters 40-66, however, focus more on the grace and restoration that God was going to bestow upon Israel as a whole. The chapters give hope to a struggling nation, showing them glimpses of their glorious future. Isaiah 65:17-25 is one of the passages that give keen insight into that hope, specifically, the new heavens and the new earth. Taking into account the characteristics of the time period presented here, it is best to see the new heavens and the new earth as the Messianic Kingdom, the one-thousand year period where Jesus Christ will reign physically over the earth. This assertion will be proven through several steps. First, the context of Isaiah, both as a whole and within chaps. 58-66, will be considered. Second,

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2 Ibid., 1029-30.
an exegesis of 65:17-25 will be presented. Third, other occasions where this theme occurs in the Bible will be examined.

The Context

As stated before, Isaiah can be divided into two main sections: chaps. 1-39 and chaps. 40-66. Within the latter, Martin sees three main themes: deliverance of God’s people (chaps. 40-48), restoration by the suffering Servant (chaps. 49-57), and restoration realized and completed (chaps. 58-66).³ In these final nine chapters, Isaiah records what God requires as far as Israel’s obedience to His commands, and the necessity of God bringing about that obedience (chaps. 58-59). Once God’s covenant brings about Israel’s obedience, peace and prosperity will be upon them (chaps. 60-62). Isaiah 63:1-6 looks to the satiation of God’s wrath, while 63:7-64:12 records Israel’s prayer of thanksgiving and praise.

This prayer then sets up God’s response, which lasts through the end of the book (chaps. 65-66). In this section, God speaks of His long-suffering towards a disobedient people (65:1-7) and the distinction between His servants and everyone else (65:8-16). Verse 16, however, sets up the immediate context for vv. 17-25. It speaks of those blessed in the land and their former troubles being forgotten. Indeed, it is that verse to which the יִכְכָּלָה of v. 17 refers. Verses 17-25 then offer a glimpse as to why the blessing will be so abundant, and why former troubles will be forgotten.

³Ibid., 1033.
Exegesis of Isa 65:17-25

Isaiah 65:17-25 presents six characteristics of the new heavens and the new earth. These characteristics not only help identify the timing of this period from a theological standpoint, but also give Israel a picture of what their future holds.

Newness (v. 17)

The first line speaks of God’s intent to recreate the present heavens and earth. The same word (אֲבָרָה) that is used here in Isa 65 is also used in Gen 1 to refer to God’s creative work. It occurs twenty times in Isa 40-66 alone, and everywhere except in this passage it refers to God’s past creative work. The three occurrences in this passage, however, refer to God’s future creative work.

When אֲבָרָה is coupled with the adjective יָדוֹ, several things can be noted. First, the future creative work will be new. In beginning the creation process again, God will be able to restore those aspects of this current creation that were not originally part of His perfect design (i.e., sin).

Second, this new creation does not necessitate a destruction of the former creation followed by a complete recreation. Westermann may be correct when he writes: “[These] words... do not imply that heaven and earth are to be destroyed and in their place a new

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4Childs notes: “The reference to God as creator of the heavens and earth is a dominant theme (42:5; 45:7, 12, 18; etc.). Moreover, the verb is not only used to designate God’s initial creation of the heavens and earth, but its continuous maintenance and preservation (42:5-6). However, even more significantly, the verb is employed by... Isaiah in connection with the promise of new things (48:6), which will replace the former things. Thus, v. 17b joins intentionally to this theme of the former things (48:18).” Brevard Childs, Isaiah (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 537.

5As it stands here as a participle in Isa 65:17, Young notes: “The participle may have the sense of near futurity: about to create.” E. J. Young, The Book of Isaiah (NICOT; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972) 3:513.
heaven and a new earth created – this is apocalyptic... Instead, the world, designated as ‘heaven and earth,’ is to be miraculously renewed.” In other words, v. 17 refers to the restorative work of God between the Tribulation and the Messianic Kingdom. The other characteristics that follow in vv. 18-25 seem to support this conclusion.

