

Rebirth of Planet Earth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

One day, a 12-year-old boy, having just read a book on astronomy, refused to go to school. His mother, hysterical, took the child to the family doctor, who asked, “Billy, what’s the matter? Why don’t you want to study or go to school any more?”

“Because, Doctor,” he said, “I read in this astronomy book that one day the sun is going to burn out and all life on earth will vanish. I don’t see any reason to do anything if, in the end, everything will die out.”

The mother, hysterical, shouted, “It’s not your business! It’s not your business!”

The doctor, after calming down the mother, turned to the little boy, smiled, and said, “But, Billy, you don’t need to worry, because by the time this happens, we’ll all be long dead, anyway.”

Of course, that’s part of the problem: In the end, we’re all dead, anyway.

Fortunately, our existence doesn’t have to end in death. On the contrary, we have been offered life, eternal life, in a world made new.

The Week at a Glance: What final hope does Isaiah present us? How can Gentiles become priests and Levites? How does Isaiah contrast the fate of the wicked with that of the redeemed?

Memory Text: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17, NRSV).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 26.*

New Heavens and a New Earth (*Isa. 65:17-25*).

Read Isaiah 65:17-25. What kind of restoration does the Lord promise here?

God promises a new creation, beginning with the words: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (*Isa. 65:17, NRSV*). In this remarkable prophecy, the Lord promises to “create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight” (*vs. 18, NRSV*). In the city there will be no more weeping (*vs. 19*). People normally will live considerably longer than a century before they die (*vs. 20*). Their work and children will remain for them to enjoy (*vs. 21-23*). God will answer them even before they call (*vs. 24*).

However nice, why is it not a complete picture of our final restoration, our final hope?

Thus far we have a picture of tranquil long lives in the Promised Land. But even though people live longer, they still die. Where is the radical transformation of nature we expect with the creation of “new heavens” and a “new earth”? The next verse tells us: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (*vs. 25, NRSV*).

For carnivores such as lions to become vegetarian requires far more than a vegetarian cooking class. It requires a re-creation to restore the world to its ideal state, as it was before sin in Eden introduced death.

What we have here in Isaiah 65 is God presenting the creation of “new heavens” and a “new earth” as a process, series of steps, that begins with the re-creation of Jerusalem. Compare Isaiah 11, where the Messiah would bring justice (*vs. 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.

Suppose instead of living 60,70,90, or even 100 years, most people lived a million years or more. Why, still, would the fundamental problem of humanity not be solved? Why is eternal life the only answer to our deepest human needs?

Divine “Magnet” (*Isa. 66:1-19*).

Read Isaiah 66:1-19. Keeping in mind the time in which Isaiah wrote, what is the basic message he is giving here?

Through the prophet, God reiterates the appeal and warning that permeates the book: God will save and restore the humble, who tremble at His word (*vss. 2, 5*). As in Isaiah 40:1, He will comfort them (*vs. 13*). But He will destroy those who rebel against Him. These include hypocrites of ritual, whose sacrifices He rejects (*Isa. 66:3, 4; compare Isa. 1:10-15*), as well as those who hate and reject His faithful ones (*Isa. 66:5*). They also include those who practice pagan abominations (*vs. 17*) like those practiced at the temple in Jerusalem (*Ezek. 8:7-12*).

Look at Isaiah 66:3. What is this text saying? What spiritual principles are being revealed here? How might the same idea be expressed, but in the context of contemporary Christianity and worship?

How does God serve as a magnet to draw the nations to Himself? *Isa. 66:18, 19*.

Following the destruction of His enemies (*vss. 14-17*), God reveals His glory so that He becomes a magnet to draw people to Jerusalem (*compare Isa. 2:2-4*). He sets a “sign” among them, which is not specified here but apparently refers to the sign last mentioned by Isaiah: God gives His people joy and peace and restores their land (*Isa. 55:13*). When He reveals His glory by restoring His people after destruction, this is a sign of His restored favor, just as He gave Noah the sign of the rainbow after the Flood (*Gen. 9:13-17*).

Read Isaiah 66:5. What does it mean to tremble at His word? Why does the Lord want us to tremble at His word? If you don’t, what might that say about the condition of your heart?

Missionaries and Worship Leaders *(Isa. 66:19-21)*.

What is the meaning of survivors' bringing people from the nations as an offering to the Lord? *Isa. 66:19, 20*.

God sends survivors of His destruction out to the ends of the earth, to people who do not know about God, “and they shall declare my glory among the nations” (*vs. 19, NRSV*). This is one the clearest Old Testament statements of the theme of missionary outreach. In other words, not only are people to be drawn to the Hebrew nation but some of the Hebrew people will go to other nations and teach them about the true God—a paradigm that is explicit in the New Testament. Though there was Jewish missionary outreach between the time of return from exile and the time of Christ (*Matt. 23:15*), the early Christians spread the gospel rapidly and on a massive scale (*Col. 1:23*).

