

## Dare to Dream

Lesson for June 11, 2023

**Unit III:** The Prophets Proclaim God's Power

**Scriptural Background:** Isaiah 65:17-25

**Printed Text:** Isaiah 65:17-25

**Key verse:** *"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."* (Isaiah 65:25, NIV)

Long ago a man sought the perfect picture of peace. Not finding one that satisfied, he announced a contest to produce this masterpiece. The challenge stirred the imagination of artists everywhere, and paintings arrived from far and wide. Finally, the great day of revelation arrived. The judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another, while the viewers clapped and cheered.

The tensions grew. Only two pictures remained veiled.

As a judge pulled the cover from one, a hush fell over the crowd.

A mirror-smooth lake reflected lacy, green birches under the soft blush of the evening sky. Along the grassy shore, a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner.

The man with the vision uncovered the second painting himself, and the crowd gasped in surprise. Could this be peace?

A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky precipice; the crowd could almost feel its cold, penetrating spray. Stormy-gray clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. In the midst of the thundering noises and bitter chill, a spindly tree clung to the rocks at the edge of the falls. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters as if foolishly seeking to experience its full power.

A little bird had built a nest in the elbow of that branch. Content and undisturbed in her stormy surroundings, she rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she manifested peace that transcends all earthly turmoil.

Berit Kjos, *A Wardrobe from the King*, pp. 45-46.

This is the peace found in the new heaven and the new earth promised by God in this week's lesson.

## Key terms

1. **Former** (verse 17) – First; having previously filled a particular role or been a particular thing.
2. **Rejoice** (verse 18) – To be glad, joyful. The term “rejoice” was commonly used among early Christians. It was a call to joy and often used as a salutation.

## Lesson Background

The historical context of Isaiah 65 is not very clear, as there are different views on the authorship and date of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 65 is part of the section known as Trito-Isaiah (chapters 56-66), which is often regarded as a separate collection of prophecies from a later period than the original Isaiah of Jerusalem (chapters 1-39) and Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55). It contains prophecies about God’s judgment and salvation for Israel and the Gentiles.

The chapter seems to address the situation of the Jewish exiles in Babylon, who were hoping for God’s deliverance and restoration of their homeland. However, God reveals that He is also reaching out to the Gentiles, who did not seek Him, while He is judging His rebellious people, who did not obey Him.

Isaiah prophesies of a new creation for the Israelites to look forward to, where God will make new heavens and a new earth, and where His people will enjoy His blessings and peace. This may reflect the hope for a messianic age, or an eschatological vision of the final state of God’s kingdom. While the Jews themselves are called a “rebellious people, God still promises to bring a “seed out of Jacob ... mine elect.”

In verses 1-16 God speaks to the Gentiles who have come to trust in Him. “I am found of them that sought me not” refers to the unconditional election of the Gentiles as the bulk of the New Testament church of God. (See Romans 10:20). God is gracious and merciful to those who seek Him sincerely, even if they are not His covenant people. He says, “I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me” (Isaiah 65:1). This shows that God’s salvation is not limited by ethnic or religious boundaries, but by faith and obedience.

God is also just and righteous to those who rebel against Him and persist in idolatry and sin. He says, “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” (Isaiah 65:2). He warns that He will repay them for their iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers (Isaiah 65:6-7). This shows that God’s patience and longsuffering have a limit, and that He will not tolerate wickedness forever.

God is faithful and loving to His servants and elect, who trust in Him and obey His commands. He says, “As the new wine is found in the cluster, And one says, ‘Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,’ So will I do for My servants’ sake, That I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, And from Judah an inheritor of My mountains; My chosen people will inherit them, And there will My servants dwell” (Isaiah 65:8-9).

The language here is reminiscent of Romans 11:1-5, where Paul insists that God has not forsaken His people Israel. The references to the plain of “Sharon” and the “valley of Achor” blossoming abundantly look forward to the prosperity Israel will enjoy during the millennial kingdom.

