

ESCHATOLOGY AS TRANSFORMATION: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 65:17-25

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues that eschatology is all about transformation. The text of Isaiah 65:17-25 is therefore used as a point of departure to validate this claim. The work used a textual analytical methodology in studying the text under question. Through the analysis, the paper came to the conclusion that creatio ex-nihilo is not going to take place again as did in Genesis 1, rather at the eschaton, God would transform the Heavens and earth, transform/heal the past, transform the human person, transformation labor, transform the divine human relationship and transform the interaction between nature. Nonetheless, the paper considered our focal text as a type that serves as a pre-eschatological picture of Revelations 21 which aided in having a clearer picture of how this transformation would take place ultimately. Eschatology as transformation hence gives hope to the suffering Church that at the eschaton, all past troubles (Persecution) would neither be remembered nor would they come to mind, for God would be reunited with His transformed people for a transformed divine-human interaction in the transformed heavens and earth.

Keywords: eschatology, transformation, textual analysis, Isaiah 65:17-25

INTRODUCTION

Christian theology of the *eschaton* (the last days) has gained undivided attention from numerous scholars around the world over the years. This could be as a consequence of the fact that a need arose for people to begin to talk about and know what the scripture essentially says with regards to the end times (which constitutes the future of humanity and the entire creation), since belief in the end of the age is one of the central beliefs of every religion. In fact, “even false religions, the more primitive as well as the more advanced, have their own eschatology.”¹ As a result of the value of this theological subject, there is no serious systematic theologian who does not make it a part of his or her theological discourse. For instance, Bruce Milne,² Millard J. Erikson,³ Berkhof, Wayne Grudem⁴ among many others took their time to give extensive biblically based explanations on this subject. Again, we see Plato, Emmanuel Kant, Wolff and Leibnitz among other philosophers making it central in their discussions on the future of the world and humanity.⁵ Hence, this doctrine remained an important concept in both philosophy and theology up to the present time. Hitherto, the number of major debates over eschatology has been few and it has remained relatively undeveloped when compared to other theological motifs such as those related to Christian faith and experience, James Orr noted; as church history advanced, different doctrines dominated the center stage of theological debates, for example, in the first five centuries theological energies of the church were directed elsewhere⁶ while in the late nineteenth century and throughout

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960)

² Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1982)

³ Millard J. Erikson, *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1983)

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994)

⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 661.

⁶ Milne, *Know the Truth*, 371.

the twentieth century, eschatology has received a closer extermination than ever before.⁷

Many issues concerning eschatology are ambiguous and as such difficult to deal with. As a result, some preachers, teachers and theologians abstain from it and become *eschatophobic*⁸ towards this subject entirely. Yet others find it interesting and informative to budget a space for it in their busy schedules of theological discourses. Consequently, there abound numerous publications on the treatments of this subject, exploring either general or individual eschatology leading to divergent treatments ranging from ancient to modern times, namely; the modernized eschatology (i.e. liberal approach) as popularized by Adolf von Harnack, demodernized eschatology advocated by Albert Schweitzer, realized eschatology as championed by C. H. Dodd, existentialized eschatology as proposed by Rudolf Bultmann, politicized eschatology as inspired by Jurgen Moltmann, and systematized eschatology promoted by John Nelson Darby the developer of dispensationalism.⁹ All these views sprang up in a trial to give a clear explanation on how and what the future of humanity and the entire universe would be. Furthermore, in recent times, many people came into the terrain of this discourse with newer perspectives on this subject. These among many are; Donald E. Gowan,¹⁰ John

⁷ James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 20.

⁸ This term refers for the dislike, fear and even abandonment of eschatological discourse, with a thought that it is not relevant and of somewhat difficulty to talk about.

⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1162.

¹⁰ Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (New York: Augsburg Fortress, 1987): 1-175.

Webster,¹¹ Miroslav Volf,¹² Peter C. Phan,¹³ Ellen Concannon,¹⁴ Howard Marshall.¹⁵ These discourses have indeed given newer perspectives on eschatology using different approaches. A study similar to the present, is that of Jiri Moskala¹⁶ who used the text of Isaiah in order to know whether Isaiah 65:17-25 really speaks of the eschatological new heavens and earth. Still, others approached this concept from a New Testament perspective e.g. Joseph Plevnik's work on Paul's Eschatology.¹⁷ Fascinatingly, it has been discovered that exploring the subject of eschatology as transformation is an area untouched, especially with regards to using Isaiah 65:17-25 as a point of departure. Therefore, this is exactly what this present discourse is out to do, through a critical analysis of the text of Isaiah 65:17-25 and through seeing Isaiah 65:17-25 as a typological expression and pre-eschatological picture of Revelations 21.

ISAIAH 65:17-25 IN THE CONTEXT OF 64 AND 66

In studying Isaiah's concept of eschatology as depicted in 65:17-25, it becomes salient to explore the immediate context of the chapter so that we can see how the context helps us understand the message enveloped in this text. This context

¹¹ John Webster, "Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Vol. 2. No. 1 (March, 2000): 13-28.

¹² Miroslav Volf, "The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on Social Dimension of the Eschatology Transition" *Modern Theology* Vol. 16 No. 1 (January 2000): 91-113.

¹³ Peter C. Phan, "Eschatology and Ecology: The Environment in the End-Time," *Irish Theological Quarterly* (July, 2005): 5-48.
<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

¹⁴ Ellen Concannon, "The Eschatological Implications of Karl Rahner's Eucharistic Doctrine" *The Heythrop Journal* (2010): 881-892.

