

LESSON 13 *June 19-25

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.*

SUNDAY June 20

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Isaiah 66, 67.*

Teachers Aim:

1. To convey the hope of eternal life.
2. To show how we can receive eternal life.

Lesson Outline:

I. We Have This Hope.

- A. Isaiah 65:17 begins a passage with familiar language of a new heaven and earth. But it soon becomes clear that this is not the final hope of the righteous, for there is still death and sacrifice.
- B. Shifting from the temporal to the eternal, Isaiah offers a picture of God's final promise of an eternal home for the righteous, balanced by a graphic image of those who do not accept this promise.

II. To Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People.

- A. Eternal life is the consummation of the work already accomplished at the Cross through the suffering servant portrayed in Isaiah.
- B. Through the scattered people of Israel, God invites all nations to witness His glory as equal members in His community of faith.

Summary: The crimson threads of salvation and restoration run throughout God's warnings to His people and end in a new heaven and a new earth as dwelling places for God and the righteous who come from around the globe.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: Rebirth of Planet Earth.

The drama between good and evil ends in the triumph of goodness. But this end is really only the beginning of eternal joy and glory for the Lord and His redeemed, because in the "ages to come He might shew [to us] the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (*Eph. 2:7, NKJV*).

I. A Brave New World (*Isa. 65:17-25*).

When God blots out evil at the end of the executive judgment (*Revelation 20*), He will create new heavens and a new earth. This removal of everything negative clears the way for the establishment of everything positive. No insensitive hands, no discordant notes, no foul deeds will taint the tapestry of God's magnificent handiwork. All life will be alive with untainted joy, grace, love, and the sounds of praise and thanksgiving to God. If we are faithful, our voices will blend with those of all the blood-washed saints and celestial beings.



June 21

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 (vs. 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 (vs. 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

No painful flashbacks will haunt us, for the old conditions “shall not be remembered, nor [come upon the heart]” (*Isa. 65:17, KJV, margin*). This does not mean we will have amnesia but that these things “will no longer distress or annoy the mind or cause feelings of remorse.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 333.

II. Citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Heaven will not be populated with self-promoters who have bulled their way to the head of the line, for many who are now first will be last, and the last shall be first (*see Matt. 19:30*). God looks on the heart, while we look on the outward appearance. Those who revere God’s Word above their own or anyone else’s are taught by God to grow in the image of His Son (*Rom. 8:29*). When Jesus returns, bearing the name “The Word of God,” He will gather into His kingdom all who have been truly sanctified by His Word and who have honored its counsels (*Rev. 12:17, 3:10, 14:12, 19:13*). Realizing their deep need, they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. They have cooperated with God’s grace, which provided them with the power they needed for victory and character development (*see 2 Pet. 1:3-11, Rev. 3:5, 12:11*).

III. Live Offerings Are Fruits of the Gospel (*Isa. 60:5-7, 66:19-21, Rom. 15:16*).

The only workmanship we will carry into heaven comes in the form of those whose salvation we have helped to obtain (*see 1 Thess. 2:19, 20; Col. 1:27-29*). “There [in heaven] all who have wrought with unselfish spirit will behold the fruit of their labors. The outworking of every right principle and noble deed will be seen. Something of this we see here. But how little of the result of the world’s noblest work is in this life manifest to the doer! . . .

“Many a worker sends out into the world messages of strength and hope and courage, words that carry blessing to hearts in every land; but of the results he, toiling in loneliness and obscurity, knows little. So gifts are bestowed, burdens are borne, labor is done. Men sow the seed from which, above their graves, others reap blessed harvests. . . . In the hereafter the action and reaction of all these will be seen.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 305, 306.

IV. Glories and Privileges of the World Beyond (*Isa. 66:22, 23; Rev. 1:5, 6*).

It lies beyond our present scope to imagine the privileges and joys awaiting us (*see Isa. 64:4, 1 Cor. 2:9*). How can we really grasp what it means to be a priest and ruler in the realms of glory? We may have some faint knowledge as to what this entails by reading such passages as Exodus 19:4-6, 1 Peter 2:5-10, Revelation 5:8-10, and Revelation 20:4.

TUESDAY June 22

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*)?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

“There we shall know even as also we are known. There the loves and sympathies that God has planted in the soul will find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages, the sacred fellowship that binds together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’—all are among the experiences of the hereafter.