## Lesson In Depth

### I. A New Heaven and a New Earth (Isaiah 65:17)

**Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth:** The word “For” connects this verse to promise in the previous verse that “the former troubles are forgotten, and... are hidden from my eyes” (v. 16c). The promise is that Yahweh, having forgotten the former troubles, will create new heavens and a new earth. As the ultimate answer to the problem of man’s sin, God will create new heavens and a new earth. When Jesus returns, He will so create or re-create the heavens and the earth that they will be new – the pain, the evil, the temptations we experience now will be no more, and everything will be so wonderful that we will not even think of past troubles or sins.

This is not the first time we have heard of “heavens” and “earth” in this book:

- The prophet earlier identified Yahweh as the one who “created the heavens and stretched them out, he who spread out the earth and that which comes out of it, he who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk in it” (42:5).
- But Yahweh commanded the heavens and earth to listen to a word of judgment—“I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me” (1:2). “Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place in the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, and in the day of his fierce anger” (Isaiah 13:13).
- But the God of judgment is also the God of redemption who says, “Sing, you heavens, for Yahweh has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth! Break out into singing, you mountains, O forest, all of your trees, for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob, and will glorify himself in Israel” (Isaiah 44:23)—and “Sing, heavens; and be joyful, earth; and break forth into singing, mountains: for Yahweh has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted” (Isaiah 49:13).

The mention of creating “new heavens and a new earth” takes us back to the opening chapters of Genesis where, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). With each act of creation, God pronounced the creation good, but the introduction of sin in Genesis 3 defiled the good creation—nothing has been the same since. But God is going to redeem the situation by creating “new heavens and a new earth.” This does not mean that he is going to destroy what exists and begin anew from nothing. This is to be a transformation more similar to the rebirth to which Jesus refers to in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3).

From John's context we see that this new heaven and a new earth comes after the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and is connected not with the millennial earth, but with the eternal state. If all we had to go by was Isaiah's statement, we would automatically connect this new heaven and a new earth with the millennial earth, because immediately after Isaiah 65:17-19, we clearly find the millennial earth described. But based on what we find in 2 Peter and Revelation, we must see that Isaiah is in the prophetic habit of switching quickly from one time frame to another, speaking of the eternal state in Isaiah 65:17, and of the millennial earth a few verses later in Isaiah 65:20-25.

**And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind:** "Former things" alludes to Israel's rebelliousness and sin and the judgment that resulted. God will forgive and forget. The former things will be relegated to a dim and unremembered past—hidden from God's sight" (v. 16).

This is another indication that Isaiah 65:17 does not speak of the millennial earth. Other passages of Scripture referring to the millennium show that there will be definite remembrance of **former** times on the earth. The whole temple ritual existing in the millennial earth (Ezekiel 40-46) will be a remembrance of the **former** days of Levitical sacrifice. The **former** nations of the world will remain (after judgment) and will serve the LORD and Israel (Psalm 72).

## II. **Delight and Joy** (Isaiah 65:18-21)

**I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing:** In the earlier part of this chapter, God said, "my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be disappointed" (v. 13). But now that God is creating new heavens and a new earth and is pushing the former iniquities out of sight and out of mind (v. 17), the people can "be glad and rejoice forever" in what God is creating. The new Jerusalem will not only be a joy to them but will also be a joy to God and its people will be a delight to him.

There will be a **Jerusalem** in the eternal state, in the **new heavens and a new earth**. Revelation describes – in stunning imagery – the descent of the *New Jerusalem* from heaven to the new earth (Revelation 21:2-27). This will be a time of great rejoicing for God's people as John records:

*"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, [which is] new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and [I will write upon him] my new name" (Revelation 3:12).*

**And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people:** As long as people live in sinful rebellion against God, people will weep and cry in distress – both the afflicted and those who afflict them – both those who love God and those who hate God and His commandments. When Jesus Christ returns visibly to earth, He will rejoice over those who love and follow Him and who obey His commandments.

**... and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying:** he people will have cause for rejoicing, because the sound of weeping and the cry of distress will be but distant memories. The following Scripture is the best to explain this.