¹⁵ Howard Marshall, "Eschatology and the Parable" (July, 2005): 5-48.
<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

¹⁶ Jiri Moskala, "Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heaven and the New Earth?" in *Meeting God on the Mountains: Essays in Honor of Richard M. Davidson* (2016): 187-210 *Faculty Publications*. 206.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/206>

¹⁷ Joseph Plevnik, "Paul's Eschatology" *Toronto Journal of Theology* Vol. 6 No. 1 (1990): 86-99.

would help us fathom the relationship between the preceding chapter—64 and the proceeding one—66. But, before delving into this issue, it is noteworthy that the text of our concern is a literary unit on its own. This is because verse 16 of the chapter concludes the matter raised from the beginning of the chapter, while verse 17 begins an entirely new subject which Isaiah discussed all through to verse 25.

Turning back to the immediate context of our pericope, chapter 64 is a prayer that began in chapter 63, it's a prayer that acknowledges heavens as the dwelling place of God, pleading that He opens the heavens and come down so that the mountains would tremble before Him v. 1 and to make His name known to his enemies v. 2. This plea is based on the previous knowledge that God does come down and the mountains will not tremble before Him and this is because there has never been any god besides the LORD who delights in helping those who do right and yet angry with sinners. Additionally, it is a prayer that acknowledges the limitation of man in his trial to earn God's approval v. 6 and as a result of man's sin, God hid His face and it is a prayer that requests God's treatment of His people with mercy and restoring them back to their land so they could resume their worship in their holy and glorious temple vs. 8-12.

Accordingly, chapter 65 comes as a response to the prayers offered in 64. Beginning from v. 1 of 65, it becomes glaring that this is a response that shows God's mercy to a people undeserved, people who refused to seek God, who did not call him, who walked in ways not good, who continually provoked God to his face, who are hypocrites v. 5 and people who followed other gods v. 7. Many scholars like Warren W. Wiersbe interpret these verses as God's announcement that His salvation will go to the Gentiles, even though they did not seek the Lord or experience the blessing He gave to Israel.¹⁸ This merciful

¹⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Expository Commentary: Old Testament* (PC Bible Electronic Database: Biblesoft Publishers., 2001), n.p.

response of Yahweh is only extended to those who were willing to return to him regardless of who they are, which means there is hope simply because God out of mercy found some good in this people in keeping with the love He has for humanity. Again, those who utterly disregard God's grace would be put to shame and disgrace but the remnant of the Lord would be given another name v. 15, and the God of truth would be their guide as He becomes their paradigm for life and action in the new land where the past troubles would be sent to oblivion v. 16.

Verses 1-16 set the background and context of vv. 17-25. V. 16 ends with a clear articulation of God's willingness to let go of the past troubles so that these memories would not have effect on His new relationship with His people. Vv. 17-25 speak of a new order of things in an entirely new environment that warrant joy, delight, long life, dignity of labor, blessing, uninterrupted access to God and harmless interaction between nature. Then chapter 66 is introduced to remind the people of the fact that the new environment (heavens and earth) are God's throne and footstool v. 1 and they and everything in them came from Him. Once more, those to dwell in this new environment must be humble and contrite in spirit against all odds because those who chose to displease Him would inevitably encounter what they dread v. 4 but those who tremble at His word would dwell in the new Zion He would bring forth in a moment and they would swim in the overflowing abundance of His peace, wealth, comfort. They would see the glory of God and be glorified. All these, would materialize in the new heavens and the new earth which would endure before the LORD as He created them in chapter 65:17-25.

Careful study and observation would make us see the relationship between chapters 64 and 65 and 65 and 66. Chapter 64 opens the discussion with a prayer seeking an intervention from God, seeking for mercy and renewal, acknowledging God as the creator who can recreate, as a merciful father who forgives and would not refuse to help His people in their times of need.

A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 65:17-25

Reorienting our attention to the text of Isaiah 65:17-25 is believed to be the only way through which our claims in this paper would be established. In our analysis, we would explore the text under question in its original language, simply because any other text translated from the original may not give the intended meaning of the author because most times, other translations used words to describe the intentions of the original author. In addition, it is difficult to accurately define a term using another language aside the one in which it is known. Now, let's get to the text of Isaiah 65:7-15 and see what the human author really intended to say concerning the activities or intentions of the divine author.

The Text of Isaiah 65:17-25¹⁹

verse	Hebrew text	English Translation
17.	כִּי־הִנְנִי בּוֹרֵא שָׁמַיִם חֲדָשִׁים וְאָרֶץ חֲדָשָׁה וְלֹא תִזְכְּרֶנָּה הַרְאֵשׁוֹת וְלֹא תִעֲלֶינָה עַל־ לֵב:	“For behold, I create new heavens and new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.
18.	כִּי־אִם־שִׂישׂוּ וְגִילוּ עַד־עַד אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי בּוֹרֵא כִּי הִנְנִי בּוֹרֵא אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם גִּילָה וְעִמָּה מְשׁוֹשׁ:	But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.
19.	וְגִלְתִּי בִירוּשָׁלַם וְשִׂשְׂתִּי בְעַמִּי וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַע בָּהּ עוֹד קוֹל בְּכִי וְקוֹל זַעֲקָה:	I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.
20.	לֹא־יִהְיֶה מִשָּׁם עוֹד עוֹלָם נְיָמִים וְנָחוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָמְלֵא אֶת־יָמָיו כִּי הִשְׁעַר בְּרִמְמָה שָׁבַת נְמוֹת וְהַחֹשֶׁא בְרִמְמָה שָׁגָה וְגִלְל	No more shall there be in it infant who lives but a few days for the young man shall dies a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

¹⁹ The Hebrew text of Isaiah was adopted from the edited version of the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament known as Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