“There will be music there, and song, such music and song as, save in the visions of God, no mortal ear has heard or mind conceived.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 65, 66; Revelation 21, 22.*

❶ Contrast Isaiah 65:20, which says, “for the child shall die an hundred years old” with Revelation 21:4, which states, “there shall be no more death.” Give an explanation for this apparent contradiction.

❷ Isaiah 66:19, 20 may be the first scriptural reference to the idea of being a witness to nonbelievers (Gentiles). Examining this text helps us to understand why or how the Pharisees rejected the prophecies about Jesus found in Isaiah. The idea of preaching to and saving Gentiles should not have been a new concept to those who prided themselves in knowing and living by the Word of God. Yet, they were agitated and offended when Christ and His disciples preached to Gentiles. When you are baptized, you present your body as “a living sacrifice,” an offering unto God (*Rom. 12:1*). How does Christ’s admonition in Matthew 28:19 further prove that He and His Father are One?

❸ How does Isaiah 66:21 encourage converts that God still has a purpose for them in His ministry? What does this text say to well-seasoned Christians about encouraging new believers to be active in the church?

❹ Compare Isaiah 65 and 66 with Revelation 21 and 22. How do the words of Isaiah prove to be prophetic when looking at the words of John the revelator? How do Isaiah’s words prove the statement in Malachi 3:6 that God does not change? The fact that God provided these warnings, instructions, and encouragement in both the Old and the New Testament proves that He has given people throughout the ages an opportunity to know Him and accept His Son. It also dispels the argument that the Old and New Testaments contradict each other.

WEDNESDAY June 23

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!

TEACHERS COMMENTS

“ ‘As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there.’ Psalm 87:7. ‘They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord.’ Isaiah 24:14.

“ ‘For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.’ Isaiah 51:3.

“There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 306, 307.

Witnessing

You probably would not refuse a gift based on the wrapping paper. After all, wrapping paper rarely has anything to do with the gift inside.

If, however, you were foolish enough to refuse a gift because of its packaging, you most likely would miss receiving a lovely gift.

The above scenario is similar to what would happen if you remained aloof from people who were a bit different from you in their culture, language, gender, appearance, physical or mental health, etc. All these things, and more, contribute to a person’s identity. But unless you have arrived at the very core or essence of each separate individual by personally getting to know him or her, you have only perceived who he or she is through your five senses.

Our church is made up of more than twelve million individuals representing hundreds of nations around the globe. What a rich tapestry of heritage this brings to our denomination as a whole and to each one of us individually! The ribbon that weaves around each one of us, binding us together for eternity, is the love we share for our heavenly Father. Just imagine what heaven and the new earth will be like because of this love.

This week, think of someone in your local church who is quite different from you yet bound to you by that ribbon of love for God. Write or call this person to express your appreciation for his or her contribution to God’s church and your life. Pray with this person that God will continue to bless your friendship and that His coming will be soon.

THURSDAY June 24

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 worshiping 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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Magnets pull opposites together, and they are hard to disconnect once they become attached to each other. Is it possible that we can use our love for Jesus and the plan of salvation like a magnet in attracting nonbelievers to His message? Would it not be great if the magnetic connection between all of us became so strong that we would be united for all of eternity?

Thought Questions:

❶ The scientific community focuses on developing new cures and means by which people may live longer. Cryogenics (placing the body in a frozen state following death) is emerging as one possible way to do this. However, is this really the way we want to go? Why should the quality of life be more important than the quantity of time we spend on earth? We must ask ourselves two questions: (1) If we live longer, will we not perpetuate living in a sinful state and delay Christ's coming? (2) Will living longer give us more time to save more people?

❷ Jesus *leveled the playing field* centuries ago when He equalized the inherent value of Jews and Gentiles. Yet, it appears that God's people still struggle with treating one another as equals. What continues to make this an issue in our personal lives and within the church?

Application Questions:

❶ Christians know it takes human involvement to spread salvation. All of us can be involved in some way, whether on a layperson's or worker's basis, paid or unpaid. "In the very family, the neighborhood, the town, where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 141. Discuss some of the challenges of mission service. What are some of the positive aspects?

❷ Review Hymn 213 from *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. How do you plan to share with others that Jesus is coming soon? Prepare your heart for His return.

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.