“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.” (Is65:20 NKJV)

**Millennial Assertions**

“There you go, ladies and gentlemen, just read the verse and that settles it! Here it is, proof positive of the coming earthly Millennium, right before your very eyes – can’t you see it?! No more miscarriages, all live to the century mark, yet there will still be sin and death on the earth. Isn’t it obvious that this verse is speaking of the coming reign of Jesus upon the earth after the Great Tribulation but before the Great White Throne final judgment, the golden Millennial age just around the chronological corner. Soon and very soon, Christ will inaugurate His kingdom and rule with a rod of iron from His Davidic throne in Jerusalem, while the Jews are back in the Promised Land and in control of the other nations. Need I say more?! Let’s take a minute to review our Millennial charts again for a more in-depth analysis …”

Whoa there, my eschatologically driven partner! Pull back on the interpretive reins! Stop the end times horse for just a second, get your feet out of the hermeneutical stirrups, dismount and look over your speedy steed. It seems that the foregoing analysis has read quite a bit into the passage that isn’t actually present therein. We appear to have more being read into the text than read out of it in this Is65:20 Premillennial examination. Where is a Millennium mentioned or even hinted at in all of Is65? Absent from the passage is any mention of one thousand years, a seven year Great Tribulation, a physical Messianic rule, a reinstituted Temple service, and a host of additional Premillennial assumptions.

Moreover, what of 65:17? It says:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.” (Is65:17)

Most Dispensationalists assume that the coming Millennium will consist of the SAME heavens and the SAME earth as we have today, but with Jewish hegemony as Jesus rules from Jerusalem (Christian Zionism). This Millennial outlook does not seem to align very well with the NEW heavens and NEW earth of 65:17.

In addition, the verse just preceding 65:20 gives another troubling aspect for an application during a future one thousand year earthly utopia. To wit:

“I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying.” (Is65:19)

No more crying or tears sounds great, but there is a minor interpretive problem. If this is the same golden era promoted by some, if death remains present in the purportedly future Millennium as allegedly described in 65:20, then at the accursed sinner’s century funeral will no one shed a tear? It seems inconceivable that the Millennial relatives of one who dies in sin will be so stone-hearted that they won’t grab a tissue for one thousand years, not a single one weeping for the dearly departed; but if 65:20 is about a fast-approaching utopia, then this is the very situation described by 65:19. Besides, just saying the words “no more crying” reminds the Biblically literate of Rev21:4, which most everyone associates with the eternal state (as with the new heavens and earth of Rev21:1), so how can these be about the Millennium in Is65:17,19 but about the end of all time in Rev21:1,4?

Something seems amiss with the opening Dispensational analysis if it is so easily dispatched by the text of Is65 itself. With a mere two verses immediately prior to the text at hand, we have easily undone the application of 65:20 to a future one thousand year golden age. All the weight of Premillennial interpretation hung upon the 65:20 peg quickly breaks the hook; this single verse simply cannot bear the load placed upon it by those who cast about for passages to support their predetermined eschatological framework. Finding an enigmatic passage and insisting that it MUST be interpreted in a cer-
tain Premillennial manner is the stock-in-trade of some prophetic prognosticators – just witness how the famous Millennial passage has had some surprising interpretive additions that appear nowhere in the text of Rev20:1-6! The words of the son of Amoz are indeed curious and obscure on many occasions, but creatively finding the Millennium in this (65:20) and other difficult passages appears to be more eisegesis than exegesis.

**Premillennialism Contradicted By God’s Word**

Let us take a moment to examine some significant Scriptural and logical objections to a future one thousand year earthly reign of Jesus in the Premillennial (and especially Dispensational) scheme, an allegedly fast-approaching golden age. The posited utopia is supposed to be far superior to the present era but not nearly as wonderful as the glorious eternal state to subsequently come. The Millennium of Premillennialism is a middling epoch with an ill-defined alchemic admixture of the current sinful state of affairs plus Christ being physically present on earth and making things tolerably wonderful through His iron-fisted rule over the rebellious nations. Jesus is forecast to forcibly administer justice upon those who, against all reason, ultimately and inexplicably rise up in rebellion against the clearly visible Messiah at the Millennium’s termination. How much of this world and the world to come gets stirred together in the Millennial brew is highly variant, since there are no Scriptural stanzas that give even the bulk of the particulars often attributed to such an intermediate epoch. If the state of affairs on earth during the Millennium cannot be Biblically established, this calls into question the entire Millennial epoch of Premillennialists. In other words, if only speculation accompanies one’s descriptions of a one thousand year period that is supposed to be absolutely critical to our understanding of eschatology – yea, for some it is crucial for comprehending all of the Scriptures, and brethren are disfellowshipped for even questioning Dispensationalism’s veracity – then doesn’t this variability confirm the suspicion that the Millennium is a man-made construct? Several objections to a future utopia will now be considered, and most of these doubtful aspects can only be answered via unbiblical speculation (though usually these protestations are simply ignored).

How will resurrected saints, Christians still in the flesh, and unregenerate mortals cohabitate during these one thousand years? No one really knows, since the Bible never addresses itself to the subject. Therefore, Scripturally unbounded and often irrational fabrications attend Millennial descriptions. How will the church work during this middling age. Will only resurrected saints hold church office? Will all of the genuine Christians depopulate the earth to move to Jerusalem to be with Jesus? These and many other questions go unanswered by the Scriptures, since such a coming intermediate golden era is nowhere depicted in any detail. Premillennialists must grasp at Biblical straws, like shanghaiing Is65:20 for Millennial purposes, when attempting to explain what the Word of God itself nowhere explicitly describes. If a viewpoint cannot Scripturally express the particulars of this seemingly crucial middling one thousand year age, but the advocates are rather reduced to reading into passages like Is65:20 a vast horde of Zionistic details, then surely something in the basic framework is gravely askew.

Jesus Himself stands astride this Premillennial path with drawn sword, though unheeded by those bent on driving the Millennial wedge between passages that God hath joined together. Jesus Christ plainly sets forth that there will be only this age and the age to come (Mt12:32; Mk10:30). How then does one fit an intermediate Millennial age in between the now (this age) and the eternal (the age to come)? Will the Millennium be part of this age or the age to come? Will the wheat be gathered in at the supposed Secret Rapture and then Jesus comes a second time to rule over a tare field during the Millennium? But flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom (1Co15:50), so how will the tares get past the flames to enter this future golden age? The wheat is taken, the tares are burned, so who is left to populate the Millennial field? Will the sheep be whisked off to heaven while the goats hang around for another one thousand years, awaiting a future judgment? These and many other questions go unaddressed by the Word of God, and tepidly answered in the reasoning of Premillennial advocates with guesswork and conjecture.

Moreover, what is the point of Jesus’ ruling from Jerusalem for one thousand years? It is entirely unclear what exactly this reign achieves. Does the world really require further evidence of man’s per-
petual iniquity, as some Dispensationalists assert? Rom1:3 entirely discounts this notion; as Paul demonstrated in this seminal passage, from start to finish the Scriptures testify of man’s universal bent towards wickedness. Is further proof really required really required? If so, where is the Biblical justification for such a notion, where God Himself testifies that a Millennium is necessary to offer further evidence of man’s evil bent? No indeed, we have more than enough Scriptural testimony to the truth of mankind’s depraved state; an additional one thousand year era that is neither this age nor the age to come is completely unnecessary.

Many Dispensationalists contend that each of their postulated seven dispensations end in failure. Do we really need to see Jesus’ rule fail? It seems that Jesus would suffer a second and even a third humiliation during His posited one thousand year rule. Jesus’ second humiliation would be His having to rule firmly over stiff-necked men while on earth for one thousand years – what a loathsome task! Would Jesus have to organize infrastructure and public welfare programs on behalf of the world, replete with a burdensome bureaucracy that may contain many unregenerate mortals? The third humbling of the Messiah, even more degrading than the second, would come at the end of the failed Millennium, when the nations inexplicably rise up in rebellion against Him who has iron rod ruled them for a thousand years. Will your eschatological system really advocate humbling Jesus Christ twice more so that you can give a mostly parched piece of real estate to the Jews, an allegedly “unconditional” promise? The latter is really the Millennial point for many advocates, that God has an unfulfilled land promise to the descendants of Abraham. The fact that the Scriptures nowhere actually teach this, but rather the contrary (e.g., Jos23:14-15, after the conquest of the Promised Land) is quietly set aside by Christian Zionists, along with the fact that one of the primary covenantal sanctions for disobedience was expulsion from the land (Jos23:16; Lv26; Dt28). In truth, no “unconditional” land promise ever existed, but Israel faced covenant sanctions for covenant disobedience, including eviction from the land.

Nothing Secret About The Rapture

What about the Secret Rapture? The operative passage, the one where the Latin Vulgate gives us the term “rapture” (“caught up” 1Th4:17), says that, “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1Th4:16). Trumpets, archangel voices, and a shout by Jesus don’t exactly sound very secret! It is no wonder that even the progenitor of Dispensationalism, JN Darby, rejected the “secret” aspect of the Rapture, as did CI Scofield, that great dispenser of Dispensational truth propagated via the Scofield Reference Bible (Prophecy and the Church Allis p191). Even some Dispensational thinkers have admitted that the Secret Rapture, a central component of the system, has no explicit Biblical texts to support it. DeMar (Last Days Madness 1991 p131-2) is helpful on this score:

Marvin Rosenthal, a prominent and respected advocate for Jewish evangelism, states that he could no longer hold to a belief in a pretribulational Rapture because he could find no biblical support for the position. What saith the Scriptures? Human opinions are important, but the Bible is our standard. If something is not taught therein, then every Christian must reject it. Rosenthal observed that in John Walvoord’s The Rapture Question fifty arguments for pretribulationalism were offered, but no biblical text was given that explicitly taught the position.

Not once, among fifty arguments, does this godly Christian leader cite one biblical text that explicitly teaches pretribulation rapturism — not once. This was not an oversight. The reason for the omission of any pretribulation Rapture texts is clear. There are none. Walvoord’s own comment helps substantiate that fact. He wrote, “It is therefore not too much to say that the Rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology [the doctrine of the Church] than eschatology [the doctrine of the last things].” In other words, he is saying that verses which deal with the church must be used to prove an issue that relates to the prophecy. There simply is no explicit exegetical evidence for pretribulation rapturism. [Pre-Wrath Rapture of Church 1990 p280]

This is a bombshell. Not one explicit verse to support a position that millions of Bible-believing Christians hold with unbending reverence. John Walvoord, in the first edition of his The Rapture Question [1957], had to confess that evidence for either a pretribulational or a posttribulational
Rapture was not explicitly taught in the Bible. “He deleted this statement in later editions of the book” [LaSor *Truth About Armageddon* 1987 p134]. I myself have heard a sermon detailing the Secret Rapture taken from the “white space” (the no text portion) between Revelation chapters 3 and 4. Can no better be offered in support of such a seminal belief than the blank space between two chapters? Will some base their Millennial views on Biblical thin air, with nary a clear passage to support the Secret Rapture?

**Second Chance Salvation?**

In Mt28:19-20, Jesus said that He would attend the efforts of gospel preachers until the end of the age. With the advent of the supposed Millennium, this age’s end has come. Will Jesus therefore be absent from the preaching of the evangel for the subsequent one thousand years of gospel progress? Then again, won’t the Millennium be a second chance at salvation for those “left behind,” who will then know for a fact that the good news is true? After the allegedly fast-approaching seven year Great Tribulation, could not a curious but impenitent North Carolinian phone up Jerusalem and ask Jesus Himself if the gospel facts are genuine?

“Hello, and thanks for calling Jesus, the Lord of the universe, at His royal offices in downtown Jerusalem. When you are in town, please come see the rejuvenated eleventh century BC Davidic throne, plus visit the reconstituted Temple and offer the bloody sacrifices required by Moses. Unfortunately, the Messiah is currently busy with some major construction and infrastructure projects, so please leave a message at the tone. Beeeep.”

“Howdy Jesus, and please pardon this interruption of your iron fisted rule, but I have a few questions that I hope you could clear up for me. Are you really God come in the flesh, and did you actually die on the cross for men’s sins? Were you really raised on the third day? You see, Bart Ehrman essentially called you a liar in my UNC courses prior to this Millennium thing, but now I’m having my doubts about his skeptical approach to the Bible. If all of what the Scriptures say is true, then I’d be a fool not to believe in You.

“I suppose, though, I should ask You to please tell let me know if I am one of the elect or not? I sure hope I’m a chosen one; but if not, then I won’t bother looking into this salvation thing any further. If I’m not one of those predestined to believe, then I suppose I have a thousand years to fearfully look forward to burning forever, which will surely dampen my Millennial partying! So then, am I a sheep or a goat, if you don’t mind me asking? If I’m a goat, then I guess I should make the most of the next 999 years and clandestinely live it up pursuing iniquity. I could then save the last Millennial year for preparing my weapons stash for that Gog and Magog thing ... hmm, though why I would rebel is unclear, since we all know that the brief final insurrection will fail miserably. Well, if I am not one of the elect, can I just avoid the final Gog and Magog mutiny thing a thousand years from now, or am I required to participate?

“Well, I know your time is very valuable, what with all the highway and housing construction projects begun under your administration, but your royal assistance would be greatly appreciated! Please call Otis back at 919-666-7777 and let me know, if you don’t mind; or have one of your ministering cherubim or seraphim contact me as soon as it is angelically convenient. Oh, and please ignore that 666 thing in my phone number, though sometimes I’ve wondered if it is prophetic of my fate. AT&T can have quite an unpleasant Freudian sense of humor! Again, thank you so very much for your Messianic time, and have a great Millennial day!”

Obviously in such a situation, no one would be required to have faith without sight. Faith is the confidence of things hoped for and the assurance of things unseen (Heb11:1), so no such faith is required if a phone call or email can accurately ascertain the truth. In the Millennium, those who survive seven years of pain and anguish will be rewarded with visions of Jesus on TV or on the internet explaining the gospel message to all. For some Fundamentalists, there would have to be a “fundamental” change in the propagation of the good news during the Millennium, with walking by sight replacing walking by faith. However, this posited situation does indeed seem a bit uncomfortable, since one thousand years of a second salvific opportunity for the unregenerate is at odds with the balance of the Word of God, which insists that there are and will be no second chances – just ask the Rich Man of Lk16!
In addition, it appears that this Millennial concept crosses swords with Peter’s second epistle. The common Dispensational view is that many, many will come to faith in Christ during the Great Tribulation and subsequent Millennium, the Biblical facts having become so plain by the events themselves that will supposedly unfold before the physical eyes of a watching world (once again, no faith needed). According to this Futurist dogma, Christians should therefore pray that the Secret Rapture happens very soon so that a mighty host will swell the ranks of the redeemed. Unfortunately for our Futurist and Zionist friends, 2Pt3 does not allow for this middling period of mass conversion, the Millennium that is neither this age nor the age to come. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2Pt3:10). It would be hard to imagine that any mortals could possibly survive the conflagration described by Peter, only later accepting the gospel – the bread of mankind will become burnt toast, with none remaining to respond to the good news! Moreover, just before verse 10 Peter states that the DELAY of Jesus’ coming demonstrates God’s patience towards His own (the elect), “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2Pt3:9).

According to the great Apostle, God’s seeming slowness with Jesus’ Second Coming actually results in a greater harvest of souls, not a reduced one. Peter does not appear to subscribe to the notion that extensive salvific accomplishments will occur AFTER Jesus returns. In fact, Peter’s view is antipodal to the Dispensational outlook which states that the Great Tribulation and Millennium will bring with them a vast horde of conversions. Peter held that the coming of Jesus will be the end of the earthly salvation show and will usher in the final state, with no opportunity for salvation in between. Peter leaves no room for a Great Tribulation and middling Millennium with highly effective (and predominantly Jewish) gospel efforts; instead, coming to Christ will come to a close at Jesus’ return, according to 2Pt3. The Dispensational view could not possibly be more opposed to Peter’s teaching, where the salvific door is firmly shut and locked after Jesus comes back again.

It would also appear that the soon departing Secret Rapture flight has the added unpleasant baggage of potentially undercutting missions efforts. Why take the good news to the world, since those “left behind” will know for an absolute fact that the gospel is true and turn to Jesus in droves? Besides, we are often assured by Millennial pessimists that the church is a failure, so why recruit more people to a failed institution? And don’t even bother preaching the gospel to your Jewish friends, since soon they will rule the earth from Jerusalem, right? If a Jew were converted to their Messiah tomorrow, then he would be Secretly Raptured away with the church and would entirely miss the fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham that is supposedly right around the chronological corner. An Israeli convert to Jesus loses his shot at joining his currently unbelieving Israeli pals in exercising Millennial political domination – bummer! It would have been better for him to remain an unconverted Jew for now; after turning to Jesus during the coming Great Tribulation, such an one would have authority over the world instead of merely getting heaven and eternal life through repentance and faith today. A delay in conversion would definitely be in the best interests of today’s Jews, so shouldn’t we leave off evangelizing them?

How Will The Millennial Church Operate?

What about church practice during the Millennium? Will we take communion during Jesus’ one thousand year earthly rule? Paul instructs us that when we partake of the bread and cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes (1Co11:26). During the posited Millennium, Jesus has already come, so I suppose there will be no more need for the Lord’s Table. Speaking of communion, it is curious that so many Dispensationalists take the ordinance, since they are Gentile non-members of the New Covenant. Huh?! Well, there can be no doubt that in its original, literal construction, the “new covenant [is] with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer31:31-34; Heb8:8). Since Gentile churchgoers are in no literal sense part of the house Israel or Judah, literalism dictates that the Gentiles in the church are not actually part of the New Covenant. If Gentile Christians are not New Covenant participants, then why do they partake of the communion cup that Jesus Himself said is the cup of the New Covenant in His blood (Lk22:20)? It seems that those who participate in the Lord’s Supper should only be ethnic Jews who are genuine members of the New Covenant with Israel and Judah,
from which Gentiles are obviously (literally) excluded. True, some try to get around this unpleasant impasse by proposing a second or alternate New Covenant of which the predominantly Gentile church are inexplicably a part; while others say that the church receives the runoff of New Covenant benefits without actually being in the New Covenant, though it is difficult to explain covenant blessings accruing to those outside of said covenant. It becomes clear that these glosses are stopgap interpretive measures without Scriptural warrant, all in support of preconceived Zionist notions. If you are truly committed to literalistic principles and know that the New Covenant is explicitly with ethnic Israel and Judah, then shouldn’t you follow the Bullingerites’ (Hyperdispensationalists’) example and refrain from taking the cup of the New Covenant at communion, since you aren’t Jewish and therefore are not part of the New Covenant?

The issue of the Millennial Lord’s Table raises additional questions concerning one thousand years of allegedly soon-coming church practice. Will resurrected saints run the local Millennial assembly, or will mere mortal Christians be permitted to serve as church leaders? Personally, I’d prefer immortal elders and deacons who can no longer sin – I’m sure their decision making would be far superior to anything mere mortals could contribute to the body of Christ. Then again, why would any believers want to be members of a small local congregation in Georgia if their Lord lives in Jerusalem? If nothing else, the airlines will be very busy during the Millennium, since apparently all mankind will have to take their bloody animal sacrifices to Jerusalem’s Third Temple (Ezk40-48), along with attending the annual Feast of Booths (Zch14:16-19). Will we really suffer such a retrograde redemptive maneuver, returning to slaughtering creatures for sins and keeping Jewish festivals? Yes, the likes of Scofield and Ryrie blithely assert that these reconstituted Levitical sacrifices are memorial; but Jesus gave an entirely alternate memorial method (“Do this in remembrance of me,” Lk22:19). Then again, we’ve seen above that the Lord’s Table meets its demise upon Christ’s return at the initiation of the Millennium, so do bloody animal sacrifices take up the fallen memorial scepter? Moreover, the operative passages from the “Third Temple” (Ezk42:13; 43:19ff.; 44:27,29; 45:15ff.; etc.) explicitly state that the resurrected bloody offerings are for sin and atonement, so how inconsistent “literalists” can perform an interpretive shell game and reread “atonement” to mean “remembrance” is passing strange indeed. The red herring of literalism is demonstrated by such misreadings of the Holy Writ, highlighting that the issue is not a literal hermeneutic but a Zionist agenda.