21.	וּבְנוּ בָתִּים וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּטְעוּ כְּרָמִים וַאֲכָלוּ פְרִיָם:	They shall build houses and inhabit them; they plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22.	לֹא יִבְנוּ וְאֲחֵר יֵשֵׁב לֹא יִטְעוּ וְאֲחֵר יֵאָכֵל כִּי־כִימֵי הָעֵץ יִמֵּי עַמִּי וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם יִבְלוּ בְּחֵיָרִי	They shall not build and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
23.	לֹא יִיָּגְעוּ לְדִיק וְלֹא יִלְדוּ לְבָהֳלָה כִּי זָרַע בְּרוּכֵי יְהוָה הֵמָּה וּבְאֲצִאֵיהֶם אֲתָם:	They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.
24.	וְהִנֵּה טָרִם־יִקְרְאוּ וְאֲנִי אֶעֱנֶה עוֹד תִּם מְדַבְּרִים וְאֲנִי אֲשָׁמַע:	Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear.
25.	זָאֵב וְשֹׁלֵה יִרְעוּ כְּאַחַד וְאַרְבֵּי כֶּבֶד יֵאָכֵל־לֶחֶם וְנִחַשׁ עֹפֵר לְחֶמְוֹ לֹא־יִרְעוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁחַתּוּ בְּכָל־הָרִי קְדוֹשֵׁי אֱמֶר יְהוָה:	The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall each straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.”

This unit opens with the word *kiy* which is a participle and a conjunction. It is used to indicate causal relationship of all kinds. It often comes into play to signal causation, and so it has variety of meanings other than “for,” such as “certainly, else, even, except, because, inasmuch, forasmuch” etc.²⁰ Therefore, even though our text of concern gives a story that makes meaning without the conjunction of the previous verses—vv. 1-16, this word *Kiy* is used to notify us that as a result of what has transpired in the previous chapters and verses, the Lord is now decisive to do something unique about the situation. What transpired could be gleaned from the first chapter of the book, where God lamented saying “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. . . sinful nation, a

²⁰ James Strong, *New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (PC Bible Electronic Database: BibleSoft Publishers., 1994), n.p.

people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! . . . they have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy one of Israel and turned their backs on Him” (Isaiah 1:2-4). Hence, the rebellious and corrupt lives of the people, their unwillingness to return to God despites His constant gracious invitation and free offer of salvation affected everything and every system on the earth which necessitated a need for recreation, renewal and transformation.

After calling our attention to the fact that what we are to encounter is in response to an issue introduced from the beginning of the book which the entire book elaborated subsequently, in order to sustain our attention on the matter at hand, the word *hinēniy* mostly translated “behold” which in current English denotes calling the attention of the listeners to expectantly set their eyes to see what is coming forth. So, in the context of our text, the audience of Isaiah were called to expectantly look to see the *shamayin hadashim wa’arets hadasha* “new heavens and a new earth” which *bore* “I create.”²¹ In this verse, there are three verbs used. The first is *bore* which is in Qal form, Hebrew participle, masculine singular in an absolute state, translated “I created” from the root *bara* meaning “to create.”²² The “new heavens and new earth” are syntactically connected to the verb as its objects, to show that they are a product of an action taken by the “I” in *bore* which is referring to the creator God as Genesis 1 informs us. The last two verbs “*thizakarnah*” and “*tha’alenah*” the first a *niphal* imperfect while the second a *Qal* imperfect (all referring to an uncompleted action that will take place in the future, whether immediate or distant), all in 3rd person feminine plural. Their connection with negative particles “*welo*” “and not” or “nor” rendered the verb negative. Interestingly, a definite adjective “*harishonoth*” “the former” is used to qualify a noun that is not

²¹ David J.A. Clines, (Edit.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew: Volume II b – w* (Sheffield: Sheffield Pheonix Press, 2011), 258. See also, Karl Ellinger & Wilhelm Rudolf, (ed.), *Interlinear Transliterated Bible* (PC Bible Electronic Database: Biblesoft Publishers, 1994), n.p.

²² Strong, *New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers*, n.p.

present in the original text. Consequently, most English translations considered the context and inserted the noun “things.” Remarkably, the reason for this omission is not known which results in different interpretations over the years. But one presupposes that since the author does not supply the nouns he was qualifying with the definite adjective “former,” he is referring to the “former heavens and earth” since new ones would come into existence. Such that when the new ones finally come, the old/former heavens and earth and everything therein would not come to mind.

Coming to verse 18, we would see four verbs in use; “*bore*, *w^egilu*, *sisu* (occurring twice). The first two are *Qal* imperative, masculine plural; suggesting that they are commands given to the recipients to “be glad and rejoice forever.” George Arthur Butrick commenting on this said “the LXX reads, ‘they shall find in her joy and gladness.’”²³ While the third verb which also serves as the fourth is *bore* as used in verse 17 is a *Qal* participle (which means they could serve as both adjective and as nouns), Masculine singular and in an absolute state. The first two verbs are in a syntactical relationship with the last two, simply because for the previous actions to take place, the last two actions must take effect. Meaning, “they cannot be glad and rejoice forever without the Lord creating Jerusalem which would become a source of joy to the people of God and as such automatically become a joyful people. This goes in line with what Wiersbe, expresses in his comments on this verse saying, “Jerusalem will be a source of Joy, not only to the Lord but to the whole earth.”²⁴ Wiersbe’s comment ushers us into verse 19 where the Lord enunciates His determination to derive joy in the Jerusalem he would create and the people He would place in it as their dwelling. In the second part of the verse the verb *yishaama’* in conjunction with a negative particle *W^alo’* in

²³ George Arthur Butrick (Ed.), *The Interpreter’s Bible with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for each Book of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 755.