Just as the Israelites brought grain offerings to the Lord at His temple, so the missionaries would bring an offering to Him. But their offering would be “all your kindred from all the nations” (*Isa. 66:20, NRSV*). Just as grain offerings were gifts to God that were not slaughtered, the converts brought to the Lord would be presented to Him as “living sacrifices” (*compare Rom. 12:1*). For the idea that people could be presented as a kind of offering to God, compare the much earlier dedication of Levites “as an elevation offering from the Israelites, that they may do the service of the Lord” (*Num. 8:11, NRSV*).

What is the significance of God's promise to “take some of them as priests and as Levites” (*Isa. 66:21, NRSV*)?

The “them” in verse 21 refers to “your kindred from all the nations” (*NRSV*) in the previous verse. These are Gentiles, some of whom God would choose as worship leaders, along with the priests and Levites. This is a revolutionary change. God previously had authorized only descendants of Aaron to serve as priests and only other members of the tribe of Levi to assist them. Gentiles could not literally become descendants of Aaron or Levi, but God would authorize some to serve in these capacities, which had previously been forbidden to most Jews.

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10. To whom is Peter writing? What is he saying? What message does he have for each of us, as members of a “holy nation” today? Are we doing any better than the original people (*Exod. 19:6*)?

Community of Faith *(Isa. 66:21)*.

The Israelites were “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (*Exod. 19:6, NRSV*) with special priests set apart to represent them as worship leaders. But in the future, some Gentiles would become worship leaders (*Isa. 66:21*).

How would this change affect the renewed community of faith? See *Matt. 28:19, Acts 26:20, Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11, 1 Tim. 3:16*.

In God’s “new world order,” Gentiles would not only join God’s people, they would be equal partners with Jews in a combined community of faith that would be a “royal priesthood.” Therefore, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles would become functionally irrelevant.

When was this prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled?

Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, proclaimed: “There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:28, 29, NRSV*).

Becoming heirs of the promise and therefore an exalted “royal priesthood” was not a mandate for smug elitism but a commission to join the Jews in proclaiming “the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (*2 Pet. 2:9, NRSV; compare Isa. 66:19*).

The elevation of Gentiles did not entitle Jews to grumble that God was unfair in giving them the same reward. Nor did it entitle Gentiles to treat their Jewish brothers and sisters with disrespect any more than workers hired late in the day should look down on those hired earlier (*compare Matt. 20:1-16*). The Jews had first been “entrusted with the oracles of God” (*Rom. 3:2, NRSV*) as God’s channel of revelation. Paul wrote to Gentiles: “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches” (*Rom. 11:17, 18, NRSV*).

Why, in light of the Cross, in light of the gospel commission, is any kind of spiritual or ethnic or even political elitism so abhorrent in the sight of God? Look closely at yourself; are you harboring any sense of spiritual or ethnic superiority? If so, repent!

So Shall Your Seed and Your Name Remain (*Isa. 66:22-24*).

One of the most wonderful promises in Isaiah is found in Isaiah 66:22. Read it carefully. In the new heavens and the new earth, our seed and our name shall remain—forever. No more blotting out, or cutting off, or grafting in, plucking up, or uprooting. We have here a promise of eternal life in a world made new—a world without sin, without death, without suffering, a new heaven and a new earth, the final and complete fulfillment of our Christian faith, the consummation of what Christ had accomplished for us at the Cross.

Why are there new moons along with Sabbaths in the depiction of the new heavens and the new earth as presented in Isaiah 66:23?

Though there are a number of different ways to look at this difficult text, one approach is this: God created the Sabbath before the sacrificial system existed (*Gen. 2:2, 3*). So, although Sabbaths were honored by the ritual system, they are not dependent upon it. Thus, they continue uninterrupted throughout the restoration period, on into the new earth. There is no indication in the Bible that new moons were legitimate days of worship apart from the sacrificial system. But perhaps there will be worship days (but not necessarily rest days like weekly Sabbaths) in the new earth, possibly in connection with the monthly cycle of the tree of life (*Rev. 22:2*).

Whatever specific meaning Isaiah 66:23, the crucial point seems to be that God's people will be worshipping Him throughout all eternity.

Why does Isaiah end with the negative picture of saved people looking at the corpses of rebels destroyed by God (vs. 24)?

As a graphic warning to the people of his day, Isaiah encapsulates the contrast between faithful survivors of the Babylonian destruction and rebels, who would be destroyed. This is not everlasting torment: The rebels are dead, killed by "fire," a destruction that was not quenched until it did its job so that the re-creation of Jerusalem could begin.

