

# "God's Kingdom of Peace"

**Lesson Text:** Isaiah 65:17–25

**Background Scripture:** Isaiah 65:17–25

**Devotional Reading:** John 16:20–33

## Isaiah 65:17–25 (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. <sup>20</sup> "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. <sup>21</sup> They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. <sup>23</sup> They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord.

## TODAY'S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To help understand some facts about the new heavens and new earth.
- **Biblical Principle:** To explain some events during the earthly millennial kingdom.
- **Daily Application:** To write a prayer of thanks to God for the future He plans for you.

## TERMS TO KNOW AND EXPLAIN

**Tribulation Period:** A future seven-year period when God will finish His discipline of Israel and finalize His judgment of the unbelieving world. The church, comprised of all who have trusted in the person and work of the Lord Jesus, will not be present during the tribulation. The church will be removed from the earth in an event called the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:51–53).

**Millennial Kingdom:** The millennial kingdom is the title given to the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth as king in Jerusalem, sitting on the throne of David (Luke 1:32–33).

## INTRODUCTION

### New Creation in This World?

During the pandemic that began in 2020, wild animals returned to various locations that had not seen them in generations. This was due to people's self-isolation. Creatures that had been pushed out of their habitats to the fringes of human civilization lost their fear and reemerged in search of food and shelter among suddenly less-threatening areas. These appearances lit up social media—one clear reminder of the consequences of our interactions (and lack thereof) with the larger world.

This reemergence might be seen as a new creation, albeit a very modest one, but we know better. However, such a scenario has intrigued people for a long time. The plot lines of many science-fiction and horror films focus on the disastrous results of human behavior (intentional or mindless) on the environment. Such plots usually result in a hero finding a solution to undo the effects of misguided actions. That's one approach that brings hope. But it's not the approach seen by the prophet Isaiah.

## LESSON CONTEXT

Isaiah 63–66 is identifiable as a unit of thought. These chapters echo the problem of human failings addressed in chapters 56–59, but they don't stop there. They go on to add elements of hope because of the power of God. In so doing, chapters 63–66 contrast human inability to be righteous with God's divine ability to produce righteousness.

The backdrop is again that of what the people in Babylonian captivity—several decades in the future from the time Isaiah prophesied—would need as hopeful assurances of better days. When we speak of that exile, we take care to distinguish it from the Assyrian exile of the 10 tribes of northern Israel in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6). The two tribes of southern Israel, collectively known as Judah, came under Babylonian dominance in about 609 B.C. (24:1–7). The Babylonians (also known as the Chaldeans) tightened the screws in 597 B.C. when Jerusalem surrendered after a siege and suffered a partial exile (24:8–20). The final straw was the wholesale deportation (exile) to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The impact of that exile can be seen by piecing together the texts, among others, of 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:15–21; Nehemiah 1:1–3; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 52; Lamentations; Ezekiel 4:1–24:14; Daniel 1:1–2; and 9:1–19. In particular, the last of these passages notes that (1) Jerusalem's desolation would last 70 years, (2) the people of Judah and Jerusalem had brought the destruction on themselves by refusing to obey God, (3) the curses poured out on the Judeans were exactly what had been predicted in the Law of Moses, and (4) God had kept His promise to inflict such punishment. The predictions of punishment via exile are found in Leviticus 26:27–33; Deuteronomy 4:25–28; and 28:64–68 (compare Nehemiah 1:8; Jeremiah 9:13–16; 15:1–2, 14; Ezekiel 12:15; 20:23–24; Zechariah 7:13–14).

### **Celebrating Newness: Isaiah 65:17–19**

At this point the prophet Isaiah sees further into the future than any other Old Testament prophet. He looks down beyond the church age, and the Tribulation Period to the Earthly Millennial Kingdom. This brand new world is the result of the creation of God. Similar to Genesis 1 which describes the creative activity of God.

The *new heavens and a new earth* is not the same as John's "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1), because the characteristics Isaiah gives do not fit the eternal state. As far as we know, in the eternal state people will not get old or die (Isa. 65:20), nor will there be any danger of losing anything to invaders (vs. 21–23). Therefore, this reference is certainly not an experience of the eternal state, but of the earthly millennial kingdom. The *former things* (v. 17), refers to the type of forgetting when an event or experience fades into the background because something more important has replaced it.

#### **1. What is this new heavens and earth that Isaiah is talking about? (Isaiah 65:17)**

The hope for rebuilding *Jerusalem* occupied the thoughts of the poets, prophets, and other leaders of the period (Nehemiah is an example). Because the city and its (destroyed) temple represented access to God, Jerusalem was (or should have been) a symbol of all that could be holy (compare Revelation 21:2). Now, instead of a city that has been trodden under foot of the Gentiles, Jerusalem emerges as a great city of joy, and a *people of joy*.

Celebration is not reserved for humans only—God Himself can join the celebration (v. 19, compare Zephaniah 3:17). The relationship between the people of Judah and God will have changed. The strains and mutual hostility brought on by the people's sin will have vanished, thanks to God's merciful forgiveness.