²⁴ Wiersbe, *The Bible Expository Commentary*, n.p.

reference to four nouns that connote suffering, thus; *qowl b^akiy* the first noun in a construct state depending on the second for its meaning, hence, translated “the voice of weeping, *Waqowl z^a’aaqaah* translated “nor the voice of crying.” So, the verb *w^elo yishama* expressing negation comes to mean that “the voice of crying and weeping shall not be heard in the Jerusalem which the Lord would create and give to his people. Moreso, the use of the word *owd* going with the initial negation *w^elo* translated “and no more” means that in the old heavens and earth and Jerusalem, there were voices of crying and weeping among its dwellers, but in the new ones, a transformation would take place forever. In order to clarify the relationship between the New heavens and the new earth as used in our text, T. Desmond Alexander, opines that “. . . [i]t is significant that the sentence “I will create new heavens and a new earth” (v. 17) is in parallel with “I will create Jerusalem” (v. 18). This means that creating a “new heavens and a new earth” equals the creating of “Jerusalem.” As a result, the Lord “will rejoice over Jerusalem” (v. 19).”²⁵

Verse 20 continued with the negation saying *lo’ yih^ayeh mishaam ’owd* translated “then, there shall be no more...” in order to describe further how the new created Jerusalem would be. We were told previously that there will be no more voices of crying and weeping, now we are further informed that in this Jerusalem, there shall be in existence no infant or old man who will not live his life to the fullest and fulfil his destiny. The second part of the verse gives a better depiction when it says, “*ben-mee’aaah shaanaah yaamuwt w^ahachowte*’ The NLT puts it more comprehensively, thus; “no longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young!” all the verbs used in the second part of the verse; *yamuth* (Qal imperfect, 3rd person, masculine singular) *w^ehahote* (Qal participle, Masculine singular, absolute) and *y^equlal* (Pual imperfect, 3rd person masculine singular) are

²⁵ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 53.

meant to indicate that the death of infants and adults before their full age would be an abnormality and in fact it can never be found in the transformed Jerusalem. As a continuation, verse 21 present us four verbs in pairs and all in Qal perfect *banah* and *yashab* translated “to build and to inhabit” *nata* and *akal* translated “to plant and to eat” to mean that there is going to be a transformation in the labor of the dwellers of these new heavens and the new earth, they will enjoy living in the houses they build, and they will enjoy eating the fruit of the vineyards they plant which stands in a sharp contrast to what happened in the old heavens and earth as expressed in v. 22. Furthermore, v. 22 serves as a reiteration of vv. 20 and 21 with regards to longevity of the people of God and the profitability of their labor, verse 20 tells us that none would die without fulfilling their destiny, but coming to v. 22, their longevity is likened to that of a tree simply because “the ancient Hebrew was impressed with the life and duration of trees cf. Job 14:7 ff, Psalms 1:3; 92:12-13; Jer. 17:8.”²⁶ All this is to help us have a clear picture of how life in the new created heavens and earth and Jerusalem would be; a place of ultimate enjoyment, and rest from the huddles and anxieties of the past.

To further describe the new created order, v. 23 reemphasizes the fact that the labor of God’s people will not be in vain since we are already informed earlier that they will plant vineyards and eat their fruits and build houses and dwell in them. But there is an addition in v. 23 even though the idea had already been spoken of in v. 20 concerning their children saying “. . .will not die in infancy.” Thus, v. 23 is here to underline that the purpose for which they will bring their children is not to be destroyed. Two verbs are used here in connection to this *yeldu* (Qal imperfect, 3rd person masculine plural) from the root *yalad* meaning “to bring forth” and *berukey* (Qal passive participle, masculine plural, construct) from the root *barak* meaning “to bless.”²⁷ The connection between these two verbs

²⁶ Butrick (Ed.), *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 756.

²⁷ Ellinger & Rudolf, (eds.), *Interlinear Transliterated Bible*, n.p.

could be understood in two ways; on the one hand, they and their children have been blessed already and so they would not be in trouble or destroyed and on the other hand in contrast to the old way of life in the old heavens and earth and Jerusalem, the people and their children are delivered from trouble and in turn blessed by the Lord in their new abode. Consequently, as a result of the blessings of the Lord upon both the people and their children, v. 24 comes on board to underscore that the relationship between the people and their God would be transformed and sealed such that “before they call, he will answer and while they are yet speaking he will hear.” Four verbs are used here in a poetic fashion just to indicate this reality thus; *yiqra’u* from the root *qara* meaning “to call” and *e’eneh* from the root *’anah* translated “to heed or to pay attention to.” The second pair is *me^edabrim* from the root *dabar* translated “to speak” (but in our text it is used as Piel participle, masculine plural) in order to demonstrate a continuous process or action, *eshema* from the root *shama* meaning “to hear intelligently,” preferably, “to listen attentively with the purpose of acting on it.”²⁸ This is to say that in their old abode, they used to call without an answer and speak without God listening to them, but now in the transformed Jerusalem, before they even finish calling or speaking, the Lord will attend to their matter relentlessly. On this Moskala asserts that “it is a reversal of the situation of God’s people before the Babylonian exile (Jer. 3:21), where their crying is associated with God’s silence because of the people’s wickedness. . .”²⁹

Verse 25 concludes our pericope with a clear demonstration of a transformed animal world. There are 9 nouns (all common) and four verbs (*yir’u* from the root *ra’ah* “to feed or to graze,” *yokal* from the root *akal* rendered “to eat” and *yari’u* from the

²⁸ John R. Kohlenberger, *The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament* Vol. 4 Isaiah-Malachi (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 130.

