

THERFIELD CHAPEL

Sunday 20th November 2005 6:30pm

Isaiah 65:17 to 66:24

"Behold, I will create

new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered,

nor will they come to mind.

[18] But be glad and rejoice forever

in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight

and its people a joy.

[19] I will rejoice over Jerusalem

and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying

will be heard in it no more.

[20] "Never again will there be in it

an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not live out his years;

he who dies at a hundred

will be thought a mere youth;

he who fails to reach a hundred

will be considered accursed.

[21] They will build houses and dwell in them;

they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

[22] No longer will they build houses and others live in them,

or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree,

so will be the days of my people;

my chosen ones will long enjoy

the works of their hands.

[23] They will not toil in vain

or bear children doomed to misfortune;

for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,

they and their descendants with them.

[24] Before they call I will answer;

while they are still speaking I will hear.

[25] The wolf and the lamb will feed together,

and the lion will eat straw like the ox,

but dust will be the serpent's food.

*They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"*

says the Lord.

[66:1] This is what the Lord says:

*"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Where is the house you will build for me?
Where will my resting place be?
[2] Has not my hand made all these things,
and so they came into being?"*

declares the Lord.

*"This is the one I esteem:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit,
and trembles at my word.
[3] But whoever sacrifices a bull
is like one who kills a man,
and whoever offers a lamb,
like one who breaks a dog's neck;
whoever makes a grain offering
is like one who presents pig's blood,
and whoever burns memorial incense,
like one who worships an idol.
They have chosen their own ways,
and their souls delight in their abominations;
[4] so I also will choose harsh treatment for them
and will bring upon them what they dread.
For when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke, no one listened.
They did evil in my sight
and chose what displeases me."*

*[5] Hear the word of the Lord,
you who tremble at his word:
"Your brothers who hate you,
and exclude you because of my name, have said,
'Let the Lord be glorified,
that we may see your joy!'"*

Yet they will be put to shame.
[6] *Hear that uproar from the city,*
hear that noise from the temple!
It is the sound of the Lord
repaying his enemies all they deserve.

[7] *"Before she goes into labour,*
she gives birth;
before the pains come upon her,
she delivers a son.

[8] *Who has ever heard of such a thing?*
Who has ever seen such things?
Can a country be born in a day
or a nation be brought forth in a moment?
Yet no sooner is Zion in labour
than she gives birth to her children.

[9] *Do I bring to the moment of birth*
and not give delivery?" says the Lord.

"Do I close up the womb
when I bring to delivery?" says your God.

[10] *"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her,*
all you who love her;
rejoice greatly with her,
all you who mourn over her.

[11] *For you will nurse and be satisfied*
at her comforting breasts;
you will drink deeply
and delight in her overflowing abundance."

[12] *For this is what the Lord says:*

"I will extend peace to her like a river,
and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream;
you will nurse and be carried on her arm
and dandled on her knees.

[13] *As a mother comforts her child,*
so will I comfort you;
and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."

[14] *When you see this, your heart will rejoice*
and you will flourish like grass;
the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants,

but his fury will be shown to his foes.
[15] *See, the Lord is coming with fire,*
and his chariots are like a whirlwind;
he will bring down his anger with fury,
and his rebuke with flames of fire.

[16] *For with fire and with his sword*
the Lord will execute judgment upon all men,
and many will be those slain by the Lord.

[17] *"Those who consecrate and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following the one in the midst of those who eat the flesh of pigs and rats and other abominable things--they will meet their end together," declares the Lord.*

[18] *"And I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory.*

[19] *"I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations--to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. [20] And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord--on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the Lord. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels. [21] And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites," says the Lord.*

[22] *"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. [23] From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. [24] "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."*

According to the eminent 20th century philosopher, Terry Wogan, you know when you've reached the peak of your celebrity status when you're invited to officiate at the opening of a new department store or shopping centre. And you know when your celebrity status is on the decline when you're asked to open the closing-down sale of a department store or shopping centre. And you know you're really past it when the department store that you're invited to close is one that you yourself opened in what seems to you to be the quite recent past.

So, only 31 weeks ago, back in April, I opened the book of Isaiah at chapter one with you, and here we are already at the final portion.

- 66 chapters
- 1,292 verses
- 35,724 words
- 25 sermons totalling about 10 ½ hours

Quite a marathon!

God's word to us through Isaiah has been a bit like following the coils of a spring ... you go round and round in what seems to be like a number of circles, but after a while you actually see some progress as distance is covered. The book started with a number of cycles of God's condemnation of Israel and the nations, promises of punishment, calls to repentance, promises of salvation ... and each time we went round those circles, the details became a little clearer as we progressed to the highlights of the prophecies about the coming Messiah and the salvation he would bring.