Isaiah's warning points forward to an ultimate fulfillment prophesied by the book of Revelation: Destruction of sinners, Satan, and death in a lake of fire (*Revelation 20*), after which there will be "a new heaven and a new earth," a holy "new Jerusalem," and no more weeping or pain, "for the first things have passed away" (*Rev. 21:1-4, NRSV; compare Isa. 65:17-19*), a new existence, with eternal life for all who are redeemed from the earth.

Further Study: On the final cleansing of planet Earth from sin, read Ellen G. White, “The Controversy Ended,” in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 662–678.

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.

“ ‘And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.’ *Revelation 5:13*.

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is the promise of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth so basic to our Christian belief? What good would our faith be without that promise?
- 2 Read 2 Peter 3:10-14. How do these verses reflect the same idea presented in Isaiah 66?

Summary: Isaiah presents a vision of staggering scope. Not only would God purge and restore His community of faith; He would enlarge its borders to encompass all nations. Ultimately the re-creation of His community would lead to the re-creation of planet Earth, where His presence would be the ultimate comfort of His people.

A Woman's Work

J. H. ZACHARY

Pretti Sangam and his wife, Sharda, are the only Christians in their village in India. Everyone else is either Hindu or Muslim. Pretti earns his living by doing odd jobs.

Sharda wanted to share the joy and hope she had found in Jesus with the other women in her village. She began visiting from home to home, offering to read a few verses from the Bible. Several women invited her to come back. She prayed that the Holy Spirit would touch their hearts. For the first time in their lives these Hindu and Muslim women listened to the Word of God. Sharda began giving Bible studies to the women who requested them.

However, three families rejected her efforts. "If you do not stop this work we will burn down your house," they threatened. Instead of asking God for protection, Pretti and Sharda asked God to touch the hearts of these families. God honored their prayer, and in time all the families who had resisted her efforts for the women had agreed to study the Bible with her.

During a recent festival of baptism, Sharda and Pretti brought 32 persons to be baptized. One of them was Sharda's sister-in-law, Palandi. She testified, "My religion did not meet my heart needs. I was impressed by Sharda's loving prayers. When she took me to the Adventist church, I felt the presence of God." Palandi is now sharing her faith with her extended family. Her powerful testimony is reaching their hearts. She prays that all 20 family members will soon begin studying the Bible.

The group of new believers in the village is already too large to fit into Pretti's tiny home. When the weather is good they sit on the ground as Sharda teaches them from the Bible. The Southern Asia Division has purchased land, and *The Quiet Hour* is helping

build a chapel for them. Sharda and Pretti continue evangelizing. Currently they are studying with 60 interested neighbors in 15 families.

While Sharda visits homes in her village, Pretti goes to a neighboring village to give Bible studies. They do this work as volunteers because they love the Lord. Their goal is to lead at least 100 persons to Christ and to plant a church in a second village this year.



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This quarter's Bible Study Guide, *Religion in Relationships*, by Reinder Bruinsma, will guide us in a study of numerous passages of Scripture, with the intention of increasing our awareness of the ways by which our faith impacts our relationship to others—to those who are close to us and those who are afar. We will discuss how we can strengthen those relationships, even restore them if they have somehow broken down. We will discover that, indeed, there is more *religion in relationships* than many may suspect.

Lesson 1—Created for Community

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: “It is Not Good for the Man to Be Aone,” (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*).

MONDAY: Religion Has Social Dimensions (*Exod. 20:2-17, Matt. 7:12*).

TUESDAY: Building Relationships Takes Effort (*Matt. 5:9*).

WEDNESDAY: The Basis (*1 Cor. 13:1-13*).

THURSDAY: God Always Comes First (*Luke 14:26*).

Memory Text—1 John 4:7, NIV

Sabbath Gem: And, yet, amid all this loneliness is the biblical ideal, which is that we live in community with others—with family, friends, colleagues, authorities, fellow church members, et cetera. The question is, How does God want us to do it?

Lesson 2—“Honor Your Father and Your Mother”

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Respect for “Gray Hair” (*1 Pet. 5:5*).

MONDAY: Honoring Our Parents (*Exod. 20:12*).

TUESDAY: What About Obedience (*Eph. 6:1-3, Col. 3:20*).

WEDNESDAY: Parents and Children: Part 1.

THURSDAY: Parents and Children: Part 2.

Memory Text—*Isaiah 6:1, NRSV*.

Sabbath Gem: This week we'll take a look at how children, or even how adults, should relate not only to their parents but to those who are older, in general. Because, in almost all cases, no matter who we are or how old we are, we come in contact with those who are even older.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 68506-0097.