²⁹ Moskala, “Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heaven and the New Earth?” 195.

root *ra'a* meaning “to hurt or to spoil” *yashhithu* from the root *shakhath* translated “to ruin, corrupt, destroy” etc)³⁰ used in this verse and the narrator used these nouns in pairs in order to establish a metamorphosed relationship in the animal world other than their conventional relationship of disharmony in their former untransformed world. In this new environment, it would be as at first in the Garden of Eden when no animal use another as prey, no creature terrifies or bullies the other for any reason. The last part of the verse climaxes the orderliness and beauty of togetherness in this new heavens and earth, the new Jerusalem and the holy mountain of the Lord where we are told that “they shall neither hurt nor destroy... says the LORD” Meaning that in this transformed place, no one would do anything harmful to anything or anyone, but the holiness of the LORD would be the guiding principle for life and action in this new environment.

ISSUES RAISED BY ISAIAH 65:17-25

Undoubtedly, our text—Isaiah 65:17-25 is one of the portions in the book of Isaiah that raise more questions than answers in the minds of its readers. Most of the questions that come to mind are in relation to what Isaiah really refer to as “new heavens and new earth v. 17a” and “the former things v. 17b.” Is Isaiah really referring to the “new heavens and new earth” and” the former things” as referred to by John in Revelations 21 or he is referring to something different entirely? Gaining insight to these questions would inevitably help us in getting to the heart of Isaiah’s message as enveloped in our text of concern.

In the opening sentence of his article on Isaiah 65:17-25, Moskala designated this passage among the difficult passages in the book of Isaiah when he said, “this study focuses on the difficult passage of Isaiah 65:17-25 which is often applied by conservative evangelical authors to the description of the

³⁰ Ellinger & Rudolf, (eds.), *Interlinear Transliterated Bible*, n.p.

eschatological New Heavens and New Earth. . . .”³¹ Most interpretations are geared towards seeing Isaiah describing the “new heavens and the new earth” as also depicted in Rev. 21, but the question of whether Isaiah refers to the eschatological new heavens and new earth with new conditions of life as portrayed in Revelations 21 and what he meant by “former things” is a question that remains imperative, open and begging. Therefore, in his attempt to answer the above question, Moskala believes that giving a vivid description of Isaiah’s depiction of life on the New earth would help in understanding what Isaiah meant by these expressions, hence he underscores that in this new earth, the past will not be a burden, it will be a place of joy and happiness, no weeping or crying, no infant mortality or miscarriages, there is longevity of the faithful but for sinners premature death, creative work, peace and prosperity abound, it will be a life under God’s presence and blessing where prayers are being answered, a place where new conditions in nature exist and reversal of curses into blessings becomes a norm.³² This is the description given by Isaiah in our pericope. On the other hand, Revelations 21:1-5 says “then I saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God . . . he will wipe every tear from their eye. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the order of things has passed away. . . he who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new! . . .”

A juxtaposition of the two passages would make us realize that on the one hand, some things mentioned by Isaiah are absent in Revelations, such as death, building of houses and indwelling them, planting of vineyards and eating their fruits,

³¹ Moskala, “Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heaven and the New Earth?” 187.

³² Moskala, “Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heaven and the New Earth?” 194.

toiling, bearing children, praying seeking the face of the Lord and the animal kingdom. While on the other hand, there are things both authors have in common, such as; the new heaven(s) and the new earth, the passing away of the old (former) things, a new Jerusalem created by God, the wiping away of every tear, the absence of crying and pain. Accordingly, it is important to note that Revelations 21 also contain some things absent in Isaiah 65 such as the absence of death, sin, sinners and curse. It is with this understanding in mind that Wiersbe argues that “. . . [t]his is not the same as John's "new heaven and new earth" (Rev 21:1ff), because the characteristics Isaiah gives do not fit the eternal state. As far as we know, in the eternal state people will not get old or die (Isa 65:20), nor will there be any danger of losing anything to invaders (vv. 21-23).³³ Furthermore, in line with this, Moskala concludes that this Isaianic text is best understood in a typological way according to the type-antitype structure, the double fulfilment of this classical prophecy may be best understood if this prophecy is interpreted first in its original setting as predicting the ideal earthly kingdom of Israel had they be faithful to the Lord after returning from Babylonian captivity and then eschatologically in principle.³⁴ In order to reiterate this point further, Schmid proclaims that “. . . Isaiah 65:17–25 does not yet envision a resurrection of the dead, but considers the question of a long life.³⁵ To this end, we can therefore say without mincing words that Isaiah 65:17-25 does not straightforwardly speak of the New heavens and the New earth spoken of by John the Apostle in Revelations 21, rather it can serve as a prophecy predicting and anticipating a time

³³ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, n.p.

³⁴ Moskala, “Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heavens and the New Earth” 206.

³⁵ Konrad Schmid, “New creation instead of new exodus: The innerbiblical exegesis and theological transformations of Isaiah 65:17–25.” In: Barstad, Hans; Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014): 180-198. <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-100014>.

when the old things would be renewed and a better place would be created for the servants of the Lord, when He would dwell among them as His people as clearly portrayed in Rev. 21.