In this bloody Millennial process associated with the reconstituted Temple service, even Jesus Himself will have to give mortal priests His sacrifices (Ezk46:2 “The Prince” being the Messiah). Imagine that! The very One who provided redemption once for all will Himself stoop to having critters killed on His behalf, and this by mere humans! And what type of priests will be ministering at this Temple? One prophet said that only the sons of Zadok will be priests (Ezk40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11), while another said it will be the Levites (Jer33:18), and yet a third said the priests will come from all nations (Is66:20-1) – so which will it be?! Theological liberals like to say there is “tension in the text,” which translated meaneth that there are obvious errors that we’ll just smile and wink at. What could be a more obvious error than this priestly prophetic confusion? Even more confusing is the issue of Millennial circumcision. Ezekiel flatly states (44:9) that the uncircumcised will have no Temple access, so does this mean that for one thousand years the Gentiles will have to cross Paul’s objections in Galatians and become circumcised? But how will a resurrected Gentile be circumcised, one who is no longer in the flesh but who wants to worship alongside His Lord at the “Third” Temple in Jerusalem?

**Sin Might Cancel The Second Coming?**

Did you know that Jesus’ Second Advent might be significantly delayed or even cancelled by man’s actions? Indeed, applying the oft quoted postponement logic of garden variety Dispensationalism, the Second Coming may never happen at all! Since it is alleged that Jewish disobedience at Jesus’ First Advent postponed Christ’s kingdom until a future Millennium (a thoroughly Christ rejecting Jewish argument, by the way), couldn’t a similar Jewish rebellion keep the Second Advent from taking place, thereby indefinitely postponing Jesus’ return and one thousand years of blissful but iron-fisted rule over a host of ornery nations? On Jesus’ rule, Is9:7 frankly tells us that the Messiah’s rule will be without end; how then can one say that His earthly rule will be only a measly one thousand years?
An Empty Tautology

Turning to another inconsistency, some literalists stridently contend that “Israel means Israel,” adding unsubstantiated accusations like, “You spiritualize away Old Testament prophecies about Israel’s future? You don’t take the Bible very seriously, do you?” [Alas, many think that fierce pejoratives offer an effective substitute for accurate Scriptural logic. Such juvenile behavior is an eschatological Punch-and-Judy Show, wherein the Dispensational bat puppet beats its fellow mute non-Dispensational puppet and then gloats over its empty triumph.] Fortunately, it is relatively easy to undercut the purportedly literalist “Israel means Israel” tautology by pointing out additional hermeneutical inconsistencies, since the same literalists do not declare that Edom means Edom or Moab means Moab. Israel’s ancient enemies are explicitly cited in a host of passages – consider the Ammonites (Is11:14; Dan11:41), Assyrians (Mi5:5; Is19:23-25), Edomites (Is11:14; 63:1-6; Jl3:19; Am9:11-12; Dan11:41), Moabites (Is11:14; Dan11:41), and Egyptians (Zch14:16-19; Is19:23-25). Doesn’t consistency require the physical resurrection of these dissipated nations to apply the prophetic passages literally? Why such an obvious interpretive discrepancy, this variable application of the Old Testament prophecies, where Israel is the current state of (virtually atheistic) Israel while the explicitly named Old Testament enemies of Israel are given modern names like Russia, China or Saudi Arabia? These and similar objections to the pervasive garden variety Dispensationalism could be multiplied ad nauseam; but those wed to their extra-Biblical presuppositions will likely ignore the refutation.

“Unconditional” Land Promise Actually Quite Conditional

Much is made by Dispensationalists of the eternal land promise to Abraham’s physical descendants (Gen13:14-15). A shoe is removed and the table is firmly pounded (Kruschev 1960), accompanied by vehement, elevated voices, asserting that God made an unconditional real estate pact with Israel that He will surely keep. God made a promise, it hasn’t yet come to pass, and God doesn’t lie, so the promise of Palestine to ethnic Israel will take place in the future Millennium – such is the extent of the Dispensational logic. However, Bell (Crit Eval Pretrib Rapture 1967) reminds us that Paul quotes this very passage (Gen13:14-15) in Gal3:16, “thus making Christ and those who belong to Him the ultimate heirs of this promise” (p134). Bell continues (p134-137):

It is the unwavering position of dispensationalism that the [land] promise is to be fulfilled in the future to one generation of literal Israelites who survive the tribulation period and enter the millennium. After the thousand-year occupancy of the land, these Jewish believers will be relocated in the New Jerusalem, joining the church and the resurrected Old Testament saints in their eternal home. This thousand-year occupancy is thought to be absolutely essential to a “literal” fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, because the occupancy of the land by Israel historically was certainly not “forever,” and there is some question as to whether or not the nation ever occupied as much territory as was promised to them. Since the Hebrew prophets, subsequent to the days of David and Solomon when Israel enjoyed its most extensive geographical expansion, still speak of the occupancy in its fulness to be future, it does seem that a future ultimate fulfillment of some kind is to be expected. The real question involves the manner of the fulfillment, not the certainty of it.

It has already been pointed out that contemporary dispensational leaders have abandoned the more consistent literalism of their predecessors who held that all Israel would indeed inhabit the literal land of Canaan forever. The modern view that only one generation of Israelites will inhabit the land literally, and that for only a thousand years, is an attempt to come to terms with explicit New Testament doctrine that the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, not the literal land of Canaan, is to be the eternal home of the believers of all ages, Jew and Gentile alike (cf. Rev21).

By such an admission, however, it would seem that dispensationalists have actually surrendered their case. The original promise of the land was made to Abraham and to his “seed” – forever. According to dispensationalists, Abraham’s seed must mean the literal descendants of Abraham: “It would seem obvious to all who are not deliberately trying to pervert the plain teaching of scripture that the seed of Abraham, of necessity, is the term applied to the physical descendants of Abraham” (Pentecost Things To Come 1958 p85).
Therefore a “consistently literal” interpretation of the promise would conclude that Abraham himself and his physical descendants would inherit the literal land of Canaan forever. There can be no question that this is the absolutely plain, normal literal understanding of the promise. Yet dispensationalism today teaches that Abraham himself will not inhabit the literal land of Canaan again, nor will the millions of believing Israelites who died in Old Testament times, nor will the believing Jews who have believed in Christ and have become a part of the Christian church (ibid pp. 532-46). Instead, only one generation of Israelites will inherit the literal land, and that for only a limited time, one thousand years (ibid).

It is remarkable indeed that dispensationalists can maintain that this represents a “consistent employment of normal or plain interpretation” (Ryrie Dispensationalism Today 1965 p47). Yet they have been forced to this anomalous position by certain New Testament passage which are so clear that even the supposed advantages of unwavering literalism must be set aside in practice, if not by admission.

Summarizing Bell’s point, if the land is assured eternally to Abraham and to his descendants, how can this unerring promise of God be transformed to mean only one Israelite generation, and this for only one thousand years? “All Israel for all time” is by an interpretive shell game magically exchanged and now means only one generation of Jews for one thousand years. Unfortunately, such prophetic sleight of hand is commonly accepted with minimal querying by those committed to Zionistic principles.

Will the inquisitive Dispensationalist just bury his proverbial head in the prophetic sand just to keep the peace with his more belligerent literalist brethren? There can be no doubt that the bulk of historic Jewry has not profited in the least from Yahweh’s allegedly unwavering real estate pledge. The majority Dispensational report turns God’s literal land promise into ephemeral emptiness for the historical preponderance of Israelites. Maybe it would be better to go with the author of Hebrews, who says that the Lord actually promised those of faith a better land, a heavenly one, as sought by their father Abraham (Heb11:10,13-16)? Isn’t a heavenly Sabbath rest (Heb3-4) a much better “land” promise to Israel than a semi-arid piece of Middle Eastern real estate, surrounded by a host of angry and heavily armed Islamic enemies?

Ignored Unconditional Promises

Moreover, Dispensationalism’s inconsistent literalism is seen with respect to the various and sundry eternal promises to Abraham and his descendants which are routinely ignored in their “forever” application. For instance, the Aaronic priesthood is said to be “a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations” (Ex40:15). What, then, of Jesus’ Mechizedekian priesthood that supplants Aaron? Hasn’t the “perpetual” Aaronic priesthood come to a close at the foot of the cross, again as forwarded by the author of Hebrews? Indeed, the descendants of Aaron had suffered much earlier setbacks prior to the first century AD. True, the Maccabees were successful in overthrowing Seleucid rule (167-165BC), but they and their non-Aaronic descendants vied for the high priesthood in subsequent years, even enlisting pagan rulers to assist their contending claims for the fancy hat and priestly garments (see Josephus Antiq). After the Maccabean Revolt, the Syrians and later the Romans became the prime factors in determining who was installed as high priest, even if those appointed had no Aaronic pedigree and thus no Biblical right to be so elevated. Why don’t our literal Christian Zionist brethren get upset and demand a literal fulfillment for the “perpetual” Aaronic priesthood that was to last “throughout their generations”?

Often non-Dispensationalists are vigorously labeled “Supersessionists,” being accused of replacing Israel with the church. Is it really so unpleasant to suppose that the New Covenant supersedes the Old, and thus the New Covenant people supersede the Old? Even the allegedly non-supersessionists cannot cloak their replacement tendencies. Did not Jesus’ High Priesthood supersede that of Aaron? What is the Temple now? Is not the Temple of God now the church of Christ, superseding the structure in Jerusalem? As it turns out, the prophetic literalists belie their Christian proclivities and are nearly every bit as “Supersessionist” as those of non-Dispensational leanings, save for the ethnic nation of Israel. As with “literalism,” we once again find Dispensationalists to be entirely selective in their application of the “Supersessionist” moniker.
A few more generally ignored eternal promises make the same point as given above; namely, that the literalism of most is decidedly persnickety, like a man walking through a cafeteria and selecting this vegetable but not another. David said, “The Lord God of Israel has given rest to His people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever” (1Chr23:25). Has Israel actually dwelt in Jerusalem throughout its entire history? Not long after David’s words were uttered came the Babylonian Exile, decreed by the Almighty Himself – did God therefore fail to fulfill His “forever” promise concerning the Jewish occupation of Jerusalem? And what about the many centuries after the Jewish War (66–73AD) and the Bar Kochba Revolt (132–135AD), when the Messiah rejecting nation of Israel was booted from its capital for over 1,800 years? The “forever” uttered by David was obviously limited in scope. Likewise, the Tabernacle lampstand was to be tended by the sons of Aaron “from evening until morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel” (Ex27:21).

What has become of this “forever” lampstand promise, especially once the Temple was razed, first by the Babylonians and then by the Romans, both taking place on the 9th of Av?

Hold on, please, we have a battlefield communiqué from Captain Obvious. He has radioed us from the frontline that the literalism of most Dispensationalists is quite picky in which “forever” and “eternal” promises they tenaciously cling to! In fact, it seems that only one “eternal” promise, that of the land, is elevated to the position of hermeneutical control, while the other perpetual promises are quietly ignored. Raised Dispensational voices asserting their “consistent literalism” help distract attention from such inconsistencies; and as James White often says, “Inconsistency is a sign of a failed argument.” Unfortunately, such selective literalism is typically accompanied by vigorous brow beating of perceived opponents into docile submission. Fierce emotions do not establish a position as truthful, but harsh reactions can often effectively crush the opposition of the untaught or cowardly.

The Land Promise WAS Fulfilled

As stated above, the rather weak logic often applied by Dispensationalists regarding the land promise goes something like this: God promised the land eternally to Israel, this has not yet happened and God does not lie, so the fulfillment of this promise is future to our time, during the Millennium. But what if the land promise HAS already been fulfilled by Yahweh? We have powerful Scriptural warrant to say that what God had sworn to Abraham He has, in fact, already accomplished in the distant past.

As the book of Joshua informs us:

So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass. (Jos21:43–45)

It would be difficult to utter more expansive language than this with respect to the completed land promise; the Almighty did what He had sworn, giving all of the Promised Land to Israel. So as not to miss the point, the chapter ends with an all-embracing declaration – “Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.” Will the allegedly (but actually terribly selective) literalists of our day say that God did not really mean what He explicitly said, and that this land promise did NOT come to pass in the days of Joshua? Joshua himself later testifies, “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed” (23:14). In the face of such Scriptural assertions, will our Christian Zionist friends yet declare that the good words of God have indeed failed thus far, and that the completion of the land promised to Israel remains future to our day, some 3,400 years after Joshua’s day?

Besides, if this land promise has to date been rather empty and unfulfilled, what does this say about God’s character, about His power to do what He had declared? How can we trust His other promises if He obviously cannot keep the land promise to the physical Israelites? Moreover, it seems that many Futurists don’t even attempt to explain WHY the land promise is so substantially delayed. Has it been from Israeli disobedience? This is akin to the “delayed kingdom” conundrum; namely, if Jewish diso-
bedience postponed the First Advent kingdom to a future Millennium, does this not discredit the Lord’s omnipotence? At the very least, one cannot claim fealty to the Biblical (and Reformed) understanding of God’s sovereign power and still hold to man’s ability via sin to force the Almighty to hold His promises in abeyance. Was the land promise similarly delayed, thus impugning Yahweh’s covenant keeping character?

So as not to miss the “land” mark, the writer of Kings informs us, “Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life” (4:21). Does this not sound an awful lot like the land promise to Abram, wherein God said, “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen15:18)? Solomon later declares, “Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant” (1Ki8:56). Did Solomon think that the land promise had not yet been completed by Yahweh, but awaited completion in the distant future, some 3,000 years later?

It seems that despite all of this testimony, there are many who plant the literalist flag on their molehill of baptized Zionism but who then turn around and discount the very words of God, saying that the land promise has not yet come to pass. Alas, such assertions are often accompanied by vicious, toothbared attacks to hold the Dispensational hill. Such obviously finicky literalism appears to prefer a resurrected first century Zionism over the Word of God. A rebuilt Temple complete with bloody sacrifices, a Messiah ruling from a Jerusalem Davidic throne, Palestine fully populated by Jews who reign over the world, and all the Mosaic code in full force – this is just a resurrected Pharisaical first century AD hope, dispelled fully by the New Testament. The Scriptures themselves pick up the shovel to quietly cover such Dispensational tomfoolery with six feet of interpretive dirt. R.I.P.

The Land Promise WAS Conditional

There is a generally overlooked but convincing open Biblical secret with respect to the “eternal, unconditional land promise” forwarded by Christian Zionists. The land promise was implemented with obedience strings attached – occupying the Promised Land was not “unconditional” after all! Refutation of the “unconditional” nature of the land promise was given in such passages as Lv26 and Dt28 in the descriptions of specific sanctions for Old Covenant disobedience. Expulsion from the land was guaranteed for rebellion under the Mosaic economy, which came to pass during the Babylonian Captivity; much later, dispossession of the land took place more emphatically after the Jewish War (66-73AD) and the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-135AD). How one can maintain that the land promise was given without conditions when reiterations of it consistently state the contrary is passing strange indeed. The Israelites hauled off to Exile could not beat their plaintive prayer tom-toms and whine, “But Yahweh, the land promise You gave us was unconditional, so it doesn’t matter that we have been exceedingly disobedient to the covenant! Can’t You keep Your promises?! Why don’t we get a free pass for our wickedness? Why can’t we stay in Palestine, no matter how badly we behave?!”

I suppose those looking to dodge the Biblical bullets could say, “Yes, the Mosaic economy was clearly conditional, with Israel being expelled from the land for covenant insurgency; but the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional, so the eternal land promise to Abraham yet abides.” But how does one explain two different land promises being simultaneously fulfilled, one being conditional and the other without obedience strings attached? The equation is binary – either Israel was in the land or it was not. It seems Scripturally impossible to bifurcate Abraham and Moses as contemporaneous promises for the exact same piece of Levant real estate.

If nothing else, the course of history debunks any attempted gloss that separates Old Covenant land sanctions from the promises to Abraham. The fact is that the Jews have been more OUT of the land than in it since Abraham’s day. Let us briefly review Israelite history in the Promised Land. Abraham owned precious little of the land promised to him (only a cave purchased at full price!); this situation continued for subsequent Hebrews until the time of Joseph, when the children of Abraham were a small nomadic band; the Jews then spent over 400 years in Egypt, the latter portion in bondage (and yet numerically blessed by Yahweh, thereby debunking the Dispensational notion that God only bless-
es Israel when the nation dwells in the Promised Land); after the Conquest under Joshua, vast regions of allegedly Jewish real estate were actually controlled by the Philistines and other nations from the time of the Judges to David’s reign; post-Solomon, territorial control gradually decreased as other nations scooped up the nation’s lightly protected perimeters; expulsion for Mosaic disobedience came next, with seventy years of Babylonian Captivity; even after the Restoration, the Jewish provinces were dominated by Persia, Greece, Syria, and finally Rome; and in Jesus’ day, the Jews had to consult the Romans for almost every political move – Rome even appointed the High Priest (!), typically of non-Aaronic stock; and the final expulsion from the “eternally, unconditionally Promised Land” took place after the Jewish War (66–73AD) and the Bar Kochba Revolt (132–135AD). After Bar Kochba, the emperor Hadrian barred Jews from dwelling in Jerusalem and renamed the city to Aelia Capitolina in honor of the Roman god Jupiter. From 135 to 1948, the eternal, unconditional land promise was small comfort to the dispersed Jewish nation. We can categorically assert that if the land promise to Abraham was indeed abiding and unconditional, then to date the Almighty has done a pretty miserable job of keeping His Word. Rather than impugning the divine character, history and the Scriptures both teach us that God treated the real estate promise as being entirely conditioned upon obedience, as articulated in such numerous Biblical passages.

Moreover, one would suppose that some level of national autonomy should attend the “eternal, unconditional land promise.” Being ruled by others in their own land could hardly be counted towards a meaningful completion of the Abrahamic promise. As a modern example, black slaves in the nineteenth century were present in the USA but in no true sense did they possess the land wherein they dwelt. In like fashion, it is well known that during many Biblical and extra-Biblical epochs, though the Jews were physically present and accounted for in the land, yet Palestine was politically controlled by other nationalities. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, Turkey, Britain – all either directly or effectively ruled the Promised Land during various historical eras. One could hardly suppose that the Abrahamic land promise was being fulfilled to the ethnic Jews if other nations removed sovereignty from them. If the current (and largely secular) nation of Israel was today overrun by the Syrians, Jordanians and Egyptians, would anyone contend that the unconditional land promise was still being realized because many Jews were yet present in the land? Similarly, it is an historical fact that during the bulk of Israeli real estate history the Jews could raise their hands as being in attendance in the Land of Promise, but they dwelt in territory controlled by others. Rarely in history has Palestine been characterized by Israeli autonomous self-governance. During the ages where others controlled the militarily weak Jewish nation, it really is impossible to contend that the “eternal, unconditional land promise to Abraham” was being effectively fulfilled, if by this one means that the Jews politically controlled Palestine. As is easily demonstrated from times gone by, the land promise to ethnic Israel has been ephemeral emptiness from the Almighty, if indeed it was given unconditionally.

Christian Zionism A House Of Cards

Please excuse this exposé of the selective literalism that supports an unbiblical meta-narrative, but some small effort must needs be made to set aside presuppositions not forwarded in the Scriptures before looking more closely at the meaning of Is65:20. It was relatively easy to show with just a couple of verses immediately prior to 65:20 that there is no way to square a baptized Zionism with the context of the chapter. Is65:17 says that there will be a new heavens and earth during the application of Is65:20, while typically Dispensationalists contend that the new heavens and earth will only come after Jesus’ one thousand year reign in Jerusalem. Right before the very text under consideration, verse 19 clearly states that there will be no crying or mourning, but this seems almost impossible to reconcile with the Millennial deaths at the century mark allegedly described in 65:20. What?! Can we really suppose that no one will shed a tear during the Millennium when a nice old man of one hundred dies in his sins? Some literalists childishly contend, “You can’t understand Is65:20 in any other way than my way or you’re disagreeing with God!” However, upon closer examination, the passage itself discounts a Millennial application. It seems that the staunch Dispensational case made for the enigmatic “death at one hundred” verse (Is65:20) appears not so Scripturally convincing after all. The Millennial house of cards is quickly knocked over by a light Biblical breeze; indeed, the acrimony of Christian Zi-
onism’s adherents seems quite a bit more stout than the Scriptural cards used in the construction of a Jewish one thousand year utopia.