The new heavens and the new earth are then contrasted with the former (אֲשֶׁר) in the second half of the verse. There is debate about the antecedent of the word, though. If the context of the chapter as a whole is ignored, it seems as though the former thing stands in contrast to the new creation. However, many commentators rightfully connect אֲשֶׁר in v. 17 to the use of the same word in v. 16, where it refers to trouble or distress (חָרָשׁ). Oswalt extends the concept even further to include God’s previous methods of

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6Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1969) 408. Blenkinsopp finds support from the LXX (אֲשֶׁר δόσει γῆς ὃ συμφέρει καὶ γῆς καινῆς καὶ), commenting: “[This is] perhaps a deliberate avoidance of the idea of a new creation.” Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66* (AB; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003) 284. Knight counters this argument: “The LXX, written in the atmosphere of Platonic philosophy... shows that its authors had not grasped the significance of the verb bara (cf. Isa. 51:6), which describes an act of creative love and purpose.” George Knight, *Isaiah 56-66* (ITC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 97. Nevertheless, for more supporters of the renovation view that would see this as the Messianic Kingdom, see also John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001) 368; and W. E. Vine, *Isaiah* (London, England: Oliphants, 1946) 215. This view is not shared by all. Oswalt sees a three-fold referent to this prophecy: “In speaking of the kingdom of God here Isaiah amalgamates several aspects of it that may be chronologically distinct but are spiritually identical. Thus in its present manifestation in the lives of believers, the kingdom is a ‘new creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17), ‘the world to come’ (Heb. 2:5). But there is also the millennial kingdom, in which this world will be redeemed and renewed (Rev. 20:4-6). Finally, there are ‘new heavens and a new earth’ that will exist after ‘the first heaven and the first earth had passed away’ (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). All three of these manifestations of the kingdom of God and of his Messiah seem to be telescoped together in the prophet’s mind.” John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah* (NICOT; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 2:656. Young agrees: “[The new heavens and new earth are] not to be restricted to the first advent but includes the entire reign of Christ, including the second advent and the eternal state.” Young, *Isaiah*, 2:514.

deliverance which are found in 43:18, where רָאָשָׁן is also used.⁸ If this were the case, God would not be speaking of a new heavens and new earth in contrast to the former one; instead, He would be speaking of a new, restored creation where the former distresses are no longer in existence.

Therefore, the distresses and sorrows that plague this current state of this creation will be removed. The state of blessing that will come upon Israel will be so great that they will not remember (ךָּפוּ) the troubles that they had faced before. This assertion is complemented by the statement that the former things will not ascend upon (יֶלּוּ) the heart. The first phrase refers to Israel’s inability to remember their distress. The second phrase refers to the inability of the distresses to enter into Israel’s mind. In other words, Israel’s past distress will not even be a part of their subconscious thoughts, able to come to mind at any moment. In the Messianic Kingdom, Israel’s mind will be so consumed with blessing that they will not be able to remember their times of chastisement and trial.

Rejoicing (vv. 18-19)

The notion that רָאָשָׁן refers to the distress of v. 16 is further amplified by vv. 18-19, which speak of the rejoicing that will take place in the Messianic Kingdom. Verse 18

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⁸Oswalt, Isaiah, 2:656-57.
begins with two commands: \textit{exult} (שׁוּשִׁי) and \textit{rejoice} (נָלָל).\textsuperscript{9} Young states: “The imperatives suggest that the rejoicing is to begin at once because of the imminence of God’s actions and that it will go on \textit{forever} because of the permanence of their results.”\textsuperscript{10}

In other words, Israel should have been able to foresee their future deliverance from exile and have hope in spite of their current situation.

The commands to exult and rejoice forever are a result of God’s creative work. In the second line of v. 18, God says that the creating (כְּבָד) involves making Jerusalem as rejoicing (נָלָל) and His people as exultation (שׁוּשִׁי). The word \textit{as} is supplied in the translation since the objects of God’s creating work are in apposition with other substantives (אֲחַר הָרוֹסַתָּם וּלְלָה הָעֹם מַשְׁאָה). Motyer notes: “Hebrew uses apposition when one thing is so identifiable with another that they can be said to be the same, \textit{i.e.} here Jerusalem and delight, its people and joy, are interchangeable.”\textsuperscript{11} It is striking to note that the emphasis here is upon Jerusalem and her people. This emphasis seems to refer plainly to the physical city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people who would inhabit it. To extend this promise spiritually so that it encompasses the church would be to ignore the language of the text.