Coming to the issue of the meaning of “former things” as used in our text which are said “would not be remembered,” it is relevant to note that many scholars like Watts who explains that “former things” are the things of the past kingdoms of Israel under curse and judgement that were pictured in chaps. 1-39,³⁶ Lee who sees the “former things” as “the Babylonian exile and that the new Jerusalem will erase the past, shameful history related to the exile,” agree that these former things are related to the past troubles, worries, cries, exiles, pains and many other things the people of God suffered which were brought to earth as a result of the bad condition initiated by sin.³⁷ Hence, God is here declaring that in the new order He would create, “the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (v. 17). This does not refer to loss of memory . . . [rather it means] their memory is healed . . . the past [is] forgiven and reconciled and will also be hidden from his eyes. . . .”³⁸ definitely, their minds would be able to recall what happened in the past and even tell of its story, but even if and when that happens, the past would not have effect on them at all because of the new reality they have encountered.

Gowan interestingly accentuated that, “Old Testament eschatology is a worldly hope . . . [and] understands the future to be completely in the hands of God”³⁹ Holding unto this understanding, it becomes brave to see Isaiah 65:17-25 as a

³⁶ John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, WBC, rev ed. (New York: Nelson, 2005), 024.

³⁷ See Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Bloomsbury Street, London: SCM Press, 1969), R. N. Whybray, *New Century Bible Commentary: Isaiah 40-66* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publ.co., 1975).

³⁸ Moskala, “Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heavens and the New Earth,” 193.

³⁹ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 122.

pre-eschatological picture and a type of Revelations 21. This is because the picture of the new heavens and new earth painted by Isaiah got its fuller design in Revelations 21 concerning how life would be in the new heavens and the new earth. Therefore, using this pre-eschatological text and using it as a type of what would ultimately happen in the last days as Apostle John proclaims, one believes a new perspective on eschatology could be proposed and a newer understanding achieved.

THE STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH 65:17-25

Several scholars in individual books and commentaries have proposed different structures for this portion of Isaiah. For instance, Gary V. Smith among others gives the outline of this text in four different points, thus; (1). God's new creation (65:17), (2) Rejoicing and long life (65:18-20), (3). God's blessing (65:21-23) and (4). Harmony and peace (65:24-25). Remarkably, all the structures given on this text would not be far from that of Smith except that different expressions may be used depending on what an author intends to achieve at the end of the day. However, below is another proposed structure as derived from the textual analysis made above.

- A. The Transformation of the Heavens and the Earth v. 17a
- B. The Transformation of the Past (The Healing of the Past) v. 17b
- C. The Transformation of the Human Person v. 20-23
 - i. Infants will live their full years v. 20a
 - ii. Old men will fulfil their destinies v. 20b
- D. The transformation of labor v. 21-22
 - i. they will build houses and dwell in them 21a and 22a
 - ii. they will plant vineyard and eat their fruits 21b and 22a

- E. The transformation of the divine-human relationship v. 24
 - i. Before they call, He will answer v. 24a
 - ii. While still talking, He will hear 24b.
- F. The Transformation of the Interaction Between Nature v. 25
 - i. The wolf and lamb will feed together
 - ii. The lion will eat straw like ox
 - iii. The serpent will eat dust as food
 - iv. They will neither harm nor destroy

AN EXPLANATION OF ISAIAH 65:17-25

The text of Isaiah 65:17-25 speaks of the Lord's desire and plans to "create new heavens and new earth" and to send the former things into oblivion such that they "will not be remembered [at all]." The usage of the verb *bora* in the participle and absolute state with the personal pronoun "I" suggests that "Elohim" is the subject of the sentence and the actor. This therefore means that the subject of creation in Genesis 1 is still found here acting, but at this point, the word for creation is used in *Qal* imperfect tense referring to a future event. On the one hand, we can recall that in the Genesis creation narrative God used His spoken word (let there be...) to create things out of nothing, which in Latin is known as *creatio Ex-nihilo* even though the word does not appear in the text.⁴⁰ While on the other hand Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelations 21 do not in any way suggest such a creation out of nothing. This therefore highlights that though Isaiah is having the future in mind and how God would radically act on the contaminated universe, ". . . [he] does not yet speak of a new, second world to come, but of a renewal of this world."⁴¹ It is yet with this thought in mind that Butrick (Ed.), concurs that ". . . [t]he meaning is not that the present world will be

⁴⁰ Milne, *Know the Truth*, 95.

⁴¹ Schmid, "New creation instead of new exodus," 180.

completely destroyed (cf. 51:6) and new world created (cf. Rev. 21:1; II Peter 3:13), but rather the present world will be completely transformed.”⁴² Goldingay concurs with this in a glaring manner by saying that “Yahweh’s description of a new heavens and a new earth (v.17) would sound like an abandonment of this cosmos for the creation of a new one, but verses 18-25 make clear that the language refers to a radical transformation of this cosmos, specially of the city in which the people live. “creating a new. . . suggests “re-creating.”⁴³

Consequently, this gives us a sense of confidence to consider eschatology to be concerned ultimately with “transformation.” Verse 17 of our focal text as analyzed provides us with the Lord’s determination to “transform” the heavens and the earth, but, in the process of this transformation, the former things “Old heavens and earth” will have to be forgotten absolutely. Rev. 21:1 gives us a better picture of how this transformation is going to take place as highlighted earlier when it says “then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” Better put, this transformation would be accurate, absolute and perfect such that the transformed heavens and earth would appear so perfect and new as they were in Genesis 1 when God created and commended that “it was good.” Furthermore, we sightsaw through our analysis that Isaiah did not categorically inform us of what he was referring to when he used the adjective “former,” nevertheless we presupposed that he was referring to the “old heavens and the earth.” Nonetheless, as we tried to address some seeming critical issues that cause disputes in our text, we agreed that part of these former things are related to the past troubles, worries, cries, exiles, pains and any other kind of suffering they have ever experienced (this considers the context of v. 16 of same chapter). Therefore, there is going to be the transformation of the past, where the past is healed by the

⁴²Butrick (Ed.), *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 756.