Rather than the insertion of a malignant foreign body – the Millennium – into Is65:20 (and other tricky prophetic passages), it is the purpose of this paper to show that this text neatly aligns with a First Advent application, with the gospel going to the ends of the earth. Is65:20 is about this age – the age of the church and the gospel – and not about the age to come, the final consummation when all things are summed up in Christ. In explaining Is65:20, there really is no need to appeal to a middling Millennial age that is neither this age nor the age to come, a one thousand year period never explicitly mentioned anywhere in Isaiah; yea, the Millennium is Biblically found nowhere other than in Rev20:1-6, which raises serious doubts about inserting a prefabricated framework into the balance of the prophetic Word of God. The Millennium may well be the log in the Premillennialist’s eye that prevents clear prophetic vision; casting aside the one thousand year piece of lumber sheds great gospel light on many of the Old Testament prophetic texts!

**Contextual Considerations**

If Is65:20 is not speaking of century deaths during the Millennium, then what exactly is it talking about?! Please be advised that the explanation will not be the fast-paced and superficial sloganeering of the opening Premillennial analysis. The more difficult the passage, the longer the required explication. It may take more than a few sentences to reach a conclusion, which will surely try the patience of those only satisfied with sound bites, social media replies and microwave answers. Please forbear as together we unpack the hidden treasures of Is65:20 – there is gospel gold at the end of the interpretive rainbow!

Whenever a tough passage is encountered, one of the best Biblical practices is to step away from the minutiae of the verse itself and take a gander at the context as a whole. Setting the stage can at least help us understand what the verse is not saying. One’s outlook must surely comport with the balance of the text, and this will rule out certain interpretations and interpolations. As an example, one could scrutinize the bark of the tree or the bugs residing therein, but wouldn’t it be better to pull back a few paces and determine if the tree is a maple or an oak? If it is a maple, then don’t expect acorns. Such is often the misdirected case with a microscopic inspection of a difficult Scriptural text. A holistic approach (the tree itself, or even the whole forest) sets the context much better than an exacting analysis of the Greek or Hebrew (the bark and bugs). This is not to say that the latter is unimportant; but if conclusions drawn from the original languages are at cross purposes to the meaning of the paragraph, chapter, section, or book, then the language considerations must themselves be in error. The Lord says in the whole what He fleshes out in the parts.

What can be found in the chapter to help us understand 65:20? A strong adversative appears in the verse under consideration, the contrast between those who live out their days and the accursed sinner of one hundred. As a reminder, the passage under review reads as follows:

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.” (Is65:20 NKJV, numbers and emphasis added)

If in the balance of the chapter we find two groups consistently contrasted, then we are in a better position to understand the adversative presented in verse 20.

**The Gospel To The Gentiles (Is65:1-3a)**

Can we find similar adversatives in Is65 that might help us discover the meaning of 65:20? Indeed, contrasts lace the chapter, beginning with the familiar first few verses:

“I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ to a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, a people who continually provoke Me to My face” (65:1-3a)

We need not wonder about the application of this text, for we have an Apostolic directive on the matter. Surely the words of Paul in Rom10:20-21 ring in the minds of the Biblically literate when reading
65:1-2. How did Paul apply these words from Isaiah? It was that the Gentiles found the God of Israel, though they did not seek Him, while the Scripturally enlightened Jews did not obey the New Covenant but instead violently rebuffed their Messiah and so found themselves rejected by God.

Before moving forward with the 65th chapter of the son of Amoz, let us quickly review Paul’s argument in the controversial Rom9:11 to more fully understand the great Apostle’s application of Is65:1-2 in his argument concerning ethnic Israel. Paul begins with a plaintive plea on behalf of the Jews:

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom9:1-5)

At the very outset, Paul set the interpretive stage for what follows. His great desire was that the Jews would turn to Jesus Christ in faith, though the bulk of them to that point had not. The question is, “Has God’s Word failed, since in the main the Jews had rejected their Messiah?” Often this aspect is overlooked when folks atomize Paul’s subsequent presentation. What is the Apostolic answer to this troubling question about ethnic Israel’s unbelief? “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom9:6). Paul’s point is that being a physical Jew does not guarantee Messianic acceptance, for from the first Israelite (Abraham) onward, there had always been a distinction between the children of the promise flesh and those merely of the flesh. Isaac was of the promise but not Ishmael, though both issued forth from Abraham; and, more pointedly, one twin (Jacob) was chosen while the other (Esau) was not (Rom9:7-13). We could profitably dissect the balance of Rom9, but the point here is that Paul set the stage for God’s election of some but not others, and in this context Is65:1-2 is quoted.

Moving to the end of the chapter and the beginning of the next, Paul continues his explanation for the majority Jewish rejection of Jesus:

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. (Rom9:30-33; 10:1-3)

Can there be any doubt that the context of Paul’s use of Is65:1-2 is his concern for the ethnic Jews who had rejected Christ, who had stumbled over the stumbling stone and the rock of offense? Bearing this understanding in mind, consider again the Apostolic message:

And Isaiah is very bold and says, “I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.” But as for Israel He says, “ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.” (Rom10:20-21)

At the very outset of Is65 we have the subject matter set with Apostolic authority, giving the primary antithesis of Rom9-11 (and, as will be shown, in Is65). The predominantly Gentile belief in the gospel is contrasted with the Messianic spurning of ethnic Israel by Paul in Rom9-11, and the mighty Apostle employs Is65:1-2 in support. This linkage between Rom10:20-1 and Is65:1-2 strongly implies that this contrast is likewise the subject matter of the remainder of Is65. The adversatives of Is65 (including 65:20) are likely of a similar construction, where Jewry’s rejection of their Messiah is offset against those of New Covenant faith, whether Jew and Gentile. Upon this thesis we proceed, and the proof is not lacking in Is65 support.

Covenant Rebels (Is65:3-7)

A further description of the insurgents against their divine regent is given next; to wit:
“A people who continually provoke Me to My face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine’s flesh, and the broth of unclean meat is in their pots. Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before Me, I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will even repay into their bosom, both their own iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers together,” says the Lord. “Because they have burned incense on the mountains and scorned Me on the hills, therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom.” (65:3-7)

What could be a better description of Israel’s rebellion against the gospel of Jesus Christ than this? Though they claimed to be a holy nation (the infamous “holier than thou” passage), yet they were to God as those who lived in graveyards and ate unlawful pulled pork sandwiches.

The words of 65:3-7 neatly align with Paul’s later assessment in Rom9:11, that the unbelieving branches were shorn from the cultivated Jewish godly heritage olive tree, allowing the grafting in of the believing Gentile wild olive branches. Jeremiah predicted this very first century AD state of affairs when he said, “The Lord called your name, ‘A green olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form’; with the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are worthless” (11:16). It is probable that Paul drew upon Jeremiah’s prophetic insight when crafting the Rom11 olive tree analogy of Israel’s rebellion, resulting in their being pruned away from the trunk of faith; but the Apostle added the unexpected grafting in of the believing Gentile nations. Paul dealt with two types of olive branches – the natural ones, many removed from the cultivated tree for unbelief; and the wild Gentile olive branches grafted into the tree of faith. Likewise, Is65 deals with two types of people – those who wickedly assumed they were right with God through liturgy and pedigree, contrasted with those who were truly Yahweh’s own people of faith.

The formalism of unbelieving Jewry is castigated by Yahweh in Is65:3-7. Their hearts were dead set against their Creator while they maintained their external forms of worship. What could be a more apt description of first century AD Judaism, a nation that en masse missed that the Mosaic rituals pointed forward to Jesus? Jesus Himself echoed these sentiments. As one of numerous examples, consider Mt23, an extended recitation of condemning woes heaped upon the Jews by the Savior Himself, the Messiah they were strenuously rebuffing. The vineyard tenants (the Jews) preferred their empty rituals to God’s outstretched hand, and they threw the vineyard owner’s son (their Messiah) out of the vineyard and killed Him (Mt21:33-46). Dry externalism was the undoing of the unbelieving natural (Jewish) olive branches, and for this they were cut off, their kingdom being forcibly removed and given to others (21:43) – a message they fully understood (21:45-46). Of course, this is the very sum and substance of Is65. The Jewish formalists who claimed to follow the Almighty were contrasted with those who actually pursued Him in truth; and this dissimilarity has clear bearing on the meaning of the verse under consideration, Is65:20.

God’s Servants and Enemies (Is65:8-12)

In the next section, the Lord through Isaiah continued to highlight the disparity between the empty liturgically minded but ultimately ungodly Jews and the holy remnant whose hearts had been changed by divine decree and who therefore were His genuine servants.

Thus says the Lord, “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is benefit in it,’ so I will act on behalf of My servants in order not to destroy all of them. I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and an heir of My mountains from Judah; even My chosen ones shall inherit it, and My servants will dwell there. Sharon will be a pasture land for flocks, and the valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for My people who seek Me. But you who forsake the Lord, who forget My holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune, and who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny, I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter. Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.” (65:8-12)

Again, the distinction is drawn between those who falsely claimed fealty to the heavenly Sovereign and those who were authentic followers of Yahweh. The Almighty would care for His little flock, the
few good clusters, His servants; however, the bulk of the Jewish populace was destined for slaughter. Surely this is an apt description of the first century AD situation when the gospel was unveiled to Jew and Gentile alike. While the church was safely rescued from Jerusalem and fled to Pella (Eus3.5.3), Jerusalem was flattened – mercilessly razed – and the unregenerate Jews cut down en masse by the invading Romans during the Jewish War (66-73 AD). Extensive destruction came upon those who had called for Jesus’ blood to be upon themselves and their children (Mt27:25). In the words of the son of Amoz, the chosen (or elect) good clusters were spared, and the flock of God found rest and pasture (echoes of Jn10); simultaneously, the disbelieving Jews who were aggressively opposed to gospel progress (1Th2:14-16) received their comeuppance via the Roman sword and the consequent genocide against the rebellious nation. God graciously called to the first century AD Jews, but the nation largely ignored and even forcefully refused the gospel message and its related warnings (Heb2:2-4), just like those in the days before the Flood ignored Noah’s preaching (2Pt2:5). The Lord’s extended hand of mercy was vigorously knocked away by the Jewish nation, so their blood was indeed upon their own heads – on that generation who faced the wrath of God delivered by the Roman sword. [The curse does not abide thereafter – it was only for that rebellious generation; Mt23:35-36.]

Cursed For Messianic Rejection

Let us expand briefly upon this important Biblical topic, since the Messianic implications were startling destructive for the Jews of Jesus’ era. Is65 began with a passage quoted by Paul in his Rom9-11 argument as applying to the effects of the gospel in the first century AD. Many Gentiles found salvation in the Jewish Messiah – “I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by My name” (65:1). Meanwhile, the Israelites of Paul’s generation generally rejected Jesus – “I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face” (65:2-3a). What would be the outcome for that generation of Jews cursed by Jesus Himself for their rejection of the New Covenant? “Therefore I will number you for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight” (65:12). When did these awful predictions come to pass? Can there be any doubt that the very generation guilty of the blood from Abel to Zechariah (Mt23:35-36) would be cut down by the looming Jewish War (66-73 AD), while the church was protected by its flight to nearby Pella (Eus3.5.3)? The first century AD facts dovetail neatly with a Messianic application of Is65. This is the very interpretive road traveled by Paul in citing Is65:1-2 in Rom10, though he did not at that time expand fully on the wrathful implications of Jewish Messianic rejection; but the insurgent nation would find out soon enough about the consequences of their unbelieving actions, when Israel’s demise at the hands of the four invading Roman legions came like a flood.

The broken off natural olive branches would meet their end, being gathered up and burned within a generation of the cross. As Isaiah put it, they were numbered for the sword and destined for slaughter, and this because they had belligerently snubbed God’s gospel hand graciously extended to that rebellious Israeli generation. In their mutiny against the Lord, the Jews had executed their sinless Messiah, calling for His blood to be upon them and their children (Mt27:25). Would the Father stand idly by while His Son was so mistreated, abused and put to death? The Jewish War was God’s resounding reply to those who rose up against and killed the vineyard owner’s Son. The vineyard was yanked from the unbelieving Israeli nation and given to a people, the church, who produced the fruit thereof (Mt21:43). The ethnicity of the Jews brought no favor from the Lord if not united with faith, and their aggressive, bald faced rejection and execution of the Son brought the Father’s vengeance; the same eternal consequences, by the way, apply today not only to the physical Jews, but also to any not of Abraham’s faith.

Blessed and Cursed Ones (Is65:13-19)

Is65 continually confronts us with light versus darkness distinctions highlighting the different fates of those who made an empty claim to be Yahweh’s servants and those who were God’s own in truth
and demonstrated such by their actions. Keeping in mind Paul’s New Testament era application of 65:1-2 in Rom10:20-1, let us consider the next segment of the chapter:

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Behold, My servants will eat, but you will be hungry. Behold, My servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold, My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. Behold, My servants will shout joyfully with a glad heart, but you will cry out with a heavy heart, and you will wail with a broken spirit. You will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, and the Lord God will slay you. But My servants will be called by another name. Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth will swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight!” (65:13-16)

When were the servants of Jehovah called by another name (65:15) in the first century AD? One cannot help but think of Acts11:26, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Rather than being called Jews or Israelites, the genuine servants of God were now called Christians, and the early church was prospered by divine assistance and providential provision – including the conversion of Saul (Paul), the church’s erstwhile bitterest enemy. Meanwhile, the inveterate Jewish insurgents were given such divinely appointed monikers as “dogs … evil workers … false circumcision” (Php3:2) and a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev2:9; 3:9). The difference between God’s servants and the accursed unbelieving Jews was stark in the New Testament timeframe.

Moving onward, the next section of Is65 contains two of the three verses quoted in the opening statements.

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing and her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying.” (65:17-19)

As already pointed out, a new heavens and earth with no more tears are not to be found in this age but in the age to come, the eternal state. These facets are not to be construed as applying to some middling one thousand year age. The Premillennialist is found to be clandestinely borrowing features from this present evil age and the everlasting sinless age to come, thereby creating a mottled Millennial era, a manufactured utopian period crafted with cut-n-paste Scriptures to flesh out what the Bible nowhere describes. Even the famous Millennial passage (Rev20:1-6) says NOTHING about the Jews, the Secret Rapture, Jerusalem, the Promised Land, the Davidic throne, and a host of additional features inserted into the speculative Millennium. We can safely set aside such Premillennial conjectures as a wish in search of Scriptural support. The “literal hermeneutic” is actually a theological red herring obscuring the fact that a baptized Zionism drives the Dispensational interpretive cart.

Returning to what is actually said in verses 17-19, a puzzle or two appears. If the sword and slaughter spoken of in 65:12 foretold Jerusalem’s first century AD demise, then how could there be much rejoicing over Jerusalem as stated in 65:18-19? Consider that a physical Jerusalem may not, in fact, be in view at all. Note the words employed by the Lord Himself, that He would create Jerusalem for rejoicing. Wasn’t Jerusalem already in existence during the First Advent era? Obviously so. Jerusalem was likewise in existence 700 years earlier when Isaiah put quill to parchment; so then, what “Jerusalem” might be created if the city was already standing?

Notice also that Yahweh says He will “rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people.” It appears that “Jerusalem” and “My people” are equated, since it would be hard to imagine that God would only be happy with the Jews in Jerusalem and nowhere else. Who, then, were and are God’s people? As already discussed, we have in Is65 those who with empty words claimed loyalty to God differentiated from Yahweh’s authentic disciples, a dark versus light contrast that pervades the entire chapter. In a New Testament context, Paul employed this same type of adversative when the physical Jews were contrasted with spiritual Israel (Gal3:29); elsewhere in Paul’s corpus, those only circumcised in the flesh were set off against those circumcised of heart (Rom2:28-29). The writer to the Hebrews weighs in with the same type of insight, saying, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb13:10). The ethnic Jews were and are excluded from the heavenly tabernacle if they are outside of Christ. Bearing all of this in mind, it is likely that this recreated Jerusalem is not...
a physical location after all, but refers rather to the “heavenly Jerusalem” spoken of in Hebrews. To quote this seminal passage:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb12:22-24)

Throughout the epistle, the writer to the Hebrews was pleading the superiority of the New Covenant in Christ to the obsolescent Old Covenant that was waxing old and passing away (Heb8:13). In Heb12, the earthly, physical Jerusalem is contrasted with the superior heavenly version, much like Paul drew a distinction between the children of the free woman (Sarah) and the slave woman (Hagar) in Gal4:21-31. Could it not be that using poetic prophetic terms in Is65:18, the Lord foretold this very transformation from the Old to the New Covenant when He employed the recreated Jerusalem metaphor? In the first century AD, the Almighty rejoiced not in the soon-to-be destroyed hateful and defiant city of Jerusalem, but in the heavenly Jerusalem that He had created for rejoicing (Is65:18), indwelt by a people whose righteousness was derived entirely from the cross of Christ, the church being the people who made Him glad (65:19).

Moses Waxeth Old

The above outlook accords well with a gospel understanding of “the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (65:17). Could it be that this is a tangential reference to the Old Covenant passing away and the inauguration of the New, the kingdom of God (another name for the gospel; cf. Lk9:2, 6, 11) coming at the First Advent? We have similar “forgetful” passages elsewhere in the prophets. Troubling indeed to some Christian Zionists is the prophecy that the Israelites “will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again” (Jer3:16). Wasn’t the ark central to Old Covenant worship, the physical symbol of God’s presence amidst the nation? Why would it no longer be needed? The prophet later gives the answer, informing the Israelites that a New Covenant will obviate the Old (Jer31:31-34), a theme picked up again by Jesus (the blood of the New Covenant; Lk22:20), Paul (2Co3) and the author of Hebrews (Heb8-9; 12:24). Paul, that former Pharisee, made clear that the things previously central to the Mosaic economy – Sabbaths, food and drink regulations, new moon festivals, etc. – were now passé & waxed old following Jesus’ once for all sacrifice that brings men from death to life (Col2:8ff.). “And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Is65:17) – what could be a better gospel application than that Isaiah was referencing the cessation of the Old Covenant with the institution of the New, when Jesus surprised the earth by His appearing (“suddenly” coming to the Temple, Mal3:1)? Zionist Jews had hoped for the exaltation of Jerusalem and the Old Covenantal system when the Messiah came. Instead, the world received a gift far better than a glorified worldwide Mosaic economy with Israelite political hegemony. [Note once again that this empty Jewish first century AD “hope” is exactly the same as the delayed but empty “hope” that factors so prominently in current Dispensational fantasies during their ephemeral Millennium.] The Almighty’s at the Messiah’s First Advent was not Judaism glorified, but rather a shiny, brand New Covenant of an entirely different construction than the Old. The New Covenant escorted in a new Jerusalem – not a physical location, which was a shadow of the things to come, but a gospel-centered new beginning for all who by faith turn to Christ, everyone rescued from a richly desired damnation and who through faith are ushered into the kingdom of light!

Along these same lines, a little further on Isaiah pointed again to the termination of the Old Covenant, “supersessionism” writ large over the prophetic landscape:

“But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine’s blood; he who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what
they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.” (Is66:3-4)

Why would the situation arise where one who showed his loving obedience to Yahweh’s Old Covenant statutes by making sacrifices of oxen, sheep, grain and incense become like a murderer, pet killer, swine blood drinker, and idol worshiper? No doubt this section, coming just a few verses after the end of chapter 65, deals with the same issue; namely, the terminus of the Old Covenant by the once for all sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross. Before Jesus’ self-giving, any Jew was in sin who did NOT offer the prescribed Mosaic sacrifices and offerings; after Christ’s cross-work, anyone who yet clung to the Old Covenant practices and rejected the Messiah was accursed of God, proscribed by the sanctions of the New Covenant to which he refused to bow the knee.