\textsuperscript{9}While both are found primarily in poetry, the first is of particular note, as it carries with it a deeper meaning than simply \textit{be glad or delight}. Of its twenty-seven occurrences, שׁוּשִׁי occurs eight times in Isa 61-66 (61:10; 62:5 [2x]; 65:18 [2x], 19; 66:10, 14). It is also used seven times in Psalms, where it refers to general rejoicing. As such, it seems that the word has a poetic and eschatological emphasis in which (a) God rejoices in fulfilling His promises, and (b) His people rejoice in the blessings of those fulfillments. To convey this meaning, as well as to allow for cognates, \textit{exult} was used to render the word.

\textsuperscript{10}Young, \textit{Isaiah}, 3:657, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{11}Alec Motyer, \textit{The Prophecy of Isaiah} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993) 530. See also Young’s description in \textit{Isaiah}, 3:657.
In addition, the chiastic structure is worth noting. The commands to exult and rejoice forever (v. 18a) are complemented by God’s purposes of rejoicing and exultation (v. 18b). That is then followed in v. 19a, where God states that He will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in His people.

Finally, while the first three lines of vv. 18-19 deal with the positive aspects of exultation and rejoicing, the second line of v. 19 states the absence of negative aspects. Not only will there be exultation and rejoicing forever, but the sound of weeping (ֶתָּא) and distress (יָבִיק) will be conspicuously absent.

Longevity (v. 20)

One of the primary causes of grief and weeping today is death, and v. 20 speaks to the reversal of that cause. In this verse, Isaiah prophesies concerning a return to great longevity, something that was lost after the flood (Gen 6:3). Not all hold this view, however. Oswalt believes that the remainder of the chapter merely offers examples as to why there will be no more suffering. He concludes: “These examples simply illustrate all those things that cause sorrow, and they are used to show that such conditions will not exist in the new heavens and earth... This is all a way of saying that in God’s kingdom, no one will weep over the untimely death of a loved one.” Oswalt does not give a specific time period for the new heavens and the new earth, and this may be a way to keep that time period nondescript and general. However, the exact conditions given here seem to

indicate that these are real conditions, not just an allegorical way to depict a lack of suffering.

The first person mentioned in this section on death is the child. The phrase שול ימוי is literally rendered a nursing infant of days. Whybray suggests that a verb is missing and should be supplied, and it could read an infant that lives but a few days.\textsuperscript{13} Blenkinsopp notes: “שול [יומם] is a somewhat unusual term for a child prior to weaning, meaning therefore ages birth to about 3 or 4 years old (1 Sam 1:22-24; 2 Macc 7:27).”\textsuperscript{14} Regardless of the exact time referent in question, the point is that children will not die during childbirth in the Messianic Kingdom as they do now.

The old man is the second person mentioned, and it is noted that he will fill (ちゃん) his days. Just as children will not die before the age of five, so humans will live far past the age they do today. The next phrase states that if someone dies at one hundred, they are but a youth. This further supports the notion that this is a return to the life expectancies of the antediluvian age.

The final clause poses one of the more difficult interpretive questions in the passage. What is meant by בהנהאא יומם? Specifically, should the

\textsuperscript{13} Whybray says another possibility is that יומם is a mistake for ים, and it should read an infant who dies. R. N. Whybray, Isaiah 40-66 (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975) 277. Not only is this an unlikely scribal error, but there is no evidence that suggests this reading.

\textsuperscript{14} Blenkinsopp, Isaiah, 288.
participle הַשָּׁרָה טִיבִּי be rendered *the one who sins* or *the one who misses*? The former would indicate not only would there be sin at this stage of history, but that there would be a curse pronounced on them for their actions. The latter would point to one who does not attain to the one hundred years. Blenkinsopp even suggests that the "MT may be exploiting the double meaning of the verb."

It seems best, however, to render the phrase *the one who sins*. First, it is the normal connotation of the word. While its core meaning is indeed *to miss*, it is virtually always used in reference to sin. The context would have to be clear to demand any other rendering (cf. Job 5:24). Second, the early versions point to *the one who sins*: the

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16 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 284. He concludes, though, that it should be rendered *the one who misses*, although he creates a good argument for the rendering *the one who sins*: “Very clearly, life expectancy has a moral dimension: a long life is correlative with a morally upright life; sickness or premature death is diagnostic of moral disorder. In the dawn of history, the life-span is reduced to 120 years as a result of promiscuous relations between divine males and human females (Gen 6:3). The moral correlation inevitably led to problems when an ostensibly righteous individual died at a young age (Josiah at 39) or an ostensibly wicked person died in the fullness of years (Manasseh at 67). Surprisingly, perhaps, the moral dimension is not in evidence in 65:20, though both the LXX and Vulg., understandably but incorrectly, found a reference to sin in the Hebrew text.” Ibid., 288-89.