⁴³ John Goldingay, *Isaiah: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2001), 368.

presence of the future in the transformed heavens and earth. Yet, all these would happen through the transforming power of God.

Verse 20 makes it clear that, eschatology is not just about the transformation of the heavens and earth or the transformation of the past, but it, without mincing words underscores that eschatology is also the transformation of the human person. With an acute consideration of our text as pre-eschatological to and a type of Revelations 21, we exposed Isaiah articulating that the inhabitants of the transformed heavens and earth would experience the transformation of God also, such that infants would live their full years (v. 20a) and old men would fulfill their destinies (v. 20b). this gives us a picture of what would ultimately be as described in Rev. 21:4. Gowan while having a good understanding of eschatology as transformation of the human person, finds is salient to opine that “the eschatological texts of the OT affirm that both individual human beings and the institutions of human society need redemption . . . and so, the OT turns to transformation itself, to the re-creation of new people who will finally be able to live the blessed life. . . .”⁴⁴ humanity would be totally transformed, hence, there would be longevity and fulfilment of life to both infants and old men and this redemption would equally translate into their daily endeavors, God would also transform their labor so that when they plant, they would eat the fruits, when they build, they would inhabit. Even though, it is a fact that there will be no planting and building in the eschatological transformed heavens and earth, we are meant to understand that Isaiah is here showing God’s power of transformation that touches every area of man’s life which in the long run means that the transformative power of God changes everything concerning humanity and nature in the eschaton.

In their old untransformed relationship in the old cursed environment, they toiled in vain, bore children doomed to

⁴⁴ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 59.

misfortune and destruction. But now, as a result of God's transforming power, the people and their descendants would be blessed beyond comprehension. In exploring verse 23, we agreed that the connection between *Yalad* (to bring forth) and *barak* (to bless) could be understood in two ways; it could be that as a result of God's blessing, the people and their children would not be in trouble or destroyed and on the other hand, they were delivered from trouble and in turn blessed by the Lord in their new abode as a result of a transformation they received in their nature and their relationship with God. Coming to verse 24, we saw in our text that Isaiah highlights eschatology to also mean the transformation of divine human relationship. This is seen in the fact that ". . . before they call, he will answer and while they are yet speaking, he will hear." This in the words of Adam Clarke means that ". . . the Lord will give them all they crave for, and more than they can desire."⁴⁵ Based on our exploration in analyzing our passage, we got to know that for God to answer and hear their supplications without delay (which is in a sharp contrast to their old inharmonious relationship of disobedience against the Lord in their old abode), their relationship with the Lord must be transformed such that God Himself make his dwelling among them and they become His people (Joel 3:17, Ephesians 3:17). As a consequence of the Lord's presence amidst them in this new transformed relationship, "they would be a people blessed by the LORD" and this blessing would extend to their descendants.

Similarly, God's act of transformation as stipulated in our text also includes the animal world. In verse 25, 9 different common nouns and four verbs were used. These verbs and nouns were used in a syntactical connection in order to paint a picture of a transformed relationship that would exist between animals that were once in tension against each other such as the "wolf and the lamb," the loin will be transformed from being carnivorous to herbivorous and the serpent would return to its former state

⁴⁵ Adam Clarke, *Clarkes' Commentary on Old and New Testaments with Critical Notes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1832)

of feeding from the dust as declared by God in Genesis 3:14, meaning that it would no longer chase other living creature and its prey. As we have noted earlier, in the eschatological new heavens and new earth portrayed by John, animal kingdom does not exist, but in our text, Isaiah clearly spoke the way he did to help us use this text as a type of what would ultimately be. Isaiah tried to take us back to when creation took place in Genesis, when nature was in harmony with itself, when nothing and no one was working against the flourishing of the other, when no one and nothing will harm or destroy the other. In other words, Isaiah is saying that in God's eschatological transformed heavens and earth, the lost order, glory, harmony and togetherness that governed life and action in the Garden of Eden would be regained, but this would be a picture of how ultimately God would change all things to conform to its originally intended state, when sin has no power to spoil. To climax and seal the authors declaration, he clearly tells us that it is God who would do this, he spoke it and he would bring it to pass for His name's sake.

ISAIAH 65:17-25 AND GOD'S DESIRE FOR RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANITY AND ITS ABODE

God's desire right from the fall of man was and is to radically transform humanity and his environment. the Garden of Eden represented the ideal place where God wants man to live, and the state of perfection in which man was before the fall is the desired state which God desires to see man. Consequently, the eschatology of the OT grew out of the conviction that human failure has so much corrupted life on this earth that only a radical transformation initiated by God alone could make things right.⁴⁶ Yet, while the OT speaks extensively on the future, its theology of the last things is not as explicit as the NT. In the OT, the Lord gradually moved from one stage to another to see that the ultimate transformation of His people and the world becomes a reality, yet, because of human

⁴⁶ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 122.

responsibility and instrumentality, at many points, this plan proved abortive because of the limitedness and sinfulness of man.

Interestingly, in the entire occurrences of the word *bora* (38 times in Qal and 10 times in Niphal stems) in the Hebrew Bible, God is its subject.⁴⁷ This underlines that, the act of transforming humanity and the universe, the act of making all things new is the sole authority and act of God until he gradually renews those things affected by sin, and reverses the situation to its original purpose. This in other words speaks of the gradual establishment of God's kingdom. God's kingdom is here seen in the words of Vaughan Roberts as "God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing."⁴⁸ So, God is gradually transforming, changing and recreating every aspect of His creation until His rule dominates and saturates every nook and cranny of human life and the environment. This is the change that God desired to see, which he spoke through the ancient prophets at different instances in the history of His relationship with the people of Israel; gradual changes took place then, and yet the OT community could not become perfect as God desired and could not provide such an environment because of their imperfection.