The demise of the economy given through Moses was foretold by the great prophet and law-giver himself. Moses had said:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ The Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.” (Dt18:15-19)

The Lord predicted Jesus’ coming through Moses, though the first Prophet (Moses) did not know the name of the far greater second Prophet (Jesus). We even find that Moses considered “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb11:26) – Moses well knew of his coming Messiah, a Prophet far superior to the first law-giver (Heb3:2-6)! The Lord foretold that a Prophet and Lawgiver like unto Moses would arrive one day, whose signs would testify to the veracity of His message (contra the false prophets of Dt18:20-22). God had also said that the Prophet would be a man like Moses, since the Israelites had been scarred witless at Horeb by the voice of God and desired rather the mediation of a man (Moses) to speak to them (Ex20:18-21). Did this Prophet and Lawgiver who exceeded Moses ever come? Indeed, Jesus was from among His Jewish countrymen, spoke God’s words, and performed astounding miracles, all in accord with Dt18:15-22. Moreover, we have the witness of the book of Acts, wherein the men of God likely spoke of prophetic fulfillment in accord with Jesus’ post-resurrection instructions. With confidence we can conclude that Jesus’ teaching of His men in Lk24:25-27 (road to Emmaus Scripture lessons) and Acts1:3 (forty days of appearance) gave them great insight into the Old Testament prophetic applications to the New Covenant Messianic realities. In Acts, both Peter (Acts3:22) and Stephen (Acts7:37) said that Jesus was the promised Prophet who superseded Moses, ushering in a New Covenant far better than the Old one given in the Pentateuch. It appears that Peter and Stephen were both “Supersessionists,” since they considered Moses to have been superseded by Jesus! The news that the New Covenant permanently supersedes the Old is only shocking to those who want the future to feature the resurrected bloody sacrifices and a reinstituted Jewish nationalism.

What, then, of those who turned aside from the words of this Prophet like unto Moses? Undiluted penalties from the Almighty – no probation, no commuted sentences, just wrath poured out in full measure against those who rejected the Messiah sent by Yahweh. Or, as the writer of Hebrews puts it:

For if the word spoken through angels [the Law of Moses] proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Heb2:2-4)

This passage was likely the author of Hebrew’s application of Dt18:15-22, with the words given through Moses contrasted with the gospel presented by the Messiah, replete with the predicted signs and wonders. There was every Old Testament prophetic indication that the Mosaic economy was to be temporary; it would wax old and be removed upon the Son’s First Advent. Feel the powerful gospel winds blowing through Is65 and all the prophets of old, telling us repeatedly of the coming demise of
Moses by the Messiah's glorious First Advent! It is passing strange, then, that some seek to resurrect
the long decayed body of Moses from his hidden Mount Nebo resting place and through a selective lit-
eralism reconstitute political Judaism to an exalted place of world dominance, plus the restitution of
bloody sacrifices that can in no wise take away sins. Let Moses rest in peace, and seek not a retrograde
redemptive maneuver that reconstitutes the Temple’s gore when the final, once for all sacrifice has al-
ready been made by Jesus!

_Earthly Prosperity Pictures Spiritual Blessings (Is65:21-24)_

Temporarily breezing by our primary verse, let us examine the closing verses of chapter 65 to see
how they further illuminate 65:20.

“They will build houses and inhabit them; they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They
will not build and another inhabit, they will not plant and another eat; for as the lifetime of a tree,
so will be the days of My people, and My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands. They
will not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they are the offspring of those blessed by
the Lord, and their descendants with them. It will also come to pass that before they call, I will an-
swer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and
the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will do no evil or harm
in all My holy mountain,” says the Lord. (65:21-25)

Some may suppose that such elevated language bespeaks of a future golden epoch not to be found this
side of eternity. It seems that western myopia settles over the vision of many with respect to the
prophecies; Isaiah foretold it as future to his day, so it must be future to our day some 2,750 years lat-
er. However, such is not necessarily the case. Rather, it makes far more Scriptural sense to suppose
that Is65 employs soaring prophetic prose that befits the then-future gospel glory coming at the First
Advent, described through Isaiah some 750 years beforehand. If you dwelt in an ancient agrarian and
animal husbandry society, what symbols would you Scripturally expect to indicate God’s pleasure
resting upon you? Pictures of bucolic scenes with flourishing farming systems and peaceful and mul-
tiplying herds and flocks would clearly designate divine approval; and such is what we have in
Is65:21-25.

Did you notice the “wolf and the lamb” connection between Is65:25 and the famous Messianic fore-
cast of Is11 (11:6-8), all foretold by God through the son of Amoz hundreds of years prior to Jesus’ ar-
ival? There is little debate amongst those committed to Biblical Inerrancy that Is11 predicts the glory
of the first century AD good news brought by our Savior, what with the shoot from Jesse’s stem and so
forth. With the prophetic wolf and lamb connection to Is11, Is65 is undoubtedly relating similar in-
formation regarding the coming of Christ and the worldwide expansion of the gospel. Note how said
gospel progress is presented; as in Is11, pictures of physical prosperity are expansively employed to
show the spiritual bounty that came at Christ’s First Advent. Good houses, productive vineyards, long
lives, freedom from troubles, normally antagonistic animals dwelling peacefully side by side, prayers
answered before being uttered – all speak of spiritual well-being from the Almighty, not of some
crassly literalistic fulfillment. This prosperity came in the flesh when Christ walked the earth and then
willingly gave His life for the sins of His sheep. Again, how else could the prophet possibly have ver-
bally depicted what was beyond description to the Israelites who lived centuries prior to Jesus’ First
Coming? With elevated verbiage about agricultural and animal husbandry prosperity, Isaiah’s words
were the best prophetic method for describing the blessed heights of God coming in the flesh, a divine
arrival that overwhelmed the Promised Land and subsequently the whole earth some 750 years later.
The wolf and lamb grazing together clearly connects the indisputably Messianic Is11 with the fulfill-
ment of Is65. Gospel glories permeate the sixty-fifth chapter, with these splendors coming long after
Isaiah was in Paradise while his body was in the grave, awaiting a future resurrection.

Notice that prayers will even be answered before being uttered (65:24)! It’s not that in the future
God’s people were to cease praying, but that Christians would be heard immediately through Christ’s
mediatorial work. A great New Covenant blessing for those in Christ is access to the Father through
the Son! Many familiar New Testament passages testify of the intimacy Christians enjoy with the Fa-
ther because of Jesus’ work:
“Until now you have asked for nothing in My [Jesus’] name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.” (Jn16:24)
Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb4:16)

... for through Him [Jesus] we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. (Eph2:18)

What greater joy could there be for those in Christ than communing with their heavenly Father in prayer? He even knows what we need even before we ask it of Him – what an intimate privilege! This is how our access to the Father through the Son is presented by the son of Amoz.

With the preemptively answered prayers of 65:24, we once again see that the bounties of the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus were attended by spiritual blessings far outstripping anything offered under Moses. Only the High Priest had access to God the Father in all of Israel under the Old Covenant, and this only once a year (and likely with great fear and trepidation!). Now that the veil has been rent in twain after redemption was accomplished on the cross, admission has been granted to the Father Himself in the New Covenant for all those whose lives were joined by faith to the Son. Truly those in Christ can ask for daily bread and forgiveness of sins (Mt6:9-13, the Lord’s prayer), appealing to the Father based not on their own merits but rather pleading the blood atonement of the finished work of Jesus; or, in Isaiah’s words, before we call to Him [in Christ], God will answer. Far distant to the writing of Is65, the coming of cozy and comforting prayer blessings were expressed in the height of Old Covenant prophetic pictures – surely Isaiah was speaking of the gospel graces to arrive at the First Advent!

An additional clue that Is65 was completed at Jesus’ First Coming is also hidden in plain sight. The chapter closes by saying that “dust will be the serpent’s food” (65:25). After the Fall, the serpent would be cursed above all other livestock and wild beasts, and God commanded that “on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life” (Gen3:14). Of course, this is followed in 3:15 by the famous Protoevangelium, that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head, which is a veiled reference foretelling Jesus’ cross-work many millennia thereafter. The brief allusion to dust and the serpent in Is65:25 causes one to recall the balance of the events of the Fall, much like saying, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound ...” in the English speaking world brings to mind the rest of that classic hymn. Is65:25 does not literally detail the serpent’s future diet of soil, but connects Is65 with the gospel prediction in Gen3:14-15, showing yet again that this chapter by the son of Amoz concerns Jesus’ First Advent.

Finally in chapter 65, the “holy mountain” of God (65:25) is reminiscent of Is2:2-4 (cf. Mic4:1-2) that the mountain of the Lord will be exalted as chief and the nations will stream to it. This does not mean that Mount Zion will eclipse Mount Everest in height any time soon; it figuratively speaks of the exalted gospel of Jesus, a standard of righteousness being raised higher than any mountain and calling men to repentance and faith. Yes indeed, there is nary a corner of Is65 that is not gospel centered. Coming, then, to 65:20 and the century living sinners and youths, we would be well served to give primacy to any gospel centered interpretation firmly grounded in a first century AD.

Prophetic Brackets
If one finds opening and closing brackets, then one can safely assume that what comes between encompasses all under the same heading. The opening bracket, Is65:1-2, was given a first century AD gospel application by Paul (Rom10:20-1). To refresh our memories, these verses state:

“I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ to a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts” (65:1-2)

As applied by the great Apostle, Is65 opens with the predicted Israeli rejection of their Christ contrasted with the (primarily) Gentile acceptance of the Jewish Messiah. What, then, is the closing bracket? Is65:25 wraps up with “dust will be the serpent’s food,” another clear gospel figure taken from Gen3 and understood as such by Isaiah’s original Biblically literate readers. Is65:25 also has the famous Messianic wolf and lamb connection to Is11, plus the “holy mountain” that is said elsewhere to
attract the nations (Is2:2-4). The conclusion is that the chapter opens and closes with [or is bracketed by] First Advent gospel themes, so it makes sense that what comes between the brackets does not pertain to some future speculative Millennium, but rather to Jesus’ cross-work to save men’s souls! True, the chapter and verse divisions were not added until much later, being finalized by post-Reformation printers; nevertheless, the original Isaiah parchment breathes a fresh, New Covenant application from the start to the finish of what we now call chapter 65. The verbal brackets inform us that the whole of Is65 applies to the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, “who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Ti2:14). Given the opening and closing brackets and without any warrant to suppose otherwise, we would do well to suppose that ALL of Is65 centers on Jesus’ First Advent, including the enigmatic 65:20 under consideration.

Sheep and Wolves Together (Is11:1-10)
Momently stepping aside from Is65, let us further examine the famous Messianic Is11 in more detail, especially with respect to the wolf and lamb picture that ties it to Is65. The well-known pericope reads (Is11:1-10):

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.

The stem of Jesse and the Branch (cf. Is4), Jesus Christ, appeared at a time when the Davidic line had seemingly been cut off, the long dormant stump bearing no signs of kingly life. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a Branch shoots forth, the long-awaited Messiah, to claim His rightful throne! Believe it or not, He was Joseph’s son, raised in that Galilean backwater, the hamlet of Nazareth. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth,” asked Nathanael (Jn1:46)? Well, yes indeed! The king was the descendant of Joseph, a lowly tekton (Greek τέκτων, often translated “carpenter” but actually an artisan or craftsman of any type, including masonry). Who would have thought that the Davidic line of succession had been reduced to such a pathetic blue collar state? In Is11, the wolf and lamb picture is intimately connected with Jesus’ coming in the first century AD. It is not that suddenly wolves begin joining the local chapter of the Ovis Aries’ [Sheep’s] Club; rather, this image gives an elevated prophetic picture of spiritual health and well-being, as are the other Old Testament portraits of spiritual bliss in the passage (children with vipers, leopards with goats, etc).

On Prophetic “Telescoping”
Now some may think that parts of Is11 speak of Christ’s First Advent while other components taken “literally” are reserved for a future Millennium; but does this really have to be so? The passage itself gives no hint of such a bifurcation. Sure, commentators often appeal to telescoping or prophetic foreshortening to explain the seeming combination of things that, in their opinion, are simultaneously nearby and chronologically much further away. The prophet sees the future like a distant mountain range, we are told by bifurcating advocates, where all of the peaks appear merged together when viewed from a distance. In other words, the First and Second Adve...
gether in the Is11 vision. However, upon closer inspection, the great snow-capped peaks show significant separation in time, according to this theory.

Such is the often unsubstantiated comparison, regularly given as analogical proof. Unfortunately for the proponents of this postulate, mere assertions do not constitute Biblical verification, especially when the passage itself nowhere testifies of such a sequential split in the fulfillment. Interpretive pretzeling does not establish an outlook as fact. The opening of Is11 clearly deals with Jesus’ First Advent, right up until the wolf and lamb section beginning in verse 6. Likewise, the gospel going to the nations at the end of the pericope (verse 10) concerns the widespread effect of the cross of Christ, which the Apostle Paul said traversed the first century AD earth (cf. Col1:6, 23; Rom1:8). It is far better to eschew the “mountain peaks from a distance” fabrication and employ the “Oreo” [or bracket] interpretive principle. If the beginning and ending (the crunchy chocolate part, or opening and closing brackets) of a passage speak about a certain topic, then what comes between (the creamy filling, or the material within the brackets) is likewise about the same, barring anything within the passage that testifies otherwise. Since nowhere in Is11 is there a signal that the passage is flopping between the First and Second Advents, separated by thousands of years, we must therefore conclude that the whole passage concerns the First Advent. HOW it is about Jesus’ first century AD work – now THAT is another question worthy of closer inspection; but we must at least admit that nothing given in Is11:1-10 indicates that verses 6-8 are chronologically distant from the rest of the prericope.

What has spawned the desire to issue a severance package to Is11:6-8, to hand it a pink slip for its current occupation within Is11 and “repurpose” it to a future janitorial position for completion, sweeping everything into a timeframe thousands of years beyond the First Advent? Wolves and little lambs cavort together, plus leopards with goats, calves with lions, cows with bears, kids with cobras, and so forth – there is no conceivable way that these things are contemporary facts related to Jesus’ First Coming, right? Hopefully by now you see what initiates the craving to place verses 6-8 into some type of Millennial future; that is, a desire for a literalistic fulfillment of these hostile critters dwelling peacefully together, of carnivore and prey happily cohabitating. “Verses 6-8 must have a completion in our future; I can’t understand how this passage could be fulfilled in any other way!” one may object. Of course, our limited mental faculties do not constitute Millennial proof. The supposition by some is that such fellowship amongst antagonistic animals could only take place during a coming golden age and never can be fulfilled this side of the future Millennium. Oh! Please quickly depress the interpretive brake, my literalist friend! There are a host of features in Is11:1-10 that you do not take literally, so why do you with husbandry hubris instantly presume that a description of gaily frolicking varmints is chronologically remote to the First Advent presented in the balance of the passage?

Please allow several uncomfortable applications from Is11:1-10 to demonstrate the imprudent application of the so-called “literal” Futurist hermeneutic only to verses 6-8 (wolves and lambs, etc.). A shoot from the stem of Jesse – was Jesus actually made of wood? The branch of Jesse would bear fruit – did Christ walk along with apples hanging off His blessed arms? Was our Savior birthed in an old tree trunk rather than a manger in Bethlehem? The text says that Jesus would “strike the earth with the rod of His mouth” (v4). Did our Lord have a hard time distinctly enunciating because of a big stick protruding from between His lips? Did Christ hold His garments together with a belt made only of faithfulness and righteousness (v. 5) – now how did He do THAT?! It seems also that the gospel would go to people who are flailing in the water or who have drowned, since “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (v. 9). Apparently one needs to be on a mountain to avoid sinking and to be blessed of God, because, “They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain” (v. 9). Head to the hills for safety during the gospel era, everybody! Avoid being drowned by the waters of the knowledge of God!

By now you get the interpretive (and hence non-literal) point. Is11:1-10 is laced with prophetic pictures, figures of speech that no rational interpreter would take literally. Why in the world would one therefore suppose that verses 6-8 are of an entirely different construction? Only a rash presupposition that a literal application is intended by wolves and lambs together would force one to assume a chronologically distant fulfillment for a thin sliver of a unified passage; but what if the authorial intent was instead to give a picture of peace and tranquility that came with the gospel of Christ? Saying that
the wolf and lamb bit could not have taken place in the first century AD forces one into the unhappy position of separating what God hath joined together, extracting 11:6-8 and saying it is future even to our day, thousands of years after the rest of the passage has already come to pass at the First Advent. This unnatural bifurcation results in the appeal to such glosses as “telescoping,” “prophetic foreshortening” and “prophetically seeing mountain peaks from a distance” which are completely unsupported by the text itself, surely absent from the prophet’s mind, and contrary to consistent prophetic reasoning. Would the original readers have understood such an unbounded chronological division between verses 6-8 and the rest of Is11:1-10? What about those of Jesus’ own day?

Rather than appealing to a vast temporal separation between neighboring verses, thereby breaking asunder what God hath joined together, could it rather be that metaphorical representations of prosperity are used to indicate the peace that men now enjoy with God through Jesus Christ? During the Christmas season, folks speak of peace on earth and goodwill towards men, but in fact there is little actual political tranquility among men and nations this side of eternity; the far more important component of the First Advent is that men now have peace with God through the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross (Rom5:1). Glorious symbols of earthly peace are given as witnesses of the even greater shalom brought by the Prince of Peace (Is9:6-7) whose dominion is FOREVER, not just a measly one thousand years. Such an outlook makes ALL of Is11:1-10 fit tightly together. Jesus’ came unexpectedly as the rightful Davidic heir (the shoot of Jesse, the Branch), full of the Holy Spirit (11:1-2); He righteously judged men and established the basis for men’s righteousness with God (11:3-5); He brought peace through His cross (11:6-8; the wolf and lamb bit); and after His resurrection, the gospel expanded the earth over, with the nations streaming to bow the knee at the cross of Christ, God’s holy mountain (11:9-10; cf. Is2:2-4). Doesn’t such a unified approach to the prophetic passage exalt the Father’s redemptive design much more than parsing out the passage into two disparate sections separated by thousands of years, having no justification whatsoever within the text for performing such prophetic surgery?

Consider a contemporary analogy. Suppose a prophet lived in the 1970s and wanted to foretell of a wonderful period of spiritual prosperity coming half a century thereafter. What images would he use to communicate God’s favor? Shag carpets, wood paneling, 8-track tape decks, wide and low gas guzzling cars, avocado kitchen counters with harvest gold appliances—all that spoke of “the fat of the land” during the 1970s might be used to predict the glories of a fulfillment some 50 years thereafter. When it was time for the prophet’s words to come to pass in the 2020s, would anyone discredit the deceased prophet if such things did not literally take place, if no one actually purchased harvest gold appliances or 8-track tape players? Future prosperity is given in terms to be understood by the original audience, but they likely would not be literally fulfilled half a century thereafter. Pieters (Seed of Abraham p127-8) gives a similar illustration. A father promised a horse and buggy to his son in the early 1900s, but then bought him a car when he later came of age—the promise may have a different and better fulfillment than bare literalism! Such is at issue with respect to the Old Testament prophets. They were to be comprehended by the Israeli populace of their day as they pointed towards a Messianic future. How could the prophets of old NOT used contemporary farming, herding and housing images, metaphors well-established in the balance of the prophetic Scriptures? The ancient Biblical writers used similar verbal pictures time and again to indicate the favor of God. Why some then insist that certain components are assuredly literal (wolves and lambs cavorting together) and thus are in the distant future while other aspects (roots, branches, stems) are figurative, not literal, and were long ago fulfilled is passing strange indeed, an hermeneutical inconsistency of apocalyptic proportions! For such interpreters, it is probably best to grab the prophetic foreshortening broom to cover such contradictory interpretive tracks.

Wolf and Lamb For The First Advent

Having briefly sidetracked to undercut the slicing and dicing of Old Testament prophetic passages into First and Second Advent applications for which many pericopes give no warrant, we come back to the original connection between Is11 and Is65. Both passages have the wolf and lamb harmoniously munching together on savanna grasses (Is11:6; 65:25). There is no doubt that Is11 focuses on Jesus’
First Advent, when to everyone’s great surprise a shoot sprung up from the stem of Jesse (11:1) – unbeknownst to the average Israelite, the Davidic kingly line yet lived in the first century AD! If the wolf and lamb peacefully dwelling together is given in both in Is11 and Is65, then surely Yahweh meant there to be a firm association between these two chapters. The exact same analogy in both chapters strongly implies a similar timeframe for fulfillment. In other words, if Is11:1-10 was completed at Jesus’ First Advent, then the wolf and lamb link solidly associates Is65 with the same fulfillment epoch. This, of course, is what has been argued from the outset; namely, that Is65 deals with the Messiah’s unexpected First Advent arrival and the resulting separation of the sheep and goats among the people of Israel, plus the unanticipated gospel prosperity amongst the Gentiles as set forth by Paul’s usage of Is65:1-2 in Rom10:20-21. The wolf and lamb together inextricably links Is65 with Is11; and since the latter (Is11) is undoubtedly about Jesus’ first century AD arrival, then surely the former (Is65) is as well.