17 Out of all its occurrences, HALOT only lists five verses where הַשָּׁרָה טִיבִּי should be translated *to miss*: Prov 8:36; Job 5:24; Eccl 2:26; 7:26; and Isa 65:20. Ludwig Kohler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) (5 vols.; New York, NY: E. J. Brill, 1994) 1:305. However, upon closer inspection, only Job 5:24 carries that semantic force. The verses in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are clearly referring to sin. BDB lists five verses where it should be translated *to miss*: Job 5:24; Prov 8:36; 19:2; 20:2; Hab 2:10; yet again, the Job passage is the only clear example. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006) 306. BDB classifies Isa 65:20 as *to sin against God*. Ibid.
LXX translates אַנְהָןָּו as ἁμαρτωλός (sinner), and the Vulgate as peccator (sinner).\footnote{The English translations are split as to how it should be rendered. The ASV, ESV, and NKJV render the word \textit{the one who sins}. The HCSB, NASB, and NIV chose \textit{the one who misses}.}

Third, the pual form of לָכַט פַּלּוֹת fits this rendering.\footnote{HALOT defines לָכַט in the pual as “to be laid under a curse, be designated, treated, made accursed,” and the qal as “to be small, insignificant.” HALOT, 3:1103-4. The other pual occurrences are in Nah 1:14; Ps 37:22; and Job 24:18. Here in Isa 65, the editors of BHS propose the qal לָכַט instead of the MT reading of לָכַט; however, there is no manuscript evidence, Hebrew or otherwise, that would support this emendation.} If it were qal, it would read \textit{the one who misses... will be insignificant} (i.e., not unusual).\footnote{Watts, \textit{Isaiah}, 351.} This interpretation, however, is to be rejected as it goes against the longevity of life that the passage is highlighting. Finally, Motyer adds: “[This] is a more likely rendering, not least because it matches and prepares for the reference to the serpent in verse 25c and also because it provides negative strengthening for the assertion of the Lord’s total delight in the new city (19ab).”\footnote{Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 530.}

Whether this is the case or not is debatable, but it is insignificant compared to the other arguments given.

In conclusion, the fact that death is mentioned would rule out the notion that this passage is referring to the eternal state. Even within the book, Isaiah prophesies that, at that point, death will eventually be no more (25:8). Therefore, as these blessings are not seen in today’s world, and they are not referring to the eternal state, they must be referring to a time period in between the two: namely, the Messianic Kingdom.
Fruitfulness (vv. 21-23)

Not only will there be rejoicing and longevity, but humanity’s work will be fruitful once again. The first two lines of vv. 21-23 seem to have a direct correlation to the curses found in Deut 28:30; Amos 5:11; Mic 6:14; and Zeph 1:13, where the Israelites are told that they will build houses in which they will not live. As Isaiah prophesies to the contrary, there will come a time when Israel will enjoy the benefits of their work.

Israel’s days are then likened to a tree. Although trees are an important image in the book of Isaiah, they are not always used in a positive manner. Nevertheless, Oswalt succinctly summarizes:

The day will come when Israel’s barren fields will become fertile again even to the point of turning into forests (29:17; 32:15; 35:2) whose glory will be for the Lord (60:13). God will fill the wilderness with trees (41:19; 55:12-13). Despite appearances, those who trust God will not be dry trees (56:3). They will be “oaks of righteousness” (61:3), and will no longer venerate the oaks of human pride (1:29-31).

Therefore, comparing Israel to a tree is not a random metaphor, nor is that metaphor found solely in Isaiah (cf. Ps 92:12-14). Vine takes this phrase to refer back to the longevity of life. However, within the context of fruitfulness, the tree is used to depict much more than that. It is talking about the grandeur and stateliness of the works of the tree.

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22 Oswalt, Isaiah, 2:659, n. 88. The entire footnote traces the development of Isaiah’s use of trees.