We have moved through some spectacularly detailed prophecies concerning Jesus, firstly as the suffering servant, then as the sacrifice for sin, then as the salvation of Israel, then as the pattern for obedience, then as the King of Israel, the King of the nations, the Lord of the Earth and finally onto being the King of the Heavens and the Earth. Continually mixed in with this has been the call to repentance, obedience, trust and even rejoicing.

We have seen so many of the prophecies in Isaiah fulfilled. Everything that God has said about the Saviour of Israel and the nations has come true in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's worth pausing just for a moment to consider our own response to those fulfilled prophecies. Are we to congratulate God on predicting the future so accurately? I think not. To do that would be to treat God as if he were some kind of Mystic Meg or Russell Grant. When God makes prophecies about the future, he is not merely predicting what is going to happen, he is making promises about what he is going to do. So if we want to congratulate or praise God for anything, we do so because he is faithful and has kept his promises to his people... not because he is some kind of clairvoyant.

But even that is not enough! If our minds are still fixed on the prophecies and their fulfilment, then we are still missing the point. The fact that God keeps his promises is, of course, worthy of praise. But even more so, our praise should be focussed on the subject of those prophecies - the Lord Jesus Christ. His incarnation as a man on this earth, his teaching about God the Father, his death on the cross, his sacrifice for the sins of us all, his resurrection to new life, his sending of the Holy Spirit to his church, his promise of eternal life to us all these are the things we should focus on.

Prophecy is fine, fulfilled prophecy is better, but better by far is the subject of that prophecy - our Lord and our Saviour.

And it's particularly important to keep that in mind as we look at these last few chapters of Isaiah. And why? Because in these chapters, we move to a time which has not yet come to pass. These last few prophecies relate to events which are still in our future and in the future of this planet we call Earth. And that is often inclined to make us a little scared and uncertain - especially as all the details are not there in great clarity. But if we remember one thing: the fact that our future is in the hands of God and of his son Jesus Christ, then we need not fear.

For if God has loved us so much that he sacrificed his only son for our sakes, then anything else he does in the future is not going to be any less loving, or any less for our benefit. So, at the risk of sounding like the angels of old: Fear Not!

So, I said that these last few prophecies in Isaiah relate to events which are still in the future. How do we know that?

Look at our first verse - chapter 65, verse 17: *"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.*

Clearly that hasn't happened yet. We are still living on the same Earth that both Isaiah and Jesus walked on. We still live under the same heavens, or sky, that both Isaiah and Jesus would have seen those thousands of years ago.

Look also at verses 16 and 20: *I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years.*

Again, clearly, that hasn't happened yet. In fact, Jerusalem has not really know peace since about 400BC - if ever. Of all the cities of the world, surely Jerusalem is the most troubled.

So Isaiah's prophecies look beyond that to a peaceful time in Jerusalem. To a time when there will be no more weeping and crying; to a time when, in poetic language, the wolf will feed with the lamb, the lion will eat straw and serpents will eat dust.

The Apostle Peter recognises that these things are still in the future too, when he writes in 2 Peter 3:13: *But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

In the book of revelation the same familiar words appear in chapter 21 verse 1: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

So, clearly, these events outlined in Isaiah are yet to happen. But when? I think the clue is in another verse in the book of Revelation ... Rev. 20:11: *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.*

The old earth and sky flees from the presence of him seated on the Great White Throne. This is the great throne of judgment from which God's final condemnation of a sinful world is carried out. So that puts it right at the end of time. For those of you with your fingers on the eschatological pulse: that means after the Rapture, after the second coming, after Armageddon and after the Millennium although some people feel that Isaiah's description could also have a partial fulfilment during the thousand years of the Millennium itself as well. I'm in favour of that too, given the fact I'm always harping on about how prophecies tend to have a number of partial fulfilments before the Big One happens.

But is this all just speculation? Surely, you might think, all this direct intervention by God in history ended with the death and resurrection of Jesus, didn't it? After all, he died on the cross for us and paid for our punishment with his own life. As long as we believe in him, then we go to heaven when we die and somewhere not so nice if we don't believe. Can't we just leave it there?

No. God's concern is with the whole of creation. Certainly he has made it clear that his people are saved. But the whole of creation was affected by sin at the fall ... Think back to the account of the

fall in Genesis. God says to Adam: (Genesis 3:17) *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."* And just like you and I need to be redeemed and rescued from the curse of sin and death, so too the earth needs to be redeemed and that curse removed. Creation - the earth - needs to go through a death and resurrection just as we do when we become Christians.

And so Isaiah is here looking forward to that new heaven and new earth - a redeemed creation .. a time and place of utter peace and tranquillity, completely unaffected by sin and evil - those things having been destroyed. A return, if you like to the Garden of Eden before the fall.