**Sheep Are God’s People, Wolves Are Hostile Nations (Ezk34:23-28)**

Are these passages (Is11:6; 65:25) necessarily talking about literal animals in the first place? There is yet another Old Testament passage that has bearing on the wolf and lamb metaphor and thus sheds light on the meaning and message of Is65.

> “Then I [the Lord] will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.” (Ezk34:23-28)

A good shepherd tending His flock against harmful beasts sounds like a wonderful time to be around. Who is this Good Shepherd? The answer is in the asking – it is none other than Jesus Himself, the very image Christ used in Jn10! When was the Good Shepherd set over His sheep? That took place in the first century AD, when the Messiah displaced all the bad shepherds described earlier in Ezk34. When was a covenant of peace made? “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom5:1); “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Col1:19-20). So then, we have the Good Shepherd who came and made a New Covenant of peace; this, no doubt, is the fulfillment of Ezk34:23-25a.

What are we then to make of the harmful beasts mentioned in Ezekiel’s pericope? Living securely in the wilderness, asleep in the woods and not being harmed by beasts is given first (34:25b). Who or what were these beasts? Irrational speculation is put to rest; “They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid” (34:28). The nations of the earth are “the beasts of the earth” (including the wolves) that “will not devour them.” In like manner, Daniel presented a similar prophetic usage, where nations future to Daniel’s day were represented by various beasts (Dan7, 8). Christ’s sheep were to be protected from the devouring nations, the wolves and other carnivorous creatures of the world. This may very well be what Isaiah intended by the prophetic language, “the wolf will dwell with the lamb” (Is11:6; 65:25).

We can therefore conclude from Ezk34 that the Good Shepherd, Jesus (34:23-24), was to bring His sheep into a covenant of peace (34:25a), give them abundant blessings (34:26-27), and protect them from harmful predatory nations (34:25b, 28). Has this ever been literally true in all of its parts? Does Jesus actually keep His flock from every war and supply never-ending earthly prosperity? The Scrip-
tures plus Christian history consistently say no; having peace with God results in the certain and often violent antagonism of the world (Jn15:18-20; 1Jn3:13). Anyone who supposes that riches, peace and prosperity attend the followers of a Messiah persecuted and executed by the world has not actually read his Bible very closely. Once again, in Ezk34 we have exalted Old Covenant language – security in the wilderness, peace with the nations, trees bearing fruit, the ground producing in great quantities, etc. – that pointed forward to New Covenant spiritual realities; and one of the ways this was expressed was by the peaceful wolf and lamb metaphor, which Ezekiel explains as freedom from the ravages of predatory nations encircling pathetically small and militarily wimpy Palestine.

Suppose one lived in the Promised Land under the Old Covenant. What images would we expect a prophet to employ to represent the future blessings of the coming Messianic era? As detailed above, we would anticipate pictures of agrarian and herding prosperity in a nation centered on such activities for its very survival. In chapter 34, Ezekiel gives us yet another metaphorical aspect that we might have guessed would come from the prophets, one that would particularly strike home with an often militarily weak populace; namely, that the aggressive surrounding nations who regularly pillaged the Israelites – the savage beasts – would be kept at bay by God’s mighty intervening hand. With this understanding, this section of Ezekiel (34:23-28) therefore also comports with a first century AD application, when the Good Shepherd inaugurated a New Covenant of peace. The wolf and lamb dwelling together in tranquility is not a picture of some coming earthly Millennium, but rather uses Mosaic economy hyperbole – the encircling hostile nations subdued – to speak of the joys of having our righteousness found in Christ alone and thus being blessed of God!

**Ridiculing Literalism (Again)**

Of course, prophetic literalists will and often do take umbrage at such explanations. “God means what He says! You undercut the Scriptures by spiritualizing away the literal meaning! You have forsaken the grammatical-historical method to forward your own agenda. Only we Dispensationalists have the Biblical backbone to take the Scriptures literally in all their parts, including the prophecies!” In derision, let us once again apply “strict literalism” to Ezk34:23-28.

The section begins with “My servant David” becoming the shepherd of the sheep, displacing the bad shepherds. To be true to literalistic principles, this must be the resurrected King David himself – there really is no question that David is literally spoken of in the text. During the posited Millennium, David must apparently reign alongside King Jesus, which certainly will supply some measure of regal confusion. Surprisingly, some literalists actually hold to this view. However, this stirs up an insurmountable objection from the pericope itself, which flatly states that, “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David” (34:23). In this fabricated Millennium, there really is no room for two co-regents in the one shepherd equation, with Jesus and David somehow simultaneously ruling Israel; there can only be one shepherd of God’s sheep.

One might attempt to get around this monarchical confusion by saying, “See, it says ‘prince,’ so this must mean that Jesus is the King and the resurrected David is the prince under Him.” The lengths some will go in pursuit of their version of selective prophetic literalism is startling indeed. Then again, one might say that Jesus rules as King while David goes out to tend the royal flocks and herds, since he is said to be the one shepherd, not necessarily acting as a sovereign regent after all. I guess all of those domesticated animals doomed to slaughter at the reconstituted Temple posited from Ezk40-48 must be tended by someone, so why not resurrect King David for such a lowly task? How one might creatively bypass this Jesus plus David dual regent / twin shepherd impasse is left as an exercise for the Biblical student of literalism; but the requisite “working around” or “fudging” of the Scriptural data itself points towards a fundamentally failed Fundamentalist method.

To be consistent, a literalist must insist that leopards, wolves, tigers and lions are all exterminated by God during the covenant of peace – “I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land” (34:25). How then can the wolf and lamb lie down together for one thousand years, since clearly Ezekiel prophesies the demise of all Millennial carnivores? According to Ezk34, it seems that during the ephemeral Millennium the predator section of the City Zoo will be phased out, being entirely depleted of its fearsome attractions; and there will be no more entertaining
lion tamers at the local Millennial version of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, which will be something of a showman’s let down. But wait! The passage only says that the wild beasts will be removed “from the land” – maybe only the land of Israel will be depopulated of carnivorous critters? If so, I suppose that would be a good time to pack up and move to Palestine for safety’s sake!

Do you like camping? Do you like camping, for, say, a thousand years or so? I sure hope so, since during the alleged Millennium Ezekiel says that we will “live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods” (34:25). I guess the Lord will change my wife’s heart, since she only “camps” in nice hotels while traveling. Besides, doesn’t this contradict what we have learned about the assumed one-thousand year period in Isaiah, that Millennial folk will build houses with their own hands and live in them (Is65:21-22)? So which is it – Isaiah’s houses or Ezekiel’s wilderness camping? Personally, I’d prefer a house for greater protection during the “showers of blessing” (34:26). If you consider a red Ferrari a blessing from God, then duck inside your house (Isaiah) or tent (Ezekiel) and hope that your shiny new sports car survives the fall from the clouds. “Stay inside, kids, the showers of blessings from Yahweh are pelting the ground with hazardous ferocity today!” If you are a pet lover, then surely God’s “showers of blessings” will put a new spin on the meaning of “raining cats and dogs.”

Unlike the housing versus camping conundrum, we do see a united front by Ezekiel and Isaiah regarding the Millennium being populated by hillbillies for Jesus. Ezekiel says that God will make “the places around My hill a blessing” (34:26), while Isaiah says, “They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain” (65:25). OK, so there appears some slight prophetic inconsistency here, one being a hill and one a mountain; but passing over this minor prophetic anomaly, it seems that one must live on a hill (or mountain) during the Millennium to be blessed of God. If you are in the plains or valleys, then I’m sorry, the Lord’s blessings will bypass you entirely – we have double prophetic testimony on that score! I can assure you with Scriptural authority from both Ezekiel and Isaiah that the likes of Kansas or Nebraska will not be blessed of God during the Millennium, since there are no mountains to speak of in those states. Then again, if God’s blessings are falling from the sky like showers on the mountains (or hills), maybe it would be safer to dwell in the flatlands and valleys and thus NOT to be so dangerously blessed by the Lord!

During this postulated Millennium, presumably you will either enjoy lots of travel or extended fasting. What?! Yes, the Almighty through Ezekiel says of “My servant David” that “he will feed them himself” (34:23). If you are hungry, it looks like a trip to Jerusalem is in order; otherwise, too bad for your Millennial tummy! It would be good if you had died before the Millennium started and then were resurrected, since your food requirements would thereby be greatly reduced. Pity the poor mortals who will be racking up their frequent flier miles to go get a bite to eat at Jesus’ Jerusalem Bistro or David’s Dandy Downtown Diner. Maybe the hungry Millennial mortals should move to Mount Zion after all, since there will be God’s blessings only on His hill (or mountain); and they can buy reinforced stainless steel umbrellas to ward off the ever-present and perilous showers of blessing.

As one can see, it is remarkably easy to make a mockery of “strict” or “consistent” literalism, which often amounts to little more than simplistic logic applied to the Scriptures in support of a baptized Zionist meta-narrative. Oh, how often have Christians berated their brethren with childish statements equivalent to these: “I get to define the rules of the game, and if you disagree with me then you stand against God Himself! I get to tell you what is ‘literal’ and what isn’t, and you are a fool if you cannot see it my way!” Well, if you want to be consistently literal, why not take literally what Ezekiel says about Millennial camping, cars falling from the sky, hillbilly living, exterminating all predators, King David ruling next to King Jesus (with the corresponding conundrum of only one shepherd), going to Jerusalem to get a bite to eat, and so forth? The defensive Dispensationalist rightly responds, “Well that would be silly!” And so it is. Consistent literalism is consistently jejune and cannot be uniformly applied.

The Prophets Weren’t Literalists

Have you ever noticed that the prophets never advocate or explain literalism? How, then, does one understand what God intended to be literal and what was prophetically pictorial? Maybe one’s interpretation of the prophetic literature should begin with the assumption that pictures or signs are given
that generally are not to be taken literally. Multi-headed beasts, fiery locusts, and so forth are taken “literally” by ... NO ONE! Indeed, that most maligned and controversial of Biblical books, the Revelation, instructs us on how to interpret the prophetic literature. The Apocalypse begins with the statement that Jesus Christ revealed soon-coming events by “signs” (1:1; Grk ἐσήµανεν). I take the first verse of Revelation literally, and this instructs me to take the rest of the Revelation figuratively (or as given by signs; after Beale). Here, then, is Apostolic instruction on the prophetic delivery. Shouldn’t we heed John over our latter day selectively literal prophetic prognosticators and their baptized Zionist agenda? Likewise, the famous “Third Temple” vision begins with Ezekiel saying, “In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city” (40:2). The ancient prophet gives every possible indication that the city was a vision, not literal. Besides, how many high mountains are literally present just north of Jerusalem? Uh, that would be zero. In their prophetic visions, Ezekiel and the Apostle John inform us of signs and visions – as would be expected – so why cannot our Futurist friends take these clear statements literally?

Ezekiel himself probably didn’t invest much of his own personal finances in the prophetic literalist stocks of his day. Ezekiel strongly hints at a non-literal fulfillment when at one point he speaks of “harmful beasts” (34:25), then later explains that safety from these actually meant that the flock “will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid” (34:28). This proper prophetic understanding, which is by no means literal, aids our outlook of the wolf and lamb metaphor. In other words, when Isaiah says that the “wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox” (65:25), we must not immediately assume a futuristic completion of this during an allegedly fast approaching Millennium. It may very well be that this fully came to pass at the First Advent, when peace with God gloriously arrived with Jesus’ cross-work. Which gives more glory to God, wolves and lambs snuggling together under a blanket in front of a roaring fire during a cold Millennium evening, a one thousand year period that is neither this age nor the age to come; or the Messiah’s work on the cross providing redemption for all who trust in Him, thereby supplying everlasting harmony between God and men, given in exalted prophetic pictures of earthly blessings? The answer is in the asking.

I doubt Ezekiel or Isaiah’s primary concern was for Millennial species relations between predator and prey. Isaiah did not climb off the plane waving a peace treaty in front of the hopeful little lambs, duplicitously signed by representatives of the wolves, declaring, “Peace for our time!” (Chamberlain after Munich, 1938). As another example, Paul said, “‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.’ God is not concerned about oxen, is He?” (1Co9:9). Literalism would insist that the passage Paul quoted (Dt25:4) would, in fact, be merely concerned with how to correctly tend one’s oxen; but the great Apostle begs to differ. “Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?” (1Co9:10-11). In Paul’s oxen application, we find once again that literalism is rarely the Biblical key, and this is highlighted repeatedly to the Jews in John’s Gospel (the blind will see, the fields are ripe for harvest, this destroyed Temple will be raised in three days, etc.). Besides, where does the Bible state that literalism is the interpretive talisman permitting entry into the dread heights of all prophetic secrets, and where does it define and defend such literalism? Paul clearly violated strict literalism when applying the oxen image to gospel workers. Will the literalism of some obviate such a great Apostolic declaration? Maybe literalism is not so central to understanding the prophets after all.

Those who belligerently insist upon (highly selective) literalism appear to have ignored the fact that the unbelieving Jewish leaders were the consistent literalists of Christ’s day, and that they arrived at similarly false Zionist conclusions. The first century AD Jews wanted an exalted Judaism with a political Messiah ruling from Jerusalem, the expulsion of their enemies from Palestine, and Jewish rule over the nations via the political strength of their enthroned Messiah. It would obviously be difficult to slip a dime between these mistaken and disproved hopes and the Millennial desire vociferously expressed by a current segment of Christianity, a baptized Zionist future that is mysteriously neither this age nor the age to come.
Besides, if Paul had “literally” believed what many Dispensationalists claim the Bible teaches, then he could have significantly throttled back the opposition he faced from the Jews during his missionary journeys. Paul could have said something like this to his antagonistic Hebrew opponents:

“Look, my Jewish brethren, you have the right idea about a powerful political Messiah in Jerusalem, but you are just a few thousand years too early. Unfortunately, your disobedience has postponed the Messianic kingdom; but after a lengthy period of expulsion, you will repopulate the Promised Land and rule the earth for a thousand years. Please don’t ask me to explain how man’s disobedience can thwart the plans of God – it’s all too complicated to explain right now. Just know that in the distant future, the Messiah you rejected, Jesus, will be seated on the Davidic throne for a thousand years, and you Jews will be able to boss everybody around to your heart’s content. The Temple will be rebuilt, and the Mosaic sacrifices will be fully resurrected and imposed on the nations – oh, did I fail to mention that the Temple will soon be demolished? I know, I know, I wrote a whole section of Romans where I inadvertently left out these important Millennial details about an exalted Jewish future. I had a great opportunity to spell out all of this in Rom9:11, but there must have been a revelatory hiccup and I simply didn’t bring up the subject of one thousand years of Jewish glory, a coming timeframe that is neither this age nor the age to come – my humble apologies! Now, please, put down those rocks and let me go my way. We’re on the same page for the Messianic kingdom, and it’s not my fault that you are simply a few thousand years too early!”

Well now, it is difficult to see how Paul could square such hypothetical pleas with Jesus’ categorical statement that His kingdom was NOT of this world (Jn18:36), and with Paul’s own assertion elsewhere that flesh and blood (including ethnic Jews) do NOT inherit the kingdom (1Co15:50). The Bible gives no indication that Paul subscribed to any of the current Dispensational lore, for He never spoke about Judaistic Zionism except in condemnatory terms (e.g., Php3:2; Rom2:28-9; 9:6-13).

The failed literalism of the first century AD Jews is roundly refuted by Jesus and the Apostles; will it really be resurrected by the cherry-picking literalist of some within the church, only for God to once again show it to be a false hope? Does Yahweh have to prove to the intransigent Christian Zionists that, yet again, fantasies about Israel’s future national hegemony through a political Messiah are entirely misplaced? The Jews of Jesus’ day kept pushing the literalist predictive button, expecting a glorious Messianic age lasting for eternity (not just for one thousand years), and this led to their rejection of Christ’s actual kingdom in their midst (Lk17:20-1), a kingdom that was not of this earth (Jn18:36). Must we really repeat the same failed Zionistic experiment negated by the Messiah Himself? The hope of Israel is and ever will be in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, not in Jewish political dominance, numerous earthly thrones and an expansive Israeli realm. Paul ended his recorded ministry in Acts by telling the Jews that he wore his chains “for the sake of the hope of Israel,” and he solemnly testified to them “about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening” (Acts28:20, 23). Do you really suppose that Paul was telling the Jews how they could feel good about themselves because one day in the distant future their descendants would rule the world during the Millennium? No indeed; the message to Israel is and ever will be to find peace with God through Jesus Christ, not to get their scepters ready for an extensive earthly rule from Jerusalem next to the Messiah they rejected at the dawn of the New Covenant.

**Widened Isaianic View, Same Conclusion**

Returning to our holistic theme, many items featured in the later chapters of Isaiah also intersect with events of the First Advent, again showing that there is precious little in the prophet’s closing chapters dealing with a Millennium future to our time. Rather, the glories of Jesus’ First Coming are magnificently scattered throughout the gospel according to Isaiah. Let us briefly review a few of the parting words given by God to the son of Amoz.

For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name. (63:16)

This sounds so much like the material in Is65 that little comment is required. The Gentiles were outside the pale during the Old Covenant timeframe (Eph2:11-3:13), but Yahweh would soon have an in-
time relationship with those from the nations who were united by faith to Christ. Soaring prophetic language elevated the Redeemer by highlighting the worldwide scope of the redeemed, which included many offspring unknown to Abraham. [Note: Wouldn’t a future dominated by Israel be a rebuilding of the dividing wall separating Jew and Gentile, contra the message of Eph2:3?]

Did the Lord’s plans fail because the Jews generally rejected their Messiah, while many Gentiles found the God of Israel they did not seek? This was the question Paul answered in Rom9:11. No, the Father did not goof up at all; the Israeli spurning of Jesus was entirely within God’s sovereign plan. Recall that in this famous section of Romans, Paul used the potter and clay imagery to show that the Lord had every right to deal with men as He pleased, since He is their Creator. To wit:

Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Rom9:21)

It is interesting that Isaiah sets the stage for Paul’s language hundreds of years beforehand, using similar terra cotta facts:

But now, O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand. (Is64:8)

One of Isaiah’s later chapters again aligns with Paul’s Rom9-11 reasoning. The Lord Almighty had every regal right to chart the extent of gospel effectiveness, what fish would be caught in the gospel dragnet. What if the Almighty actually designed the message of Jesus to harden the ethnic Israelites so that the good news would go primarily to the Gentiles (plus a Jewish remnant)? Let us give Paul’s reply, namely, will the pot argue with the potter, critiquing His design? In Is64:8, we again have a gospel oriented verse with an application picked up by the Apostle Paul in explaining the widespread Jewish hard-heartedness and the unanticipated worldwide expansion of the good news amongst the Gentiles.

Another gospel tie in comes in the chapter immediately following that under consideration. Already highlighted above was the prophesied cessation of the Mosaic sacrificial system and the subsequent inauguration of the New Covenant foretold in Is66:

“But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine’s blood; he who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.” (Is66:3-4)

Past prophets had upbraided the Israelites for not consistently keeping the Mosaic covenant; now Isaiah prophesied of a time, future to his day, when those who obeyed the Old Covenant strictures would be an abomination to the Lord. How can this be? The once for all sacrifice of Jesus brought the numerous bloody Mosaic statutes to a close, as forwarded by the writer of Hebrews. [Note: The writer of Hebrews appears to be a “cessationist!”] Before the cross of Christ, condemnation was heaped upon any Jew who disregarded the Levitical system; after the atonement provided by Jesus, clinging to the Old Covenant strictures would gain God’s opprobrium. The gospel trumped Moses, as even that great early prophet predicted of the greater and exalted Prophet to come (Dt18:15-22).