24 Young agrees: “The comparison with the days of a tree seems to be based upon the fact that to the Palestinian the tree was a symbol of permanence and endurance. Isaiah does not necessarily mean that just as tree lives for many days, so also will the people, but rather that their life will have the permanence of a tree (cf. Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:1-8).” Young, Isaiah, 3:516.
Isaiah adds a specific word (יהב) to this portion of the prophecy that is worth noting. In as much as Israel will inhabit the houses they build and enjoy the fruit of the vineyards which they plant, they will do so fully. During this time of blessedness in the Messianic Kingdom, Israel will wear out the fruit of their labors because they are able to enjoy the fruit to such an extent.

As such, v. 23 states that Israel will not toil in vain, and they will not give birth for terror. While the idea of the first clause seems to recapitulate the process of building and planting, the second clause recapitulates the longevity of life. The notion of terror (יהב) deals with a mother’s fear that some harm will befall her child. In the Messianic Kingdom, mothers will give birth, resting in the promise that they will see their children grow up and prosper. And, just as the prophecies in vv. 21-22 are a reversal of previous curses, Blenkinsopp rightly notes that this is a reversal of the curse found in Lev 26:16.

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25BDB defines יהב as “to become old and worn out,” but one definition listed under the piel is “to wear out by use, use to the full.” BDB, 115. It is not simply that the houses become run down from use, but that their purposes are fully utilized. Such is the state of blessedness that nothing is left underused.

26Delitzsch notes: “[Mothers] will not weary themselves for failure, nor get children... for some calamity to fall suddenly upon them and carry them away (Lev. xxvi. 16, cf. Ps. lxxviii. 33)... They are a family of the blessed of God, upon whose labor the blessing of God rests, and their offspring are with them, without being lost to them by premature death.” Delitzsch, Isaiah, 2:490-91. Likewise, Oswalt notes: “How futile to undergo the life-threatening pain of giving birth while knowing that disease or famine or sword could send those children to the grave even before their parents.” Oswalt, Isaiah, 2:660. See also Motyer, Isaiah, 531; Westermann, Isaiah, 410; Whybray, Isaiah, 278; and Young, Isaiah, 3:516.

27This serves as another evidence that this passage is referring to the Messianic Kingdom and not the eternal state. Just as with people dying, and sinners being present, the fact that women are giving birth indicates a time prior to the eternal state.

28Blenkinsopp, Isaiah, 289. It is striking to note that in both Isa 65:23 and Lev 26:16, both יהב and יהב are used.
The second clause of v. 23 gives the reason (ד) for all the blessing. The clause lacks a verb, but the proper form of to be should be supplied given the use of the independent personal pronoun (יהוה). A second grammatical note is that the word order places the emphasis on Israel being the seed blessed of YHWH. Lastly, in a passage such as this, where there is much mention of the reversal of covenant curses, it is natural that the covenant name of God (יהוה) is used. Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness and disobedience time and again, they must have a future as a physical nation because God is faithful to His covenant promises.

**Oneness (v. 24)**

Isaiah also prophesies that the Messianic Kingdom will be a time of oneness between Israel and her Messiah. Verse 24 gives credence to the abundant blessings that Israel will be receiving at that time. This blessing is evidenced by God’s response to Israel’s calling and speaking. God not only responds to their requests, but He does so before (יהוה) they are finished speaking. His answering and listening is heightened by the redundant use of the first person independent personal pronoun (יהוה) in addition to the imperfect verbs.

**Peace (v. 25)**

Finally, Isaiah prophesies regarding the peace that will be found in the Messianic Kingdom. Most of v. 25 is reminiscent of the prophecy in Isa 11:6-9, which describes
unlikely pairs of animals eating and living together during the Messianic Kingdom.\textsuperscript{29} During this time of peace and renewal, not only is the curse removed to the extent of death and fruitlessness, but it is removed to the extent of the animal kingdom, as well.\textsuperscript{30}

While v. 25b is also a part of the Isa 11 passage, the third clause of v. 25a must be examined first: נְחֵשׁ תֵּפָר לֹאַחַשׁ. This is the sole line of v. 25 that is not found in Isa 11. For this reason, BHS notes that this is “perhaps a gloss,” and it gives this clause its own line of text. However, since there is no manuscript evidence to suggest this rendering, it