#### **2. What kind of rejoicing will be going on in the new Jerusalem (city of God)? (Isaiah 65:18–19)**

## What Do You Think?

What biblical examples can you point to of God's rejoicing over His people?

## Digging Deeper

What analogous (similar) examples do you see in your congregation?

The *sound of weeping* is to disappear because of the forthcoming change of relationship between God and His people. The destruction of Jerusalem and other cities in the southern kingdom of Judah resulted in intense grief and mourning. Reversal of those facts seemed impossible from a human viewpoint, but not from God's (compare Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

## The New Reality: Isaiah 65:20-25

The new reality to come is to differ from the old reality in important ways. One such way is a movement back toward an ideal of the first creation: long life (see Genesis 1-11).

In this Kingdom to come, time itself shall begin to fade away; and both the infant and the old man shall have filled (lived to fulfill) their days. The phrase, "the one who dies at a hundred," means that if someone were to die at a hundred, he will be considered a mere child.

While amillennial commentators attempt to relate this promise to eternity, it is an utter impossibility to do so. Here we have the blessedness of the millennial kingdom of Christ in view. It is a time when men shall have the potential of living for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4); hence, anyone who shall die at a hundred shall be looked upon as a mere child. This era is not the restoration of Paradise, but the restoration of the pre-Flood patriarchal era. It is a time when Christ shall rule the earth with a rod of iron and the Gentile nations shall accept His authority or be cut off. It is a time when children shall yet be born, when there are still sinners, and when life on earth shall proceed as before.

### **3. How will long life be viewed in the millennial (thousand-year reign)? (Isaiah 65:20)**

The city of Jerusalem will be a source of joy, not only to the Lord but to the whole earth. It will be a city of holiness, harmony, and happiness. During the millennial kingdom, people will work, and God will bless their labors. No one's labor will be in vain. *My chosen ones* refers to the saved Israelites of the Tribulation Period who shall go into the millennial kingdom under the banner of God's blessed provision. Again, this period of time shall be long (1000 years). The greatest blessing of a blended kingdom shall be instantaneous answered prayer. People will pray, and God will answer even before they ask! (v. 24).

### **4. What will be the result of God's grace during the millennial kingdom? (Isaiah 65:21-24)**

## What Do You Think?

When have you experienced God's anticipating your cares or concerns?

## Digging Deeper

How would you respond to someone who points to God's foreknowledge as negating the need for prayer?

Nature will be at peace (v. 25). The *wolf* and the *lion* are contrasting with the *lamb* and the *ox*; but they will feed together. This would indicate that during the Millennium the carnivorous diet of certain animals shall be changed, and there shall be peace in the animal kingdom as well as among men. However, to remind us that this is not yet heaven, but Christ's rule upon the earth, we are cautioned, *and dust will be the serpent's food* (an idiom for bite the dust), while the other predatory animals have become tame and harmless. Though Satan shall be bound for a thousand years during Christ's millennial reign upon the earth (Rev. 20:2), he shall yet be released one more time for one final act of rebellion. Thus, the serpent remains in the dust as a symbolic reminder that Christ's final and ultimate triumph over him is yet to come!

## **5. How will nature change during the millennium? (Isaiah 65:25)**

### **What Do You Think?**

What would you be willing to do to heal a relationship with an enemy, demonstrating the reality of God's "peaceable kingdom"?

### **Digging Deeper**

What verses inform your understanding of the extent of your responsibility for peace?

## **CONCLUSION**

Isaiah 65 is a visionary text that should inspire its readers to see beyond both past failures and the seemingly valid temptations of the present. It invites us to imagine a different world than the one we inherited, a world in which old wounds will be healed and the God-given talents of all are used to bless others. This text offers a vision of a world in which the communication between God and humanity remains open, free, and life-giving.

Reading a visionary text means we have to think creatively in a biblical way. Such texts call us to use our imaginations so we can begin to see what God might be creating in our lives as individuals and churches. In such a vision, God is the one who does the recreating. The language of creation does not apply just to the beginning of time, but to a new era that can emerge when people who have experienced God's mercy embrace the possibilities of new and holy ways of life.

The text of our lesson advances that move in a dramatic way. It does not portray the citizens of Jerusalem and Judah as being able, by their own power, to bring about the new world God seeks. Sometimes they fall back into the same sins that led their ancestors to lose their homeland. So if a new situation were to come about, God must be the one to bring it about.

This vision of an alternative world continues to exert enormous influence on Christians today. Texts like this remind us that the current reality is neither inevitable nor the full expression of God's plans for humankind. More is possible. Imagining that something more, and celebrating even small hints of its arrival in our everyday lives, makes the community of God's people what it is.

## **PRAYER**

Creator God, who made the heavens and the earth and everything in them, create in us new hearts, new hands, and new feet so that we may think as You think, do what You give us to do, and go where You call us. Take from us the tendency to think too small and to shrink back in fear. We ask this in the name of the One who has promised to usher in a new heavens and a new earth, your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Live as if the time of the new heaven and new earth were now.