Just a few verses later, toward the close of the whole of the revelation by God to Isaiah, we have the following words:

“For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations. Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the house of the Lord, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,” says the Lord, “just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites,” says the Lord. (Is66:18-21)

Do those stuck in their (selective) literalism suppose that the named ancient nations are somehow reconstituted so God’s fame and glory can spread to them? Or must they resort to the same “spiritualiz-
ing” they aggressively oppose in others and come to a metaphorical understanding? It appears that, once again in 66:20-1, the Lord Himself gives us New Covenant realities expressed in Old Covenant language. Long lost nations, barely even mentioned in the Scriptures, are figuratively employed to express the coming First Advent realities, foretold as coming over 700 years after Isaiah applied the stylus to parchment; or, to use the son of Amoz’s words, “the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues ... [a]nd they will declare My glory among the nations” (66:18-19). Surely the demise of the Old Covenant and the inception of the New is loudly trumpeted in Old Covenant terms by Isaiah in the closing chapters of his prophecies.

During the Old Covenant epoch, what class of men were closest to Yahweh? That would be the priests and Levites. The Levites were obviously from only one tribe; even more selective was the line of priests, who were from one family of that one tribe. Of course, these men were all exclusively Israelite; Gentiles were the entirely excluded and often hated outsiders. But look what was foretold through Isaiah: “I will also take some of them for priests and Levites,” says the Lord” (66:21)! What?! The most intimate of spiritual offices in the Old Covenant, those of Levite and priest, would be granted to the nations at large, even to peoples virtually unknown in the Biblical narrative – really?! Yes indeed, there was no better way to express the extent of New Testament era gospel effectiveness than to declare that those who were in Christ were amongst God’s priests and Levites. Peter picked up on this concept in a similar fashion, his text being mostly drawn from Ex19:

... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1Pt2:5, 9-10)

The remarkable operation of the good news of Jesus Christ would be to gather in Christians from the world over, with priests and Levites from every corner of the globe; and what better way to signify the towering heights of gospel progress than by listing its impact on nations virtually unknown, even to the Scripturally literate of Isaiah’s day! Through the gospel of Christ, unfamiliar Gentile countries were not only given access to the Lord, but were granted the most intimate offices the Old Covenant had to offer, that of Levite and Priest!

From a handful of verses in the chapters surrounding Is65, we see foretold through Isaiah the extensive progress of Gentile salvation in the first century AD, plus the predicted Jewish Messianic rejection. These gospel facts were articulated in Old Covenant terms, just as one might expect – that is, unless one initiates his analysis with a preconceived and ossified Zionist hardness. Fortunately as can be observed by those without a theological ax to grind, the lightly veiled prophetic language of Isaiah, thinly cloaked in Abrahamic and Mosaic covenantal concepts, revealed the extent of the success of Jesus’ First Advent redemptive labors. God did not intend for the Jews en masse to accept their Messiah; the Potter did as He pleased with the clay. The plan was never for a political earthly kingdom, neither in the first century AD nor in our own (supposedly near) future, a fictitious earthly utopia that is neither this age nor the age to come. The intention of God from of old was that throughout the history after the cross, the church would be populated primarily by a people whom Abraham did not know (those not of Jewish descent); these people would be Yahweh’s New Covenant priests and Levites. What a blessing to the earth in general (Rom11:12, 15) and to us in particular, both Jew and Gentile who have found sanctuary from the wrath of God in Jesus, our City of Refuge (Num35)!

Thematic Review

Stepping back prior to proceeding with 65:20, how have we been schooled thus far from the message of Is65? Paul used 65:1-2 in Rom10:20-1 and applied it to the widespread New Testament era Israeli rejection of Jesus, in contrast to the extensive Gentile acceptance of the gospel. The surprising union of a Jewish remnant with the numerous Gentile converts to create the New Testament church – the mystery of Eph2:11-3:13 – is completely at odds with what New Testament era Zionists might have anticipated with the arrival of their long-awaited but ultimately rebuffed Messiah. Paul’s first century
AD application of Is65 sets the stage for our understanding of the remainder of the chapter. The great Apostle applied Is65:1-2 to his own day, when the gospel was going forth, rejected by most Jews but accepted by a vast horde of Gentiles. Likewise, Is65 closes with other hints of completion during the First Advent. The serpent’s food would be dust (v25); and any Bible knowledge student understands this as the accomplishment of the promise given in the Gen3:14-15 Protoevangelium, where the good news about Jesus is given in veiled terms concerning the serpent’s diet of dust and the crushing of its slithering head at the cross of Christ. Also at the chapter’s end is the wolf and lamb picture connecting Is65 to the Messianic Is11, plus the Lord’s holy mountain that is likewise attached to Jesus’ First Advent (Is2:2-4; Mi4:1-2). Therefore, with the start and end of the chapter being about the gospel and employing the interpretive “Oreo” [or bracket] principle, we can safely conclude that the creamy middle filling [the interior of the brackets] of this chapter from Isaiah is likewise centered on the cross of Christ. Is65 opens and closes with the Messiah and His effect on the world; we should therefore look for the core of the chapter to have come to pass in the New Testament era, unless there is bountiful Bible evidence to the contrary. In short, Is65 is NOT about a speculative future Millennium; indeed, the notion of a one thousand year reign of Jesus is completely at odds with what God revealed elsewhere in Isaiah, that the Messiah’s kingdom would be without end (Is9:6-7). Isaiah seemed to know nothing of a Messianic kingdom of limited duration future to our day, with Jews politically dominating the earth from Jerusalem and Moses fully reinstalled. In the book of Isaiah in general and chapter 65 in particular, God was far more concerned about revealing the impact of His Son’s redemptive work than He was in disclosing some mysteriously hidden Millennial secrets, an age nowhere explicitly discussed by the son of Amoz.

Do we really have to wait for an alleged Millennium for the good news of Jesus Christ to be successful? Such gospel pessimism is not Scripturally supportable. Centuries earlier, Yahweh had declared, “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is11:9; Hab2:14). This came to pass with the coming of Christ the first time; it was not a literalistic picture of drowning converts to Christianity, the gospel going to the passengers of the sinking earthly Titanic (Apr 1912). Oh no, what was foretold was much better than a long delayed earthly Messianic kingdom thwarted by the unbelief of an ornery Jewish populace. No longer was truth constricted to a small strip of coastal Levant real estate, nor only to the typically rebellious Jewish masses. Jesus told the woman at the well that “an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers” (Jn4:23). This came to pass during Paul’s day, though some seem to wish away the Apostle’s positive declarations so as to forward futuristic fantasies. Paul said that the gospel came to the Colossians “just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing” (Col1:6) and urges them to not be “moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (Col1:23). Likewise Paul gives thanks to God through Jesus for the Romans, since their “faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world” (Rom1:8). Will our literalist friends deny these clear Apostolic words to forward their failed kingdom hypothesis? Even in Paul’s day, the gospel was NOT a failure, but had compassed the world over. The fantastic news concerning future gospel progress permeates the latter chapters of Isaiah, including Is65.

Oh, rejoice in the blessings and cursings of the gospel, much like those Old Covenant blessings and cursings detailed at the ends of both Leviticus and Deuteronomy! For those united to Christ by faith in the New Covenant, there are enormous eternal blessings and everlasting hope; not for territorial expansion and political dominance, but for peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, plus the Good News going to the world’s four corners “as the waters cover the sea” (Is11:9; Hab2:14). For those who reject the Son, however – especially those Israelites who should have joyfully received their Messiah with arms wide open – there is untold, perpetual pain and agonizing anguish to come. On earth the wicked may prosper (Ps73), but what wrath from Yahweh awaits those who spurn the Son and bring God’s unyielding judgment upon themselves; in short, “how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb2:3).

Returning to “the wolf and the lamb” of 65:25, this prophetic picture firmly connects Is65 with the famous Messianic Branch from Jesse’s stem given in Is11:1-10. Though some appeal to unwarranted
“telescoping” or “mountain peaks seen at a distance” glosses, there is no fundamental reason to assume that pictures of glorious prosperity pertain only to an age chronologically removed from the fulfillment of the other prophetic pictures of the good news about Jesus; rather, the images of agrarian and husbandry bliss accord well with a First Advent application of the peace between God and man bought and brought through Jesus Christ (Rom5:1). Few of the verbal pictures in the remainder of Is11 are taken literally (branches, roots, stems, belts, and so forth); why must one take the wolf and lamb picture literally? The answer is that far too many want to vault forward from Jesus’ First Coming to a gauzy Millennial age, infilling with speculation what is lacking in the Scriptures. Since the Bible nowhere describes in any detail the posited future one thousand year age, Premillennial proponents must duct tape together stray prophetic verses to flesh out their preconceived Zionistic notions – notions which are remarkably similar to the failed first century AD expectations of the unregenerate Jews! The intricate creativity of such Futuristic efforts is its own most effective refutation. Mr. Christian Zionist, who said you could just grab stray enigmatic prophetic verses and cobble them together with baptized Scotch tape to form this misshaped Millennium, this amalgamation of every Play-doh color in the Bible to get a uniformly brown Millennial mass that is neither this age nor the age to come? Alas, add a heavy dose of, “Believe the way I do or you deny the Bible‼” and you have much of what passes for classic Fundamentalist eschatological belief.

Having a solid connection between Is11 and Is65 via the “wolf and lamb” link, we can confidently assert that Is65 is Messianic in scope, just as Paul attached gospel import to 65:1-2 in Rom10:20-1. If Is65 is predominantly associated with the First Advent, then it is no surprise to find similar gospel graphics at the end of the chapter. Prosperous vineyards, good houses, fruitful fields, offspring not taken away in battle, and formerly adversarial animals getting along famously are all images of man’s peace with God through Jesus Christ. What would be a better capper to show the non-literal fulfillment of these prophetic illustrations than verse 24, with prayers being answered before being spoken? What?! Is the Almighty instructing us to set aside making requests of Him, since our prayers are heard without us even bothering to ask? Such would contradict many Scriptures indeed (Jn16:24; Mk11:24; etc). Prayers being answered without actually praying is yet another symbol of gospel prosperity, where God’s intimacy with His people is pictured by the Lord answering without His sheep even asking. We may safely conclude, then, that the verbal graphics of farming riches and herding opulence given in Is65:21-25 well accord with a figurative application in the first century AD of the expansion of the gospel the world over.

With Apostolic authority setting the pattern at the chapter’s outset, we then saw how often in Is65 those who make a formalistic claim to follow Yahweh were distinguished from those who obey the Almighty in truth. The rebellious people who spurned God’s hand, who ate swine’s flesh and yet declared themselves “holier than thou” were set off against those who found Jehovah without seeking Him (65:1-7); God’s chosen ones, the flock that truly sought Him, were consistently distinguished from those destined for slaughter because they would not listen to nor answer Yahweh (65:8-12); the Lord’s servants rejoiced while those who opposed Him were broken and cursed (65:13-16); the name of those who stood against the gospel would become a curse (65:15) while the Lord’s servants would be called by another name (“Christian” in Acts11:26); and in a recreated Jerusalem, God rejoiced and was glad in His people, with the former things of the Old Covenant being set aside (65:17-19). The disparity between those who deceptively claimed fealty to the Almighty King and those who loyally followed their Sovereign in truth was a key distinctive constructed in various prophetic images throughout the chapter. If a contrast is evidenced in 65:20, the initial presumption must be that it accords with the same pattern established in the balance of the chapter, unless the text itself presents compelling reasons to the contrary. The core of Is65 is the contrast between those truly blessed by the gospel and those externalists who were accursed, and we would do well to bear this in mind as we examine the operative verse more closely.
One Hundred Years? Parsing Is65:20

Finally coming to the business of analyzing the seemingly inscrutable Is65:20, let us refresh our memories from the NKJV text (which, like the GNV, has the adversative “but” rather than the more tepid “and” of other translations):

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for ① the child shall die one hundred years old, but ② the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.” (Is65:20 NKJV, numbers and emphasis added)

Who are the people being referenced, those who live a century and yet die accursed, those contrasted with the child dying one hundred years old (the last half of the verse)? As demonstrated above, the whole chapter is laced with dissimilar fates; the covenant sanctions against the formalistic false followers of Yahweh (the ethnic Jews) were consistently distinguished from the abundant divine blessings upon those who were truly God’s chosen servants, whose hearts were dedicated faithfully to Yahweh. Also recall that the chapter opened and closed with First Advent applications. Verses 1-2 of Is65 were quoted by Paul in Rom10:20-1 to the very same end described above, contrasting the unbelief of Israel with the expansive receptivity of the Gentiles. At the end of the chapter, verses 24-25 have the Messianic image of the wolf and lamb grazing together (cf. Is11:6), of dust being the serpent’s food (cf. Gen3:14-15), and of prayers being answered without them even being uttered. In addition, shortly after the chapter break there was a further gospel era reference. Is66:3 tells us that “he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man.” This text pointedly highlights the Old Covenant’s end, when sacrificing critters for sin comes to a close by the once for all sacrifice of the Son upon the cross. Therefore, without any verbal justification within 65:20 to think contrarily, our first assumption must be that any contrast given in this verse must be of similar gospel portent, the distinction between the externally minded, Messiah rejecting Israelites and those who by faith in Christ were God’s true servants, whether Jew or Gentile.

Please note that the first half of 65:20 does not have the adversative, but rather makes a positive statement about what shall be no more; this half verse will be pursued at length below. For now, the disjunctive “but” of 65:20b is between ① the child who dies at one hundred and ② the one hundred year sinner who is accursed. Our straight-out-of-the-interpretive-box hypothesis must be that somehow the child who dies at one hundred represents God’s genuine and chosen servants while the accursed sinner of one hundred stands for the Israelites devoted to ceremonialism but who are actually Yahweh’s enemies. Does this concept, the primary thrust of the remainder of Is65, align with 65:20b; and if so, how?

Let us think for a minute: Is there any Biblical line of reasoning related to the one hundred year mark? Indeed, there is an extremely famous one hundred year benchmark in the annals of Israel, right at the very inauguration of the nation. Every original Jewish reader of Isaiah could quickly recite the account of Abraham’s being one hundred years old when Sarah gave birth to Isaac. “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” (Gen17:17). Abraham’s question was resoundingly answered in the affirmative – “Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him” (Gen21:5). As the Lord Himself put it to Sarah when she laughed at the possibility of bearing a son at such an advanced age, “Is anything too difficult for the Lord?” (Gen18:14). Therefore, any of Abraham’s physical progeny must rightly be considered children of one hundred, since through Isaac was the nation of Israel birthed. True, Ishmael had arrived some fourteen years prior via Hagar, when Abram was eighty-six (Gen16:16); but in no wise did the covenant extend through the son of the slave woman (Gal4:21-31). So then, ethnic Israel rightly traced its roots through Abraham’s son of one hundred years, Isaac.

However – and this is the core of this paper’s assertion – there is a race of men unknown to Abraham but of a similar faith, and these should likewise be considered Abraham’s children of one hundred. As we saw above:

For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name. (63:16)
Paul greatly expanded upon this “unknown to Abraham” theme in his epistles. How was the uncircumcised Abraham justified before God? As Paul recounts in Rom4, Abraham was not justified by the works of the Law (Moses yet being “in the loins,” coming several hundred years later). Rather, Abraham was made right with God through faith; and thus Abraham was the father of both the circumcised (Jews) and uncircumcised (Gentiles) who are of a faith like that of the great patriarch (Rom4:9-12). Paul drove a stake into the heart of any unregenerate, ethnically based Zionism with his conclusion:

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom4:13)

The very kernel, the sum and substance of God’s spiritual blessing, comes not through physical descent (cf. Jn1:13) but through a faith like unto Abraham’s. Who, then, are the true Israelites? “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise” (Gal3:29). We see, then, that there is a second type of “son of one hundred,” namely, those who are heavenly minded like Abraham. Abraham sought not to become part of the landed gentry of Palestine; instead, Abraham longed for a heavenly city whose architect and builder is God (Heb11:9-16). It is likewise for all who share the faith of one hundred year old Abraham.

Paul explicitly stated this very notion in the balance of Rom4. To cite this familiar passage in full:

For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (Rom4:16-25)

The Apostle took great pains to instruct the Gentile Romans of their affinity to the olive tree of faith (cf. Rom11). True, they were not Abraham’s physical progeny and thus had no inheritance with ethnic Israel; but by faith they were grafted in to the olive tree of the historically faithful and now experienced the nourishing sap of a faith like Abraham’s. The dividing wall of hostility was shattered, violently broken down by the bloody, atoning conflict at the cross (Eph2:14-18). The previous separation between Jew and Gentile was visibly represented by the Temple, with its decree informing any trespassing Gentile violating its precincts that he was assenting to his own death sentence. This obstacle was removed because the redemptive work of Jesus had achieved what no blood of bulls or goats could ever accomplish (Heb10:4). The Temple represented ethnic Israelite inclusion, yes, but it also stood for Gentile exclusion. Would God’s people who were Gentiles be forever barred from access to their Father, to the very height of intimacy offered by the Old Covenant? God gave His resounding answer with the torn veil, followed forty years later by the Temple Mount being wiped utterly clean by the Roman X Legion (“Fretensis”). Now through the cross, Jew and Gentile alike were united in the church by faith in Christ, a great mystery brought to full light so that all the world would give glory to God (Eph2:11-3:13). There would no longer be any Jewish rejection of those whose lineage could not be traced to Abraham (Acts15). Therefore, the second seed of Abraham was not of the flesh but of the Spirit, united by faith to Christ, and these should likewise be considered offspring of Abraham’s one hundred years.

Returning to Heb11:9-16, we see that Abraham was not looking for real estate largesse from Yahweh; rather, Abraham’s was a heavenly hope. To wit:
By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Heb11:9-16)

Did you notice the topic once again raised by the writer of Hebrews? The aged Abraham, the man of one hundred years, brought forth descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore. At no time in history has ethnic Israel ever been so populous; but with the inclusion of those in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, Abraham’s offspring do indeed constitute a teeming horde. The faith of Abraham extending to the nations also completed the expansive early promise to Abraham, that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen18:18; see also 22:18 and 17:4-6,16), a mass multitude of “sons of one hundred” birthed to Abraham but not by natural descent. Truly the Gentiles of faith are Abraham’s offspring, though unknown to the great patriarch and his Israeli progeny (Is63:16)!

What can we then conclude about Abraham’s children (or seed)? The Scriptures clearly set forth two types of offspring of the founding patriarch. There are those who are the physical children offspring of Abraham, the Jews; and then there are those who by faith are Abraham’s genuine spiritual descendants. In many instances these two classes are blessedly united, in the case of Israeliites who have accepted Jesus as their Messiah; but there is definitely a multitude of the redeemed unknown to Abraham (Is63:16) but of a faith like unto the patriarch’s. These two types, one from Abraham’s loins and one from his faith, are routinely contrasted in the Word of God. To the Jews, John the Baptist said:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Mt3:7-10)

The Jews trusted in their Abrahamic pedigree. John the Baptist made plain to these “holier than thou” (Is65:5) types that their hope was false, a belief based on their bloodline rather than on hearts of covenantal obedience to Yahweh. Rocks would be of greater spiritual benefit to the kingdom of God than these self-righteous, self-serving, unspiritual Jews. Yes, they had Abraham’s ancestry, but they were yet under God’s condemnation for their implacable impenitence. Being an ethnic son of one hundred was of no eternal benefit to these faithless men who rebelled against both the Old and New Covenants. It is the same today; being an ethnic Israelite (or the son of a preacher) has no redemptive runoff from one’s forebears.

Likewise, Jesus gave a sharp riposte to the Jews who claimed, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone,” and, “Abraham is our father” (Jn8:33, 39). Trusting in their heritage, these Jews spurned the promised Messiah and sought to kill Him. What was Jesus’ retort? “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. ... You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.” (Jn8:39, 44). The Jews’ confidence was in their pedigree, but the Messiah assured them that this would purchase for them a fast pass through the gates of hell, a quick queue for these rock-hearted sons of one hundred. [So much for the popular but fictitious “Jesus, meek and mild,” a milquetoast Messiah who was only “loving” (read: sappy sentimentalism) and never crossed anyone! People who make such assertions only show forth their Biblical illiteracy.] Obviously both the Messiah’s precursor, John the Baptist, and Jesus Himself castigated the ethnic, unbe-
lieving Jews for not being true spiritual descendants of Abraham, though both acknowledged the Jew-

ish lineage of the covenant rebels. The unbelieving Jews who were the sons of one hundred stood ac-
cursed before the Father. The Israelis prior to the destruction of Solomon’s Temple had said, “This is
the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” (Jer7:4), trusting in the struc-
ture’s presence as a sure sign of God’s unwavering blessing upon them, but they found soon thereaft-
ner that God’s hammer of wrath for covenantal disobedience would firmly fall upon them; in like fashion,
those of Abrahamic lineage in the first century AD trusted in their bloodline rather than in their Christ,
and for this they would be cast out of the vineyard and the eternal blessings of Yahweh’s favor given to
a nation producing the fruit thereof (Mt21:33ff.). [Note: The kingdom was not “postponed” because of
the vineyard tenants’ disobedience; rather, it was taken from them by the executed Son’s irate Father
and given to those bearing the fruit thereof (Mt21:43).]