\textsuperscript{29}Blenkinsopp notes, albeit incorrectly: “The scribal addition to the poem (v 25) is an interesting example of prophetic intertextuality, the reuse or ‘recycling’ of existing prophetic sayings by adapting them to new situations. In this instance the scribe has inserted a somewhat abbreviated version of Isa 11:6-9, perhaps reproduced from memory. Only two out of the six pairings of unlike animals (predator and prey) were considered necessary to make the point, omitting therefore leopard and goat; lion cub and calf, together with stall-fed beast; bear, and cow. The scribe also omitted the infant playing in close proximity to cobra and viper, and mention of these dangerous reptiles suggests an addition, drawing on Gen 3:14b. But whoever added this further note was not just presenting an alternative to cobra and viper, as if to say that snakes are to become just ordinary, harmless animals. He was apparently convinced that, having been cursed from the very beginning, snakes are the one exception to this ideal scene of harmony in the animal world. The snake is therefore excluded from this transformation of the natural world, this return to the first creation, in which humans and animals are to live in harmony and none will kill for food (Gen 1:29-30). From this perspective, the new creation is an apokatastasis, a restoration, a return to origins, to the lost world of innocence that came to an end with the great deluge.” Blenkinsopp, \textit{Isaiah}, 290. Leupold counters such argumentation: “Suddenly the thought veers over into the area of nature, characterized by peaceful coexistence of, and with, what were wild beasts. Instead of regarding this as a valuable supplement to what has already been described as a new creation, this verse is treated by some as suspect, as an unfortunate addition. This is an example of the type of criticism which we rightly deplore... True, the passage may be a take-off on 11:6-9, but even our Lord sometimes repeated himself in his discourses spoken here on earth. At least the critic would have us consider the line ‘and dust shall be the serpent’s food’ as a gloss. But even this is a colorful item. It indicates with a kind of half-sigh that the fallen state of man will not be entirely forgotten.” Leupold, \textit{Isaiah}, 2:368.

\textsuperscript{30}The Bible is silent as to the existence of animals in the eternal state; however, it does speak of animals being on the earth during the Messianic Kingdom. As such, this is one more evidence that the Messianic Kingdom is the time period in view.
would be best to see v. 25a as a tricolon line of poetry, as opposed to a bicolon line followed by the phrase *but the serpent's food will be dust*, as indicated in the text.\(^{31}\)

This third part of the tricolon line is obviously a referent to the cursing of the serpent in Gen 3:14. Ridderbos notes: “The implication seems to be that the serpent will submit to its curse without hurting human beings anymore.”\(^{32}\) Nevertheless, the serpent is still intact on the new heavens and the new earth. Goldingay may be correct when he states:

> This surprising comment implies that, for all the vision of new creation, the factors that led to the original human act of uncreation have not been removed. It seems odd that there was present in God’s good creation a creature who encouraged humanity to do other than God said. In parallel, it seems odd that this creature should also be present in the renewed Jerusalem.\(^{33}\)

In other words, the serpent is still allowed to be active during the Messianic Kingdom.

While later revelation will add that Satan is locked in the abyss at this point in time (Rev 20:1-3), the curse is not rolled back so far so as to include all traces of sin. The serpent, then, indicates that while the new heavens and new earth is not yet a totally perfect, glorified state, it is markedly more peaceful.

The final line is the ending summarization of the peaceful nature of this time.

Motyer explains that the *holy mountain* is “the place where the Lord in holiness dwells in

\(^{31}\)Whybray agrees with BHS: “It is probably useless to seek a logical link between this phrase and the rest of the verse. It impairs the metrical structure, and its allusion to the eating habits of animals seems to be its only link with the context.” Whybray, *Isaiah*, 278-79.


the midst of his people, and now, they with him.” The specific expression *My holy mountain* occurs five times in Isa 56-66 (56:7; 57:13; 65:11; 65:25; 66:20), and only once in Isaiah outside that context (11:9). In addition, *the holy mountain* is found in 27:13, where the term is used in conjunction with Jerusalem. Therefore, it seems best to equate *My holy mountain* in 65:11 with the city Jerusalem.