In the OT, God entered into a covenant relationship with the people of Israel and gave them the law trusting that through keeping the covenant by absolute obedience to the law, they would be a transformed people who could influence their environment positively. But it evidently came to the fore that they could not live such a life and provide such an environment as desired by God. Seeing this however, God had to radically change his plan and method which he announced through the prophets—the Messiah whose coming was

⁴⁷ Moskala, "Does Isaiah 65:17-25 Describe the Eschatological New Heaven and the New Earth?" 192.

⁴⁸ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Norton Street, Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 22.

miraculous as announced by the prophets (Isa. 7:1-17; 42:1-9 53:1ff etc.), through whom all imperfections would be perfected. He would “open the eyes of the blind, set the captives free from prison and release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (Isa. 42:7). So, God’s act of transformation as a gradual process began from the transformation of the heart of man, because the seed of sin is in the heart of man. Prophet Ezekiel announces God’s desire to transform the hearts of men in order to conform to His will when he said “I will give you a new heart and put my spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). God as a Holy God does not and cannot relate with a sinful man, so God had to restore, amend and transform the broken relationship through Christ so they could have an uninterrupted relationship as it were in the Garden of Eden such that “before they call, I will answer, while they are still speaking, I will hear” (65:24).

In our text, we saw God transforming humanity to conform to His image once more, so that their relationship would also be transformed for a better divine human interaction. It is at this point good to note that this transformation is a gradual process as highlighted earlier. God is not on the rush to make things happen, rather He moves from one stage to the other. through the coming of Jesus Christ—the Messiah, God succeeded in transforming the heart of everyone who believes in him (Jesus Christ). Knowing this reality, Apostle Paul says:

“. . . if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” NIV (Corinthians 5:17-19).

Apostle Paul spoke in clear terms about the spiritual transformation that takes place in the hearts of all who receive Christ. This is interesting because he still says, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his one Son in the likeness of a sinful man to be a sin offering . . .” (Rom. 8:1-3).

Notably, God’s desire to transform humanity is beyond the spiritual or inner transformation. Absolutely, it is very important that man is transformed spiritually so he could relate with God uninterruptedly, yet God desires that man lives with Him bodily forever as it were in the Garden of Eden. This however, cannot take place until man is body transformed. This transformation is therefore said to be eschatological when Christ would return the second time. In our text of consideration, we agreed that Isaiah did not give a clear picture of how this eschatological event would take place, but using it as a type of Revelations 21, it depicts how man would be reunited with his maker in a never-ending interaction. Hence, it is God’s desire that man is radically transformed bodily at the *eschaton* in order to have a revolutionized body that would enable him welcome Christ at his second coming. This truth is expounded lucidly by Apostle John in 1 John 3:2 when he says “. . . now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” All who are in Christ will be like him as he is at the *eschaton*, even though it is not vivid how their body would be, we are hitherto certain that it would be a glorified body as that of Christ; this fact is pelted out by Paul once again by saying, “. . . our citizenship is in heaven. . . and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be

like his glorious body (Phil. 3:20). Furthermore, those who are bodily transformed to the likeness of Christ would live in the transformed environment—heavens and earth, which would be created at the *eschaton* and God will live with them forever. This is the environment Isaiah said “the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind, there will be no sound of weeping and crying, which is reechoed by John who further describes with much clarity that it would be a place where God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of this transformed people, there will be no death or mourning or crying or pain for the Lord is “. . . making everything new!”

Applicably, knowing this truth would inevitably give the church a sense of comfort and peace. In the history of the church from its inauguration till date, history made it clear that it experienced and still experiencing persecution of diverse kinds. This is indeed in fulfilment of the words Jesus spoke in explaining the signs of the *eschaton* when he says, “[before the end comes] . . . they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all in account of my name. . . [but] by standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:12ff). all this persecution the church is passing through is because the enemies of the church persecuted the Lord of the church also (John 15:20). At the *eschaton*, when God would renew all things, all persecution would end, all believers in Christ would be taken to a place where there would be no more pain, no death, no mourning, but there would be ultimate joy as a result of the reunion between the church and its Lord which comes as a consequence of God’s transforming power. The church should therefore not worry because “the former things would not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” at the *eschaton*.

CONCLUSION

Countless approaches and interpretations of “eschatology” have been offered by different scholars in the history of Biblical

scholarship, especially with regards to the events it envelopes. this work considered Isaiah 65:17-25 to demonstrate that eschatology could also be considered as transformation. The analysis of the text gives us a clear understanding of the fact that when the Lord says “I will create new heavens and new earth” he does not mean that he would create from the scratch as he did in Genesis 1. Rather it refers to a radical transformation that would take place to both heavens and earth, transformation/healing of the past, transformation of the human person, the transformation of labor, the transformation of divine human relationship and the transformation of the interaction between nature. Notably, we agreed in this paper that Isaiah 65:17-25 could be taken as a type and a pre-eschatological picture of Revelations 21. This is because what Isaiah was not able to see and say, John clarified and fulfilled this in clear diction. Finally we got it right that, God’s acts of transformation as understood from our text, gives the church hope that all the persecution it is passing through would one day become a thing of the past such that “they will not be remembered nor will they come to mind.” In addition, eschatology as transformation gives the church this everlasting hope that believers in Christ as they are transformed in the heart through the Spirit would ultimately experience bodily transformation as they get reunited with the Lord of the church at the *eschaton* to live forever in their new abode provided by God.

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