**Accursed in the New Testament**

The Jews of Jesus’ day who were of the flesh of Abraham but not of the patriarch’s faith stood ac-
cursed before the heavenly King against whom they had revolted. Several New Testament passages
have bearing on the “accursed” concept. In Galatians, Paul dealt with those who sought to bring the
Christian Gentiles under the restrictive power and control of Judaism in general and Jerusalem in
particular. “You have believed in the Messiah, but now you need to submit to Moses to truly be fol-
lowers of a Jewish Messiah!” was the heresy of the so-called Judaizers. What was the great Apostle’s
response? It was precise, punctuated and stern. “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should
preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said
before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is
to be accursed!” (Gal1:8-9). Those who infiltrated the church and propagated their Judaism amongst
the Gentile converts to Christianity, seeking to chain the New Covenant believers to the Old Covenant,
stood accursed of God. Those who promoted such evil within Christ’s body were termed “the dogs ...
the evil workers ... the false circumcision” (Php3:2). Paul gave no quarter to those Jews who corrupted
the pure gospel of Christ “by placing upon the neck of the [Gentile] disciples a yoke which neither our
fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Peter in Acts17:10). The New Testament calls accursed those
who clung to Moses and rejected Christ. This is the very point made in 65:20, where the one hundred
year old sinner – the ethnic offspring of Abraham – was numbered among the accursed for snubbing
the grace of God extended through Jesus.

In similar fashion, Paul would prefer to be “accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my
brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites” (Rom9:3-4a). Note once again the
connection between the term “accursed” and the Jewish unbelievers of Paul’s day. If possible, Paul
would trade his own conversion to Christ and become accursed if this would lead to the transfor-
mation of his Jewish kinsmen. Those whose lineage could be traced to Abraham – the physical sons of
one hundred – were instead the ones who stood accursed before God for their Messianic refusal and
denunciation, and Paul explained why this took place in Rom9-11. Again, we see the link between Is-
raelite unbelief and the notion of being accursed, the same message given in prophetic form in
Is65:20.

“If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed” (1Co16:22) is how Paul closed his first letter
to the church in Corinth. There were those in the church but who were not of the church, and they
stood accursed of God. There is no certain Jewish correlation with this statement that ends the epis-
tle, but Acts18 makes the Israelite relationship much more transparent. The widespread opposition of
the ethnic Israelites to the gospel in Corinth led to Paul’s being hauled before the proconsul, Gallio
(Acts18). However, the proconsul quickly ruled that Jewish internecine doctrinal squabbles were of
no interest to Roman jurisprudence, and the case was thrown out of court. This aborted trial led to the
synagogue ruler, Sosthenes, being beaten before Gallio by his fellow Jews; and this is likely the self-
same Sosthenes who appeared at the outset of the epistle (1Co1:1). While it is true that any who reject
the Lord are accursed (1Co16:22), yet the connecting rod of the Jews in Acts18 with 1Co1:1 casts need-
ed light upon the “accursed” passage that closes the letter to the troubled Corinthian church. Paul’s fi-
al anathema at first glance seems out of place in the epistle, but not when one factors in the Jewish
gospel opposition evidenced in Acts18. The Christ-rejecting Israelites were at least in the back of Paul’s mind with his statement that one stands accursed who does not love the Lord; and the Jews and their pervasive hostility to Jesus may have been at the forefront of Paul’s thinking when he penned the seemingly random “accursed” statement at the end of 1Corinthians. Jewish opponents to the propagation of the good news stood accursed before God – maybe this was what Paul was bringing to mind at the end of this first epistle to the church in Corinth.

In these three examples – Gal1:8-9, Rom9:3-4a, and 1Co16:22 – we observe the intimate connection between those deemed by God “accursed” and the Messiah rejecting ethnic Jews who clung to the externals of the Old Covenant. In a pointed denunciation, Jesus Himself offers stern woes in Mt23 – the equivalent of being cursed of God – spoken against the Jewish leaders who pretended to serve Yahweh when they actually hated their Sovereign King. In the New Testament, the ethnic Jews were consistently singled out for God’s approbation (e.g., 1Th4:14-16), those sons of one hundred year old Abraham who discarded the faith of their great patriarch and the nation’s founder. We see, then, that the New Testament concept of being accursed of God is routinely tied to Jewish gospel opposition, and this neatly dovetails with Is65:20, that the nation which traced its roots to Abraham – the physical sons of one hundred – where accursed sinners before the Almighty for their rebellion against the New Covenant.

What About Death In 65:20?

A problem emerges with respect to this double century theory; namely, “... the child shall die one hundred years old ...” Death is highlighted in 65:20, which does not exactly sound like the one hundred year youth is especially blessed of God! Au contraire, all who have been truly born again in Christ fully understand that life eternal comes through death’s door. A quick survey of some epistolary literature reminds us of death’s centrality in bringing about spiritual life to those formerly in the death grip of transgression. In the usual physical versus spiritual New Testament contrast, it is not the grave, a six foot dirt nap, that brings the blessings of God; rather, death to self and sin is what the apostolic handwriting emphasizes as the doorway to eternal life.

How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ... Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him ... Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom6:2-4,8,11)

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ... But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. (Rom7:4,6)

[We] always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2Co4:10)

For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. (Gal2:19)

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees ... ? (Col2:20)

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col3:3-4)

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him (2Tm2:11)

... and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1Pt2:24)

There can be no Biblical doubt that being united to Christ in His death brings life to the wretched sinner in desperate need of an alien righteousness imputed to his account. It is not surprising, then, that in Is65:20 the youth actually dies at one hundred, but not necessarily in a physical sense. Though his body yet lived, Adam spiritually died when he partook of the fruit; in converse fashion, those joined to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection are those who die to self and live for God. The repentance and
faith of regeneration, along with the concomitant death to self, makes one a “youth” in Jesus. The death to self that accompanies repentance and faith brings life through the Son of God! With this New Testament application of death as the requisite doorway for eternal life, consider again the prose of Is65:20, that “the child shall die one hundred years old.” Could this not be a poetic foreshadowing of those who die with Christ, are born again and thus are united to Jesus by a faith like that of one hundred year old Abraham? In other words, the “youth” or “child” is merely an Old Testament mantle for a New Testament concept, prophetic garb for one who has been born from above.

**Born Again Prophetic Presages**

Becoming a baby or youth to enter God’s family – this can’t help but remind us of the famous words of Jesus to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn3:3). [Note that Nicodemus was the “literalist” in his encounter with Jesus – “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” (Jn3:4)] Could the “youth” of 65:20 be prophetic language predicting the gospel era when one must be born again to enter the kingdom of God – not physically reborn as Nicodemus mistakenly thought, but reborn by faith to gain entrance into the New Covenant’s spiritual economy? Jesus Himself said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt18:3-4). It is not that one must become a physical child to be acceptable before God; rather, it is childlike faith that is pleasing in the Father’s sight. To be a part of the Old Covenant economy, one must be physically born a Jew; the New Covenant is of an entirely different construction, with only those partaking who are reborn from above and whose hearts are filled with God’s Law (Jer31:31-34; Heb8). Being a child who dies at one hundred in Is65:20 is likely prophetic shorthand for being a legitimate son of Abraham’s faith (Gal3:29). In contrast, the ethnic Jews were illegitimate sons of Abraham’s one hundred year faith, though they had a genuine Israelite pedigree. Death to self and being born again are indispensible to entering into New Covenant blessings, to being translated from a son of darkness into a child of light, to becoming an offspring by faith of the one hundred year old Abraham. The Israelites who had one hundred year Abraham in their lineage but did not share the patriarch’s faith had no share in the eternal inheritance from God, despite their vitriolic protestations to the contrary.

Several hundred years earlier, David penned a similar prophetic presage to the renowned “born again” characterization of kingdom entrance given above. No one will dispute that Ps110 is Messianic, the psalm being oft-quoted in the New Testament to that end. “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’ … The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps110:1,4) – these two verses alone establish the Messianic nature of this poem of David. What, then, do we make of verse 3? “Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; in holy array, from the womb of the dawn, your youth are to You as the dew” (110:3). Once again, could it not be that the refreshing “youth” birthed not from a woman but “from the womb of the dawn” was David’s oblique reference to being born again by faith? Those born again in Christ “volunteer freely” because “in the day of Your [God’s] power” they were moved towards repentance. In Ps110:3, we again have a gospel oriented passage predicting the First Advent era message of being born again, of becoming a youth birthed by God’s power and not of natural descent (cf. Jn1:12-13).

**Summary: The Double Century Sons Theory**

Reciting once again the text of Is65:20:

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.” (Is65:20 NKJV)

The great progenitor of Israel was one hundred years old when Isaac, the child of promise, was born (Gen21:5), so Abraham’s century mark historically connects two categories of people. There are those of the faith of Abraham and are the chosen of God, and these are routinely contrasted with those who
trace their family tree to Abraham but lack the eminent patriarch’s faith. Ethnic Jewry may formalistically serve Yahweh but these physical Israelites are actually His archenemies; the sons of faith are of God’s flock, not those of physical descent (Jn1:13). In Is65:20b, there is an obvious contrast between two classes, ① the youth who dies at one hundred whose fate diverges from ② the accursed sinner of one hundred. As in the balance of Is65, those who are of the faith of Abraham (Rom4; Gal3:29) are contrasted with Abraham’s insurgent physical descendants, the Jews whom Paul called, “the dogs ... the evil workers ... the false circumcision” (Php3:2) and John called “a synagogue of Satan” (Rev2:9; 3:9). If this one hundred year dual connection to Abraham is correct, then ① the youth of one hundred represents of a child of faith whose heart is circumcised even if his flesh is not (Rom2:28-29), and who will forever enjoy the grand gospel blessings found in Christ; while ② the one hundred year accursed sinner signifies any ethnic Jew who rejects his Messiah and therefore, despite his pedigree, faces the wrath of God.

This gospel oriented understanding of “the youth will die at the age of one hundred” is entirely in accord with the rest of this chapter in Isaiah. It also aligns well with Jesus’ repeated statements that the Law & the Prophets consistently testified of His First Advent (Jn5:39-40; Lk24:27, 44-45). This faith oriented outlook is likewise harmonious with the New Testament concepts of dying to self, being born from above, having childlike faith, and being a spiritual descendant of one hundred year old Abraham. Meanwhile, those who were merely in Abraham’s one hundred year bloodline are accursed if they refuse their Messiah; their Israelite lineage only heightens their condemnation, making them children not of Abraham’s faith but of the devil (Jn8:33, 44).

Spiritual profit is gained by becoming, like Nathanael, “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” (Jn1:47). Nathanael was already an ethnic Jew, so of what was Jesus speaking? It is clear that unlike many Israelites, Nathanael was of a different composition, having a faith like Abraham’s that made him a true son of one hundred year old Abraham. Likewise, Jesus said of Zaccheus, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham” (Lk19:9). It was not that Jesus’ testimony to the deciduous dweller transformed Zaccheus into an ethnic Jew – he was already an Israelite! No, Zaccheus’ faith (granted by God, Php1:29) transformed him into a true son of one hundred year old Abraham. Jew and Gentile alike will find no profit in being physical Israelites [showing forth the lie of the modern Gentile trend of some towards a Judaizing Christianity]; no, together both Jew and Gentile “are all under sin” (Rom3:9). Therefore, both classes are in desperate need of an alien righteousness, imputed to them based not upon a bloodline (being physical sons of one hundred) but upon having a faith like one hundred year old Abraham. The pinnacle of God’s blessing through Christ comes not to a particular ethnicity but to a specific class of individuals who have a faith like the patriarch’s, as forwarded by Paul in Rom4. Truly the newborn of faith who dies to self is a genuine child of Abraham’s one hundred year faith, while the sinner who only traces his pedigree (but not his faith) to Abraham’s one hundred year offspring stands accursed.

What Shall Be No More (Is65:20a)

Having established the double Biblical meaning of being a son of one hundred, let us next turn to the first portion of Is65:20. “There shall be no more from there an infant of days, nor an old man who has not filled his days” (65:20a, updated KJV). What on earth might this be all about?! At the very least, we would hope that the first half of verse 20 aligns with the First Advent hypothesis given above; namely, that one hundred years ties Abraham’s two progenies, the ethnic unbelieving Jews and those of Abraham’s faith (whether Jew or Gentile). However, this text will surely require flexing our interpretive muscles and some serious investigative sweat; this will not be a casual walk through the prophetic park.

Before proceeding with the sundry options, where is “from there,” as in “There shall be no more from there ...”? As demonstrated above, the location is cemented by the foregoing verses, showing that this is not a physical location at all but is rather a recreated Jerusalem.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing and her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. (65:18-19).
The book of Hebrews makes plain that a recreated Jerusalem is the inheritance of all who are in Christ’s New Covenant, in contrast to those condemned under the Law, the Old Covenant Mosaic economy. Repeating that which was explained above, the writer to the Hebrews said:

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.” And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb12:18-24)

If one is from the heavenly Jerusalem, then he is a member of the New Covenant; after the cross of Christ, this means being part of the church. Whatever the infant and old man represent in 65:20a, they must be understood in light of this New Covenant Mount Zion framework.

What follows are some gospel postulates for what 65:20a negatively asserts (“There shall be no more …”) concerning old men and infants, plus a running commentary on each one’s likelihood. Some lightly grasped conclusions (“held with two or three fibers of my being”) will come thereafter.

• Lengthened days is an Old Testament metaphor for spiritual prosperity, while the margins of life (the infants and the aged) are a merism representing all stages of life. [“Alpha and Omega” or “A to Z” are merisms symbolizing all that comes between.] A few examples from other passages should suffice to prove the point. “So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Dt30:19-20). Fulfilled days bespeak of God’s blessings during the Old Covenant. “Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants” (Jl3:16); i.e., get everybody together, from the octogenarians to the tiniest of tots (a merism). If lengthened days is symbolic of being blessed by Yahweh, while those on life’s chronological margins gives a merism for men of all ages, then combining these Old Testament metaphors in Is65:20a points towards the peak of God’s spiritual blessings. Since those who are in Christ have truly obtained the pinnacle of spiritual bliss, it makes sense that the completion of one’s earthly days in 65:20a by young and old alike was used as hyperbole for those who enter into the Messiah’s sheepfold, blessed with eternal life in Jesus. Also present could be a hint of the eternal life concept in the fulfilled days of babies and geriatrics. Via the infant and old man merism whose days are extended, Isaiah informed us well before Jesus’ day that those who are enveloped in the love of Christ are richly approved by Yahweh.

• What “day” is being referenced by the enigmatic “infant of days” in Is65:20a? Maybe an “infant of days” has been born again in the day of the Almighty’s power, moving a person’s heart towards repentance? Paul used “day” in a similar fashion when quoting an earlier passage in Isaiah – “Behold, now is ‘THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,’ behold, now is ‘THE DAY OF SALVATION’” (2Co6:2; cf. Is49:8). Truly the notion of “day” related to the gospel is not twenty-four hours, but instead points to the present epoch, the “day” when Yahweh’s strength produces regeneration in a dead sinner’s life. One might say to a pokey child, “Now!” It is likewise for Paul’s 2Co6:2 exhortation: Don’t delay, now is the acceptable day of salvation! We saw something similar above in Ps110:3, that the youth (those born again) are moved “in the day of Your power.” Unfortunately, this theory concerning “an infant of days” does not square very well with the outset of the verse, that, “There shall be no more ...” Before the cross, genuine conversions were relatively sparse, Scripturally gauzy and ill-defined (e.g., when was David converted?), and mostly constricted to the Israelites (cf. Jn4:22-24); after that first Easter morn, the transformation of lives was widespread, with numerous and well documented rebirths in Jesus the world over. Therefore, though the suggestion has some attractiveness, an “infant of days” is likely not about being born again, since the “acceptable time” and “the day of salvation” were extensive, not diminished, from the first century AD onwards.
• “Neither shall there be there any more a child that dies untimely, or an old man [or elder] who shall not complete his time (65:20a LXX, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek begun in the 3rd century BC at the behest of Ptolemy II Philadelphus). Note the alternate translation of “days” in the LXX, namely “time” and “untimely.” Paul refers to himself as one “untimely born” (1Co15:8), strikingly similar language (though of differing Greek construction) to the LXX of 65:20a. Could Paul be making an oblique 65:20a citation in 1Co15:8, and thus the untimely infant allusion is what was being highlighted when the Apostle spoke of his tardy new birth and out-of-season apostleship in Christ? Interestingly, “old man” in the LXX is presbytēs, the Greek term from whence we get our New Testament term “elder” (presbyteros). Being born again and speaking of elders in 65:20a may quietly foreshadow things to come in the first century AD church. Once again, however, this founders on the rocks of what shall be no more (the outset of 65:20). New births and church elders were quite numerous after the cross, not reduced, so this supposition about time, timely and elders must be discounted in light of 65:20’s opening statement.

• If New Covenant Christians are being referenced by the “suckling of days” (YLT of 65:20a), one is reminded of another New Testament teaching. Believers are encouraged to crave the pure milk of the Word in 1Pt2:2. Could this be the implication of the “infants” in 65:20a? An alternate construction of the next portion triggers remembrance of an additional New Testament image — “...nor an elder who has not ordained his days.” יְמַלֵ֖א yə—mal—lê alt trans “ordained,” as in Lv8:33; 16:32; 1Ki13:33]. Ordained elders and infants feasting on milk [of the Word] surely are solid New Covenant concepts. Appealing though these connections may be, they must again be set aside because they do not square with the opening language, that, “There shall be no more from there ...”

“Ordained time” may provide a critical lynchpin to our coming to terms with 65:20a. No one is ever born again at the wrong time (“untimely”), nor a saint who expires prior to the completion of his usefulness. God has ordained all of our days according to His good pleasure, and all who enter the heavenly Jerusalem referenced in vss. 18-19 are for the Lord’s glory for the entirety of their journey upon earth, the period ordained for them by the Almighty (Pr20:24). Appropriate to the Doctrines of Grace, this view fits neatly with Calvin’s understanding of 65:20a, that Christians are always spiritually vigorous no matter their age (Isaiah Comm.). To interpretively present this perspective clothed in 65:20a garb: “There shall be no more from there an untimely new birth in Christ, nor an aged saint who does complete his ordained days ...” This outlook on 65:20a says that all who are born again in Christ are birthed in due season – no miscarriages in the kingdom of God! – and each fulfills his days on earth according to the decree of the Almighty – no premature deaths in the kingdom, either! This stance on 65:20a is a very attractive, gospel-centered hypothesis indeed, carrying with it the considerable gravitas of the great magisterial Reformer’s vast intellect.

Evaluating The “There Shall Be No More” Options

Stepping back and looking at the entirety of the 65:17-25 stanza, we see that great blessings attend the Lord’s called and faithful ones, like the prosperity promised for obedience under the Old Covenant. For instance:

“They will build houses and inhabit them; they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit, they will not plant and another eat; for as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, and My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they are the offspring of those blessed by the Lord, and their descendants with them.” (65:21-23)

Similar language expresses the converse in the Old Covenant sanctions, where Israel is forewarned about forsaking the Lord:

“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ... It shall come about if you ever forget the Lord your God and go after
other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the Lord your God.” (Dt8:11-14,19-20)

Such comparisons between Is65:17-25 and similar passages from the Law and the Prophets could easily be multiplied, showing that the thrust of the text must be the abundant blessings of Yahweh upon New Covenant saints expressed in Old Covenant terms. How else might an Old Testament prophet explain New Covenant realities to his contemporaries? The “fat of the land” pictures for those who bow the knee to their Messiah makes perfect sense when viewed 700 or more years prior to the gospel events of the first century AD.