*Other References to the New Heavens and the New Earth*

The term *new heavens and new earth* appears three other times in Scripture. The first mention after Isa 65:17 is in 66:22. It seems best to view the term here as referring to the Messianic Kingdom, as well. First, vv. 14-17 refer to the Second Coming of Christ, an event that takes place prior to the Messianic Kingdom. Second, vv. 20-21 speak of offering sacrifices and the reestablishment of the priests. Lastly, as was the case in 65:25, v. 20 makes reference to God’s *holy mountain*. All of these indicate that the *new heavens and new earth* refer to the Messianic Kingdom set up on this earth.

The NT authors, however, use the term differently. In his second epistle, Peter makes reference to the new heavens and the new earth (*καινοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ γῆν καὶ νησί*) as motivation for believers to live godly lives. In 3:10, Peter says that the heavens, elements, earth, and the works in the earth will all be burnt up and thus pass

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34 Motyer, *Isaiah*, 531.

35 The word πῖ (mountain) is used fifty-seven times in Isaiah. Not including the six instances of *My holy mountain/holy mountain*, πῖ is used nineteen times in reference to Jerusalem and Zion (2:2, 3; 4:5; 8:18; 10:12, 32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 25:6, 7, 10; 27:13; 29:8; 30:29; 31:4; 37:32; 40:9; 65:9). Twice it is referred to as *My mountain* (14:25; 49:11).
Unlike the restoration of the current heavens and earth that Isaiah writes about in his prophecy, Peter is referring to a complete annihilation of the current system. It is no mere refreshing. This annihilation leads to the new heavens and new earth of the eternal state where believers will live forever. Believers are therefore to live looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth and be diligent to be found blameless before Christ.

Like Peter, John uses the term in Rev 21:1 to refer to the eternal state. The events in chap. 21 take place after the Messianic Kingdom and Great White Throne Judgment written about in chap. 20. John saw a new heaven and a new earth ($\omega\iota\nu\rho\alpha\iota\nu\kappa\alpha\i\nu\nu\kappa\alpha\i\nu\kappa\alpha\i\nu\gamma\eta\nu\kappa\alpha\i\nu\kappa\alpha\i\nu\nu$) after the old one passed away (παραληθεν). Unlike the picture of the Messianic Kingdom found in Isa 65, John states in Rev 21:4 that there will be no more death. Also, only glorified believers will be present in the eternal state (21:27), unlike the sinners in the Messianic Kingdom (Isa 65:20).

**Conclusion**

Isaiah 65:17-25 offers a picture of one stage of a yet-future promise to Jerusalem and her people: the Messianic Kingdom. During this time, God’s creative work will cause the earth to be restored, thus reversing the damage and decay of thousands of years

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36 Several different Greek words are used here for the idea of burning: $καυσω\kappa\nu\omega$ (v. 10, 12); $κατακαω$ (v. 10 [supported by the MT and Codex Alexandrinus]); $πυρω$ (v. 12); and $τηκω$ (v. 12).

37 Other commentators support the conclusion that Peter is referring to the eternal state as the new heavens and the new earth. See also Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2006) 340; Thomas Constable, “Notes on 2 Peter,” 41-42 [cited 1 May 2009]. Online: http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/2peter.pdf; and R. Larry Overstreet, “A Study of 2 Peter 3:10-13,” *BSac* 137 (1980) 358-61. It is worth noting that this author does not agree with all of Overstreet’s statements, but he nevertheless presents evidence that supports the conclusion of this paper as it pertains to 2 Peter.
of history, particularly the previous seven years of the Tribulation. God will cause the people to forget their former sorrows and griefs associated with the old system (v. 17). The Messianic Kingdom will be a time of great rejoicing and exultation, when weeping and distress will be done away (v. 18-19). One of the reasons why there will be much exultation and rejoicing is that longevity of life and its fruitfulness will be restored. God asserts this to be the case because Israel is the seed blessed of YHWH (vv. 20-23).

Finally, Isaiah records the future reversal of the curse on the animal kingdom, causing peace to come upon it. The serpent, while still in existence, is rendered harmless and reduced to eating dust. Israel will not be involved with evil or destruction (vv. 24-25).

Over the decades that Isaiah was writing and prophesying, Israel and Judah were both in spiritual decline. Had God not made unconditional covenants with the nation, it would be easy to understand why God would have given up on them, letting them enter into permanent exile. However, God did promise to make Abraham a great nation with an abundant land, a multitude of people, and His glorious blessing (Gen 12). For this reason, they were, and still are, destined to fulfill that divine promise. Nothing can take away from God’s faithfulness to His people.
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