During the Millennium, Jerusalem will be a place of joy. Also the Lord himself will rejoice over it, for sorrow will be vanished. And though death will still be present, life spans will be extended and people will enjoy safety and the produce of their vineyards. God's blessing will be on their work and families and he will speedily answer their prayers. Wild animals will lose their ferocity and harmony and safety will prevail under God's rule.

Actually Isaiah introduced this thought much earlier on in the book, and it's one of those beautiful passages we love so much: Isaiah 11:6-9: *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. [7] The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. [8] The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. [9] They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

And that brings us to the end of where Isaiah can take us with his prophecies. But not quite to the end of the book - yet. Chapter 66 is the end of the book and is a kind of summary of the previous 65 chapters in many ways ... and it's not often an OT book has a summary. But then again, it's not often we have a whole book of this size which is almost exclusively God addressing his people directly.

In verses 1 and 2, the Lord re-states his sovereignty: "Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. you can't build a dwelling place for me, because I created everything that exists."

In verses 2 to 4 God tells us what is and what isn't acceptable from his people: "The people I esteem are those who are humble, those who acknowledge and regret their sins, those who take my word seriously." For the people of that time, of course, that meant following the Laws of Moses: for us it means following the teachings of Jesus. "Those who I do not esteem are those who follow the outward rituals and sacrifices, but don't listen to me."

<u>ISAIAH 66 - A Summary of the entire book?</u>	
1-2	The Lord re-states his sovereignty.
2-4	What is and what isn't acceptable from God's people.
5-6	God condemns religious hypocrites.
7-11	The restoration of God's people.
12-13	God's children comforted.
14-17	God's enemies destroyed.
18-19	The Glory of God to be seen by all the nations.
20-21	Believers from the nations to join the people of God.
22	The new heavens and new earth.
23-24	All mankind will acknowledge God as King.

In verses 5 and 6, God condemns those who professed to know the Lord but who actually hated and discriminated against God's people. In Isaiah's time, these were the inhabitants of Jerusalem who proclaimed themselves to be God's people but who did not listen to him and despised his prophets. They were rewarded by the Babylonian invasion. In our time these are the people who call themselves Christians but who live contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

Verses 7 to 11 tell of the Lord restoring his nation. And these verses are equally applicable to the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, the restoration of God's rule during the Millennium as well as the restoration of creation at the end of time. The message is one of restoration, and that the restoration, when it starts, will be speedy - almost like a woman giving birth right at the onset of labour, or even before.

And in verses 12 to 13, this analogy of God giving birth to Israel like a mother giving birth to a child is continued. Like newborn children, God's people will be nursed and comforted.

In verses 14 to 17 the punishment of those who do not keep God's laws is promised. In verse 17 there's a reference to the punishment of those who eat the flesh of pigs. Don't panic if you had bacon for breakfast this morning! Remember that eating pork was not allowed under the old laws of Moses, as pork was considered unclean. Isaiah is here speaking to a people under that Old Covenant. For us, the regulations about certain types of food were swept away as the new covenant under Christ replaced the old covenant under Moses. The message here is about breaking the covenant relationship - not about the food we eat.

Verses 18 and 19 speak of God's power and glory being made shown to all the nations - not just Israel. The remnant of believing Israelites will travel as missionaries to other parts of the world, to tell Gentiles about God's glory. Those places and peoples will include Tarshish, probably in south-western Spain, Libyans in northern Africa, Lydians in western Asia Minor, Tubal in north-eastern Asia Minor, Greece, Cyprus and distant islands..... pretty much the known world at that time. And in verses 20 and 21, all those who believe, from all the corners of the earth, will be gathered together under God in the spiritual Jerusalem.

And in verse 22 we have the repeat promise that we heard at the start of tonight's passage - a new heaven and a new earth. A re-creation of the world - a doing away with the old world and its curse following the fall. "Behold I make all things new."

And finally in verses 23 and 24, month by month and week by week - an ongoing worship of God by all people and a reminder of the punishment and destruction of those who would not worship God.

And so we come to the end of Isaiah. As I said at the start - quite a marathon! We've spent a long time - almost 8 months - in the Old Testament. It's fitting that Christmas is coming up soon, as it reminds us that all these prophecies of old met their fulfilment in the birth of the baby in Bethlehem the baby called Jesus who was and is the Son of God, the saviour who gave his life in obedience to God as a sacrifice to pay the price for the sins of all who believe.

So let's leave the Old Covenant behind for now and move into the New Covenant. We praise God, not just because his prophecies were fulfilled, not just because he kept his promises, but also

because we have the subject of those prophecies and promises living among us ... in our church and in our hearts. The Lord Jesus Christ - the saviour promised of old is here. He was born, he was crucified, he rose again, he lives among us by his Spirit, he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and he will make all things new - sweeping away the old fallen world ... re-creating, renewing, loving, caring and clothing us in his glory.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life; life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love: bring us safe through Jordon to thy home above.
Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son, endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won! Amen!