

Isaiah Part 41: God's answers – the Millennium, new heavens, new earth

Isaiah 65

God answers the prayers of the remnant (Isaiah 65 v 1 to 16)

Verses 1 to 7 provide God's immediate answer: The LORD will indeed bless his genuine servants. "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by my name" (v 1) – the Jewish exiles in Babylon were examples of those who did ask for the LORD; but they would not find him, because for the most part they sought him insincerely. Yet, God would be found by those who did not seek him – namely, the Gentiles!

"I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people" (v 2) – God had not ignored the Jewish exiles in Babylon: he stretched out his hands to them all day long. Some responded (like Daniel, or like the one praying in Isaiah 63 v 7 to 64 v 12), but most were a rebellious people, "walking in a way that is not good, following their own devices" (see Judges 17 v 6; Judges 21 v 25; Proverbs 14 v 12; Proverbs 16 v 25). Paul quotes this passage in Romans 10 v 20, 21.

- What do verses 1 to 7 tell us about God? Why has God been unable to answer these prayers for Israel's salvation? See Isaiah 59 v 1, 2. How does God deal with the people of Israel in v 8 to 16?

"A people who provoke me to my face continually" (v 3) – the people who 'follow their own devices' express themselves in offensive and unholy ways (v 3, 4). "Do not come near me, for I am too holy for you" (v 5) – they could persist in this 'holier than thou' attitude even in the midst of such extreme offence before God. No wonder God considers such people as "smoke in my nostrils", and promises judgment: "I will not keep silent, but I will repay... both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together" (v 6, 7).

"Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all" (v 8) – despite the rebellious behaviour of many, God still has his servants, and he will bless and restore them. They will be regathered into his land, for he says: "My chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there" (v 9). The picture is that God finds a few 'good grapes' among the corrupt cluster of his people, and it is for their sake that the LORD blesses and restores. A theologian once commented: 'If the Church had clearly understood this simple example, it would not have dared to teach Israel's total rejection.'

"But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain" (v 11) – are destined for judgment, "because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen" (v 12). In addition to all their other sins was the sin of simply refusing to listen to God's correction. It is one thing to fall into sin through weakness or ignorance; refusing to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit is far worse.

"Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry... (v 13) – the true servants of God among the remnant of Israel will be blessed, but the false servants will be cursed. Why? "So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth" (v 16). If God does not reward his true servants, and judge his false servants, then God is not shown to be the "God of truth" – which literally means 'the God of the Amen', who keeps all his promises (see 2 Corinthians 1 v 20; Revelation 3 v 14).

New heavens, new earth and the Millennium (Isaiah 65 v 17 to 25)

- What will God's chosen people experience in Jerusalem in the Millennium (the glorious 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ) and into eternity? How does this contrast with the judgement of those who forsake God (v 1 to 15)?

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“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (v 17) – this is the ultimate answer to the problem of man’s sin, and takes place after the Millennium, when this earth and sky are done away with and God makes new heavens and a new earth. Peter uses this promise to encourage believers to holy living (2 Peter 3 v 13), and John alludes to this in Revelation 21 v 1. From Revelation we understand that this ‘new creation’ takes place after the Judgment of the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20 v 11 to 15), and is connected not with the millennial earth, but with the eternal state.

“And the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” – this is another indication that verse 17 does not refer to the millennial earth. Other Scriptures show that in the Millennium there will be definite remembrance of ‘former things’: the whole temple ritual described in Ezekiel chapters 40 to 46 will be a remembrance of the former days of Levitical sacrifice. Psalm 72 indicates that the former nations of the world will remain, after judgment, and will serve the LORD and Israel. “I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness” (v 18) – Revelation 21 v 2 to 27 describes the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to the new earth. In this eternal Jerusalem the “sound of weeping” shall no longer be heard.

“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” (v 20) – now Isaiah is speaking about the Millennium. There will be death, but in the transformed *biology* and *ecology* (v 25) of the millennial earth, people will live incredibly long, as they did in the days before the flood. If someone dies 100 years old, people will consider that person a ‘young man’ and ‘accursed’.

“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit... my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (v 21, 22) – the millennial reign of Christ will also be a time of *social* transformation when perfect justice reigns over the earth. One significant reason there will be such justice is that Satan will be bound for these 1,000 years, unable to work his destructive mischief (Revelation 20 v 1 to 3). “They shall not labour in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD” (v 23) – there will be babies born and children raised; in the millennial earth, those allowed to enter are “blessed of the LORD”, and they and their descendants will populate the earth.

“Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (v 24) – the millennial reign of Christ will also be a time of profound *spiritual* transformation and intimacy. There will be an immediate and constant sense of the presence of God, and “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11 v 9). While the opportunity for such a close relationship with God will be widely enjoyed, we know that not everyone on the millennial earth will be saved, because: (i) at the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan is released from his confinement and finds many willing servants on earth, whom he gathers for one last, futile rebellion against God (Revelation 20 v 7 to 9); (ii) Zechariah 14 v 16 to 19 and Psalm 2 (e.g. v 9) describe the firm rule of the Messiah, dealing with those who do not surrender to his reign, and enforcing righteousness over all the earth.

“The wolf and the lamb shall graze together” (v 25) – the millennial earth will also see a remarkable *ecological* transformation: no longer will predators stalk their victims. “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain” – this is the glorious result of the transformation that happens during the millennial earth. The world will be different biologically, spiritually, socially, and ecologically.

There are more than 20 different passages in the Old Testament that describe this 1,000-year period when Jesus rules over the earth: (i) King David will have a prominent place in the millennial earth (Isaiah 55 v 3 to 5; Jeremiah 30 v 8, 9; Ezekiel 34 v 23, 24; Hosea 3 v 5); (ii) there will be blessing and security for national Israel (Amos 9 v 11 to 15); (iii) this will be a time of purity and devotion to God (Zechariah 13 v 1 to 3); (iv) Israel will be a nation of prominence (Ezekiel 17 v 22 to 24); (v) there will be a rebuilt temple and restored temple service (Ezekiel 40 to 48; Ezekiel 37 v 26 to 28; Ezekiel 20 v 39 to 44); (vi) the New Testament promises a literal reign of Jesus Christ (Luke 1 v 32, 33); (vii) in their resurrected state, the saints will be given responsibilities in the Millennium according to their faithful service (Luke 19 v 11 to 27; Revelation 20 v 4 to 6; Revelation 2 v 26 to 28; Revelation 3 v 12, 21; 1 Corinthians 6 v 2, 3).