

How can these things be?

Various animals are described in Isaiah 11:6-9, and most of them are in predator-prey pairs, such as the wolf and the lamb (11:6). Yet, unlike today, all the animals will dwell together in peace and harmony. There are two obvious possibilities, either 1.) God will someday fundamentally change the nature of predatory and dangerous animals or 2.) Isaiah's description is only figurative.

Calvin believed that the description is of the people of Christ living in harmony with one another. This non-literal view, however, does not fit well with the details given, such as the lion eating straw like an ox (11:7). Moreover, it does not consider Paul's prediction in Romans 8:20-22 that all creation will someday be delivered from the bondage of sin that came with the Fall. So it is better to take these things literally.

What if various animals are only figurative?

Some claim that Leviathan (study #5), Balaam's taking donkey (#9), Jonah's great fish (#15), and future peaceful animals (#22) are all mythical. Many such skeptics also falsely claim that the resurrection of Christ is only figurative, but Paul rightly says that their "faith" is vain (1 Cor. 15:17).

When will these changes occur?

In his first coming, the Lord Jesus demonstrated his authority over creation by calming the storm, walking on the water, turning water into wine, and riding on a donkey's colt, but he did not turn lions or wolves into peaceful straw-eating creatures. While with the wild beasts in the wilderness for forty days (Mark 1:13), Jesus did not change the beasts of the field into domestic animals. That, or something much like it, will be done when he return. Even so, lions will still be recognized as lions and bears as bears.

These great changes will come about after the tribulation period and be enjoyed throughout the 1,000 year reign of the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). The church age is not in view in Isaiah chapter 11 because the church was a mystery which was hidden until revealed in the New Testament. (See Matthew 16:18 and Ephesians 3:8-12.)

Why aren't change in the animal kingdom mentioned much by other prophets?

It may be stressed in Isaiah because he was the prophet who spoke most about the Prince of Peace (9:6) and had the most to say about the whole world being changed. In contrast, Ezekiel, for instance, wrote about great changes to Jerusalem, especially to the temple, but Isaiah's focus was broader. (Changes in the animal kingdom are also mentioned briefly in Hosea 2:18, however.)

The main reason why animals are not mentioned very often by the prophets is simply because people are more important. Notice, that even in Isaiah 11:6-8, the safety of children is stressed.

What is the application for us?

We should be encouraged by the fact that great changes are coming and by the fact that such are now much closer than when Isaiah wrote and when the first disciples believed. (See Romans 8:20-22.) In fact, it may be only a few years away, after the seven year tribulation period. When we pray the so-called Lord's Prayer for God's kingdom to come to earth (Matthew 6:10), we are praying among other things for the Lord to return and for these great changes to become a literal reality.

When the Messiah first came, most Jews were hoping that the Romans would be driven out, but the changes that will come to the world when the Lord returns will be much greater than a change in government. All of creation will be set free, and the animals will once again be peaceful.