The conclusion is that the first option above gives the best fit to Is65:20a; namely, that fulfilled days demonstrated via the suckling babes and old men merism evidences pervasive spiritual health and well being amongst the people of God, the New Covenant church. As might be expected, however, 65:20a conveys the extravagant New Covenant blessings in Old Covenant longevity terminology. Genuflecting to the great magisterial Reformer (the last option above), we also see in 65:20a the notion of man’s days being ordained by the Lord (Pr20:24; Jer10:23; Ps37:23) with no premature births or deaths in the body of Christ – richly appropriate concepts associated with Calvin. All comes to pass according to the Almighty’s good pleasure (Is46:10;Php2:13). Prolonged physical life in 65:20a dovetails neatly with the rest of the Is65:17-25 pericope, where good houses, plenty of food, safety from enemies, and prosperous herds all indicate the New Covenant favor of the Lord, verbally presented in characteristic Old Covenant terminology.

Truly those who find life in Christ are blessed of God – not with passing physical prosperity, but with spiritual affluence that exceeds anything this world can offer! All of the spiritual abundance from Yahweh is bound up in Christ (Eph1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8; Col1:27; 2:9-10), and the prophetic language of the son of Amoz strains the Old Covenant vocabulary to express the vastness of New Covenant gospel opulence to be poured out over seven centuries after Isaiah’s earthly journey was through. Surely Isaiah was accurately described later by Peter: “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1Pt1:10-11).

**Poking Fun At Zionism**

Our Futurist and Zionist brethren may strenuously object, replete with pejorative laced language. “Oh no, you fool, your views on Is65:20 are not literal at all, so your conclusions entirely miss the mark! You have to explain literal infants and old men. This passage is about the Millennium, when Israel will be back in the land and life will be long but not eternal. Why aren’t you taking the Bible seriously?! You’re just spiritualizing away the passage! Will you next be denying Inerrancy?! Only we Dispensationalists have the steel backbone and iron intestinal fortitude to take the Old Testament prophecies literally!” Sidestepping the obviously empty rhetoric and nasty name calling – a trademark of an illogical position that cannot survive cross examination (Pr18:17) – let us return to the actual passage to cast further aspersion upon such literalistic straight-jacketing of the prophetic Scriptures.

In the alleged Millennium, will everyone have a vineyard and drink wine? 65:21 says, “They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.” It seems that with a literal approach, no exceptions are allowed and everyone must grow grapes and forsake his teetotalism to lusciously imbibe. I do hope there will be less automobile activity for one thousand years, or else a greater Millennial police presence to enforce the DUI laws, what with all of that wine production and consumption!

Will everyone the world over become his own general contractor plus associated subcontractors, each constructing his own house with his own hands? Such is literalism applied to, “They will build houses and inhabit them” (65:21). You’d better have a good pair of work gloves in your fabricated Millennium, since, “My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands” (65:22). Ouch! That sounds rather painfully unpleasant and not very utopian! “Oh, Lord, do I have to render my hands useless just to build a lousy Millennial house?! Can’t I hire some help?” Absolutely not! Literalism demands that your very own hands will be worn out constructing your own domicile; you will not be able to hire
any minimum wage assistance. Pity the older mortal widows who live during the Millennium, who cannot ask anyone to help them build a place to live! They indeed may hope for death at one hundred, or sooner! Additionally, how exactly this home construction passage in Isaiah squares with the Millennial wilderness and woods camping from Ezk34:25 is also unclear, a striking prophetic dissonance! “Tension in the text” – a polite theologically liberal way of saying that there are errors in the Bible – hardly begins to describe the thousand year housing inconsistency evidenced by the Is65:21-22 (houses) and Ezk34:25 (wilderness camping) contradiction.

Moreover, it seems you won’t even have to pray during this Scripturally gauzy Millennium, since Yahweh says, “It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (65:24). Whoa! That will surely save the godly quite a bit of time every Millennial morn, shortening their daily sunrise devotions, since prayers will no longer be necessary. Well, I suppose that’s a good thing, since people will need all those extra hours to be off growing grapes and turning their feet purple while stomping them to make wine, plus wearing out their hands building their houses!

No doubt good, clean fill dirt will be at a premium during the allegedly soon-coming Millennium, since each household will require a nice backyard pile of soil for any marauding snakes. Why?! We need to literally apply, “dust will be the serpent’s food” (65:25). We have to feed those poor creatures, now don’t we?! Besides, if you have an attractive and distracting load of topsoil, then the serpents probably won’t come near your house and family, rendering you much safer indeed. Pity the Millennial pest control companies’ reduction in snake removal business!

It will surely be an head-shaking shame that the valleys and plains will be completely denuded of inhabitants for one thousand years. Why this Millennial depopulation of the flatlands and ravines? Safety only comes to the mountain dwellers, since, “They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain” (65:25). It seems that all will have to become Millennial hillbillies, since no guarantee of protection is granted to those who inhabit the plains and gorges. “Hillbillies for Jesus” will no doubt be a popular social club, with many local chapters of beneficence; they can lend a helping hand to those left unprotected by Yahweh because they do not live at the higher elevations. It will be interesting to see all mankind who live in mountainous safety becoming adept at building their own houses with their own hands upon hillsides and playing football on the slopes, since protection from God will only be on found on the mountains! Then again, “My holy mountain” sounds rather singular, so I guess the whole of the earth’s population will be crowded for the safety granted by Yahweh upon only one mountain. Such overcrowding will make Singapore, Mexico City, New York or Tokyo seem sparsely populated by comparison! Think of the rise in land prices for a slim plot on that singular mountain – quite a boon for the Millennial real estate speculators who bought land early on God’s holy mountain!

As the above tongue-in-cheek mockery easily demonstrates, the puerile inconsistencies in Christian Zionism’s selective literalism become self-delivered knock-out punches. The Scriptures allow for no such thing as “consistent” literalism; “taking the Bible at face value” depends on whose face is assigning the value. How does one literally understand Jesus’ words about needing to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn6:53-56), or the necessity of being born again (Jn3:3)? The Jews of Jn6 and Nicodemus in Jn3 were the literalist interpreters of Jesus’ words – were they right? Besides, there really is no such thing as a literal interpretation, since anything taken literally requires no interpretation (after Morris Rev Comm p24, in Chilton Days Veng p399). Does the statement, “I’m going to buy groceries” necessitate any spousal interpretation? “Ooh, what did she really mean when she said she’s going to buy Cheerios?” The same stumbling block of literalism that led to the First Advent Jewish misunderstandings about being born again, of the Temple being destroyed and then rebuilt in three days, of living waters, of drinking His blood and eating His flesh, of being blind and seeing, and so forth, is the self-same refutation for our modern incarnation of mistaken Zionist literalism. This modern school of the selectively literal is relatively recent (1830s onward), which makes one wonder about the sources for our latter day Christian Zionism.

As it turns out, “literal where possible” is really just “literal where convenient” (North, in Gentry Beast of Rev fwd pxvi note). Convenient for what? Convenient for promoting a baptized Zionism, with the Israelites back in the land, Jesus ruling for one thousand years from Jerusalem, and the nations
reduced to abject servitude to the Messianically empowered jackbooted Jews. Also “convenient” is the Secret Rapture, which removes the church from being underneath the coming Jewish heel; though how exactly the trumpet call and the voice of the archangel (1Th4:16) can be in any wise “secret” is “conveniently” bypassed. Now really, is there any difference between this empty Millennial hope and the perspective of the first century AD Jewish leaders’ politically motivated Messianic expectations? Fortunately, Christian Zionism appears to be dying the death of a thousand equivocations, combined with being consistently discredited by dire predictions of what never actually comes to pass. In addition, a plethora of empty ex post facto assertions that the Bible predicted this or that war, attack or terrorist act undercuts the credibility of the end times prognosticators. If such things were so clearly revealed in the Scriptures, why weren’t we informed beforehand so we could avoid the fallout? Repeatedly crying wolf has greatly reduced the value of the Dispensational stock.

The more one is consistent in his Biblical understanding, the more he is forced to reject the erratic meta-narrative of Dispensationalism and the expedient of a Zionistically targeted “literal” hermeneutic; which, by the way, is no actual hermeneutic after all, but rather just a Futuristic Jewish storyline imposed upon the Sacred Writ. For the “true believers” who drink the Kool-Aid (Jim Jones 1978), the remarkable end times Dispensational fairy tale is exceedingly attractive, even compelling; but the eschatological fog quickly dissipates upon closer Scriptural examination. Unfortunately for such Dispensational views, elevating the unbelieving Israelites to a position of political power during the Millennium, replete with Moses reinstituted and all the bloody Temple gore, is little different from the Zionism discounted by Jesus and His Apostolic band during the first century AD. Flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God (1Co15:50), so how will the unregenerate Jews get into the supposedly fast approaching Millennium, since they would enter based upon their ethnicity (flesh and blood)? God’s children are not born of blood (Jn1:13), yet our Dispensational brethren say that, in fact, Jewish pedigree begets entrance into the Messianic Millennial kingdom. Dispensationalists claim that those descended from Abraham are God’s chosen people, though these Israelis persist in rejecting their Messiah. Now really; those who reject God’s Son and who will suffer eternal perdition if they perish in their sins are yet God’s chosen people? Of what use is being chosen by God as a physical Jew if it still lands you in hell for your unbelief? Such a stance is indeed a Scripturally difficult camel to swallow!

There can be no doubt that Jesus spoke only of this age and the age to come (Mt12:32; Mk10:30), with no middling Millennium wedged in between. Is the posited Millennium this age or the age to come? The complete lack of Biblical data on this intervening age allows for unbridled speculation, mixing and matching various obscure prophetic texts (including Is65:20) to arrive at predetermined Judaistic conclusions concerning a glorious future for ethnic Israel. However, if you truly seek overflowing prosperity for the Jews, then as Jesus, Paul, Peter, and the entirety of the Scriptures declare, point them towards faith in Christ, not in the direction of a pathetic strip of Mediterranean real estate, poorly watered in the south and with limited natural resources. If the Jews merely have an expectation of seizing a chunk of terra firma plus political control over others, then they will yet perish in their sins. The glorious inheritance from Yahweh is not land, houses or cattle, but entering the eternal promised rest of God through Jesus (Heb3:4) – now there’s an eternal promise worth proclaiming to all, Jew and Gentile alike!

Century Death Conclusions

The New Testament’s application of Is65 is related to the New Covenant era, when God became flesh and walked among us. Paul’s use of 65:1-2 in Rom10:20-1 highlights the first century AD Jewish Messianic rejection, while at the same time the predominantly Gentile wheat was gathered into the salvific barn; it was not ere long before the nascent church was principally non-Jewish in character, quite a startling outcome to grasp for the early Jewish Christians. With this New Covenant interpretive key, we see that the whole of Is65 strikes a similar chord, with nary a hint of anything pertaining to a one thousand year reign of Jesus upon a physical Davidic throne in the city of Jerusalem after the restoration of the ethnic Jews to Palestine and the resuscitation of the bloody Mosaic sacrifices. All of these Premillennial concepts must be imported in toto, since Is65 nowhere breathes a word about any of them. To suppose that one seemingly stray verse, 65:20, foretells the duration of earthly life during
the Millennium is to smuggle in a veritable host of interpretive baggage without Scriptural warrant. Such shenanigans makes one wish for the arrival of the Biblical airport authorities to enforce interpretive order.

“TSA’s (The Scripture Authority’s) prophetic scanner has discovered your extensive Jewish smuggling efforts, sir. I’m sorry, but you cannot bring all of that Millennial baggage full of Zionist contraband onto Flight 65 – Isaiah the pilot insists on your obeying the posted prophetic placards. The rules were laid down thousands of years by King Jesus Himself and ratified by His Apostles that Zionism is strictly disallowed on any prophetic interpretive aircraft. Please place your Israelite suitcases full of empty Jewish-oriented earthly promises of the land, Temple, and political dominance in the bin provided so these contaminated bags can be quarantined. We do not really want to infect the church’s brand New Covenant 777 aircraft with such communicable diseases, now do we? The plane’s prophetic load will be greatly reduced by your willing cooperation, and we appreciate your assistance in this important Biblical matter.”

The whole of the chapter contrasts Yahweh’s external but false worshipers with His chosen ones who seek Him in truth, God’s servants and flock. Taking a Premillennial butcher knife and slicing firmly against the grain of the rest of the chapter is to forward a baptized Zionism entirely foreign to the passage which must be rejected out of hand.

Keeping in mind the disparity between the true and false followers of Yahweh at the introduction of Is65, a distinction that permeates the chapter, we come to the difficult 65:20. To once again give the Scriptural data:

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for ① the child shall die one hundred years old, but ② the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.” (Is65:20 NKJV, numbers and emphasis added)

Since there is a strong adversative in 65:20b (“but”), the dissimilarity between these two classes must certainly be the same as that found in the remainder of Is65. The ethnic Israeli nation was initiated by God when Abraham was one hundred, and Abraham was also the progenitor of those of a similar faith, whether circumcised or uncircumcised (Rom4). This paper proposes that the “one hundred” of 65:20b stands for Abraham’s two types of descendants during the First Advent; namely, the Jews who predominantly rejected their Messiah (“② the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed”) in contradistinction to those of Abraham’s faith (“① the child shall die one hundred years old”). This application of “one hundred” is consonant with Paul’s use of Is65:1–2 in Rom10:20-1 – really, with the whole of Rom9-11 – where the Apostle spelled out the disparity between those who traced their lineage to Abraham but who spurned Jesus and those with a faith like Abraham’s. Whether Jew or Gentile, a true child of one hundred has a faith akin to that displayed by father Abraham. A child of Abraham’s one hundred year faith has died to self and lives for God. Contrariwise, those whose pedigree traces to Abraham (physical son’s of one hundred) but who reject the Lord Jesus Christ are cursed of God. Being accursed is uniquely reserved in the New Testament for those who clung to the Old Covenant and sought to impose it on the church, accompanied by those who flatly rejected Jesus as the hoped for Jewish Messiah (e.g., Gal1:8-9; Mt23).

The first part of 65:20 tells us what shall be no more. While several New Testament tie-ins are possible, the best understanding appears to be that the infant and old man construction is a merism (like Alpha and Omega) of the blessings of God upon His chosen servants. Uninterrupted life without premature death is entirely consistent with the other Old Covenant images of prosperity employed in the chapter. Productive fields, well built houses occupied by the builders, multiplied herds and extended lifespans are all Old Testament prophetic pictures of God’s bountiful blessings dispensed beyond measure to unworthy men. Yahweh’s covenantal riches during the First Advent epoch were predicted through the son of Amoz to extend to all those who are His people through faith in Jesus, a faith like unto Abraham’s, the one hundred year patriarch of the faithful. However, as might be readily anticipated, the New Covenant blessings through Jesus were predicted using Old Covenant images (houses, herds, longevity, etc.) – how else might future gospel glories be expressed during Isaiah’s day?!
Is65:20 says “... an infant from there,” but from where? Is it an earthly location; and, if so, how do we get there forthwith?! The two preceding verses provide divine assistance:

“... an infant from there,” but from where? Is it an earthly location; and, if so, how do we get there forthwith?! The two preceding verses provide divine assistance:

“But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing and her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people ...” (65:18-19a)

The text just before 65:20 showed that the infants and old men were from the recreated Jerusalem, a notion used in the New Testament not of a particular physical location on earth but rather of those united to Christ by faith. In other words, those one hundred year descendants of Abraham’s faith would partake of an altar unavailable to the unbelieving ethnic Jews (Heb13:10), a heavenly Temple ministered by a non-Levite and eternal High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (Heb7). Where are you from, O Christian? You may have been born in New York or Austria, but your true country of origin is the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb12:22). Though Christians may be from varying locations, our genuine and lasting “citizenship is in heaven” (Php3:20).

The favor of God is graciously extended to all “from there,” and not to the one hundred year physical descendants of Abraham who spurned the Messianic kingdom, who said, “We do not want this man to reign over us” (Lk19:14). What became of such rebels? Jesus, the “nobleman who went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself ... [said] these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence” (Lk19:12, 27). Truly the ethnic sons of one hundred became the accursed of God during and after Jesus’ First Advent. The unregenerate Jews – in the lineage but not of the faith of Abraham – were anathematized (65:20), cast off in favor of those unknown to Abraham (63:16) who were called by another name (65:15). In Jesus’ own words, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [the ethnic but unbelieving Jews] and given to a people [the church], producing the fruit of it” (Mt21:43). The kingdom was not postponed because of Jewish disobedience; the kingdom was withdrawn from the impenitent Jews and sovereignly granted by Christ to those of a faith like one hundred year old Abraham. When did this dramatically and emphatically take place? The wrath of God was poured out upon the nation of Israel within a generation of the cross (Mt24:34), when the Romans decimated the land of Palestine and burned the Temple in the Jewish War (66-73 AD). The Father’s anger against the nation that had executed His Son was extinguished after not one stone of the Temple was left upon another (Mt24:1-2).

Jewish pedigree, though not unimportant (Rom9:4-5), in itself was not and never will be salvific, even during the Millennium (whatever its character). Those whose family tree traced back to the son of one hundred still perished in their sins due to Messianic rejection (Jn8:24); or, in the words of Is65:20, “but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.” On the other hand, those born again by faith in Jesus are the true children of God, Abraham’s seed (Gal3:29). The faithful are those who die to sin and self and live for God (Rom6:2); or, in Is65:20 terms, “the child shall die one hundred years old ...” The Christian, the spiritual child of faith like unto Abraham’s at one hundred years of age, has died to the things of this world and transferred his allegiance to a different Sovereign. Such an one is eternally blessed by his union with Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection (Rom6:3ff.).

The spiritual prosperity from Yahweh was pictured hundreds of years prior to the Incarnation in the cradle to grave merism of 65:20a and is consonant with the entire 65:17-25 stanza; namely, “No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days ...” This view of 65:20 is in keeping with the First Advent application initiated by the Apostle’s quote of 65:1-2 in his Rom9-11 argument, where Paul expanded and detailed the question concerning the general Jewish spurning of their Messiah. The former Pharisee, who well understood the Old Testament and its implications to the early church, demonstrated that the vehement first century AD Israeli rebuffing of Jesus Christ was fully predicted by the Old Covenant prophets, while those of a faith like Abraham’s were the genuine sheep brought into God’s fold, cared for in every respect for all eternity. To become a true son of one hundred, both now and in the past, Jew and Gentile alike must enter the heavenly Jerusalem by faith (Heb12:22-24) and partake of an altar unknown to the physical sons of one hundred years (Heb13:10). In contrast to the spiritual prosperity enjoyed by those of Abraham’s faith, the rebellious ethnic Jews were cut off from Messianic riches because of unbelief – the natural branches were shorn from the olive tree of faith. Don’t misunderstand, Paul declared; it is not as though the
word of God had failed, for “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom9:6). God’s intention was never to politically exalt the Jews, nor to make them a ruling class over the Gentiles, nor to extend the Mosaic rituals ad infinitum; rather, the divine plan was always to spiritually rescue the elect remnant who by faith turned to Christ and thus were eternally set free from sin’s penalty.

The physical but unregenerate sons of one hundred year old Abraham stand accursed, while the born again youths of Abraham’s one hundred year faith die to themselves and live for God, bringing extravagant eternal blessings upon the recipient of Yahweh’s electing favor. This is the comforting gospel message of Is65:20, with nary a hint of speculative Millennial fabrications. God’s favor through Christ to natural and wild olive branches alike is a far superior outlook on 65:20 and accords with the balance of the Scriptures. Isn’t such a Jesus honoring perspective a Biblical cut above flimsy Zionist fantasies about near term Jewish political dominion, the physical sons of Abraham haughtily putting the Gentiles under their collective heel and treating the nations no better than Millennial serfs during Jerusalem’s reconstituted hegemony, with the Temple in full bloody operation once again? Oh, please stop! Drop the baptized Zionism and adopt a Christ exalting and Scripturally consonant analysis of Is65:20, one where Jew and Gentile alike are eternally blessed of God through the gospel by having a faith like the one hundred year old faithful Abraham!