

## **A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism**

(Part XI)

**Prof. David J. Engelsma**

### **A Spiritual Fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff**

(Concluded)

The postmillennial dream of a “Christianized” world in history rests finally on Old Testament prophecy of a coming, glorious kingdom of Christ (see the editorial, “Those Glorious Prospects in Old Testament Prophecy,” in the Aug. 1, 1996 *Standard Bearer*).

That Old Testament prophecy which more than any other is supposed to prove postmillennialism and refute amillennialism is Isaiah 65:17ff.:

*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth ... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.... There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.*

Postmillennialism, which can find no support in the New Testament’s massive teaching of apostasy from and persecution of the church in the last days, appeals to Old Testament prophecy inasmuch as postmillennialism insists on interpreting this prophecy literally. On a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff., there will be an earthly fulfillment of the prophecy: an earthly kingdom of Christ with carnal delights, especially long physical life (see the editorial, “A Spiritual Interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff.,” in the Sept. 15, 1996 *SB*; for the postmillennial interpretation of the Isaiah passage, see the editorial in the Aug. 1, 1996 *SB*, pp. 439, 440).

In the editorials in the September 15 and October 1, 1996 issues of the *SB*, I demonstrated that there neither *may* nor *can* be a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff. The prophecy must be interpreted spiritually and has, accordingly, a spiritual fulfillment.

What now is the spiritual interpretation and fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff.?

Comprehensively, Isaiah 65:17-25 prophesies the entire saving work of God in Jesus Christ. As is customary with the prophets, Isaiah sees this work as one, great event, much as one sees the distant mountains as one, great range. Included are both the

perfection of salvation (and of the Messianic kingdom) in the Day of Christ and the beginning of salvation (and of the Messianic kingdom) throughout the present age between Pentecost and the Day of Christ. All of this salvation, of course, has its basis in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for God's elect world.

That this is, in fact, the content of Isaiah's prophecy is proved from New Testament comment on the passage. In II Peter 3:13, the apostle applies the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17 to God's work in Jesus Christ on the day of Christ's second coming. In the context of the teaching that the present creation will be destroyed by fire, Peter says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The apostle Paul, however, instructs us that there is also a fulfillment of the prophecy throughout the present age. In II Corinthians 5:17, he tells us that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The authoritative New Testament explanation of the prophecy is that God's saving work in Christ will be a renewal of the creation for the benefit of the church, the "elect" of Isaiah 65:22, at the second coming of Jesus, which renewal begins already now in the regeneration of each elect personally.

There is nothing in the New Testament reflection on the prophecy that so much as hints at an earthly kingdom in history consisting of carnal benefits, physical dominion, and worldly peace.

Specifically, Isaiah 65:17ff. is the prophecy of the new world of heavens and earth that Jesus Christ will create at His second coming. This is the plain teaching of Isaiah 65:17ff. itself: "I create new heavens and a new earth." This is the New Testament explanation both in II Peter 3:13, already quoted, and in Revelation 21:1: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."

When He comes again in the body, at the end of history, Jesus Christ will destroy the present form of the creation in order to re-create the heavens and earth that God made in the beginning in their new, glorious, final form. The creation will share in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-22).

This new world will be the dwellingplace the home — of the new human race in Christ, the elect church from all nations, believers and their children (Is. 65:22, 23). The new creation will be home to the saints because Jehovah God will live with them there in Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the everlasting covenant. The new world that is coming will be "my holy mountain" (Is. 65:25).

There will be no trouble and no sorrow there, absolutely none — not one tear (Is. 65:19). Revelation 21:4, the New Testament light on the prophecy, informs us that the

reason is that there will be no death in the new world. Christ, mighty Messianic king, will have destroyed the last enemy for us (II Cor. 15:26).

As is typical of Old Testament prophecy, the prophet announced this coming deathless world in figurative language: long, earthly life (v.20). No baby will die in infancy; to die at 100 years of age would be accounted mere childhood; all the inhabitants will fill their days. The reality is: no death! everlasting life in resurrected soul and body, because the life of the people of God in the new world will be the immortal life of the risen Christ.

The New Testament gives this explanation of this and similar, figurative Old Testament prophecies everywhere, e.g., John 5:25, 26. Revelation 21:4, the authoritative New Testament interpretation of Isaiah 65:20, puts beyond any doubt that this is what Isaiah meant: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; *and there shall be no more death.*"

Cursed sinners will be excluded from the new world, existing everlastingly under God's curse in hell (Is. 65:20b; cf. Rev. 21:8).

The lifting of the curse from God's beloved world on the basis of Christ's redeeming death and by the power of His renewing Spirit will extend to the animals. There will be animals in the new creation, just as there were animals in the original creation of Genesis 1 and 2. Christ's redemption will be enjoyed by them, so that they will live in peace with each other as they did in the original phase of creation before the transgression of the first and unfaithful king (Gen. 1:29-31). There will be no death in the world of animal and plant.

The complete absence of death in the new world will be due to the perfect purging of sin from the creation. Peter tells us this "...wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13). Only righteousness will dwell there. No unrighteousness whatever will be found there. All ungodly men will have perished under the judgment of God (v.7).

Is this not a wonderful salvation?

Do not believers and their offspring have a grand hope, abundantly able to sustain them in all their present tribulations?

Is not the everlasting kingship and kingdom of Jesus the Messiah glorious?

Will not His victory be manifested as incomparable? All foes destroyed, even death. All God's people perfectly delivered from sorrow and death unto the bliss of fellowship with the triune God in His Face, Jesus the Christ. The creation itself transformed into a new world, whose goodness and splendor cause the old form of the world to fade forever into forgottenness.

All this fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. will be spiritual. The prophecy holds before us, as it held before the true Israelite in Isaiah's day, a spiritual salvation; spiritual blessings;

spiritual life; and, indeed, a spiritual world. For the last Adam is spiritual, and we expect to live a spiritual life in our spiritual body in a spiritual creation (I Cor. 15:42ff.).

The second specific fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. is the spiritual life in Christ by faith of every regenerated child of God in the time between Pentecost and the second coming. This is the authoritative explanation of the Isaiah prophecy by the apostle in II Corinthians 5:17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." He is a new creature already, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17.

The new world that is coming in the Day of Christ already breaks into the present world by the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ. It breaks into the heart of every elect child of God. It makes him a new creature. There is in his life a beginning of the deliverance from sin, sorrow, and death; of the joy; of the profitable, holy work; of the fellowship with God; of the everlasting life, of Isaiah 65:17ff. This shows itself in his confession and behavior. It brings down upon him the persecution of those who hate the Messiah and oppose His reign, the enemies of the new world.

This powerful beginning of the new world in the life of the Christian here and now does not, however, gradually bring about the culmination of the kingdom of Christ in creation. Regenerated saints do not realize postmillennialism's "golden age."

As our present, earthly body becomes the future, spiritual body by the wonder of resurrection in the Day of Christ, so also does the present, pitiful, earthly creation become the future, glorious, spiritual creation by the wonder of recreation in the Day of Christ.

"Behold," says Jehovah by the prophet, "I create new heavens and a new earth."

Man cannot accomplish it.

*Redeemed* man cannot accomplish it. Not even the postmillennialist.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [Reformed Perspectives Magazine Forum](#).

#### **Subscribe to Reformed Perspectives Magazine**

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [Reformed Perspectives Magazine](#),

please select this [link](#).