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).*

**No more shall an infant from there live but a few days...for the child shall die one hundred years old:** Quickly Isaiah shifts gears, and now speaks not of the eternal state, but of the millennial earth. When Jesus returns, He will bring a moral, spiritual, and physical renewal. No longer will sin or the results of sin shorten anyone's life – whether the unborn, infants, or the elderly. Physical diseases and the consequences of some hereditary traits that shorten life will be no more. People will no longer have their lives cut short. Both infants and the elderly will enjoy improved prospects for longevity.

This is not a promise that “Death will be no more” as in the New Testament (Revelation 21:4) but is instead a promise of longevity. The mention of “one hundred years” is hyperbole (exaggeration for effect), because we have no record of people of that time routinely living to be more than a hundred years old. There will be death in the millennial earth, but in the transformed biology and ecology of the world under the reign of Jesus Christ, people will live incredibly longer, as they did in the days before the flood.

**They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit:**

The millennial reign of Jesus Christ will not only be a time of biological transformation; it will also be a time of *social* transformation when perfect justice reigns over the earth. Never again will someone be robbed of the fruits of their labor. If you build a house, no one will steal it from you. You will inhabit that house. If you plant vineyards, no one will steal the fruit of it. You will eat their fruit. God gloriously promises, My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

### III. God Will hear, Listen, and Answer (Isaiah 65: 22-25)

**They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat:** This reiterates in slightly different words the promise of verse 21. Isaiah prophesied that because of the Israelites' sinful rebellion against God, because of their idol worship and disobedience, because they did not love God but had made the worship of God a mere formality, that God would lead the Babylonians to defeat them and carry them into exile. When Jesus returns, His people will not rebel against Him, and they will live a long life in their homes as they enjoy their labors and the results of their labor.

**... for as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people:** People admire trees for many reasons—their beauty, their productivity, and their strength. Here it is their longevity that is in view. Unlike “*the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven*” (Matthew 6:30), some trees live for decades—others for centuries—and a few for millennia. We are accustomed to seeing trees that were here long before we were born and will be here long after we die. The promise here (again hyperbole—exaggeration for effect) is that people will enjoy the kind of longevity that is routine for trees.

**... and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands:** This repeats the promise of verses 21-22a that people “shall build houses, and inhabit them,” etc. The added dimension is the phrase, “my chosen.” God chose Israel many centuries earlier, but they had sinned. The result was the futility curse: “You shall betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: you shall build a house, and you shall not dwell therein: you shall plant a vineyard, and shall not use its fruit” (Deuteronomy 28:30). That curse is now reversed, so that God’s chosen “shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

**They shall not labor in vain:** This repeats the promise of verses 21-22. We do not know all that God plans for those on earth or those in Jerusalem when Jesus returns. We do know that God plans a special future for those who are alive at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Those who love Him will perform satisfying and productive work and their children will be blessed and never suffer from accidents or tragedies.

**... nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune:** To understand this phrase, we have only to look at the world around us. In many places, women bear children for calamity. Their children die of malnutrition or disease or are forced into tribal militias. They live in neighborhoods where they are not safe walking to and from school. They are tempted to engage in drugs, binge drinking, reckless driving, promiscuous sex, and a host of other dangerous activities. But the promise of this verse is that “my chosen” will not bear children for calamity.

**... for they will be a people blessed by the Lord:** There will be babies born and children raised in the millennial earth, and this is another indication that we are not in the eternal state. In the eternal state, *we neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven* (Matthew 22:30). In the millennial earth, those allowed to enter are blessed of the LORD, and they and their descendants will populate the earth.

**It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear:** God hears the prayers of His people and answers them many times before they pray. While people are praying, God has sometimes sent His answer to their prayers in advance. When Jesus Christ comes again, the surprising timing of God that we experience today will be an obvious common occurrence among God’s people.

The millennial reign of Jesus Christ will not only be a time of biological and social transformation, it will also be a time of profound spiritual transformation and intimacy. There will be an immediate and constant sense of the presence of God, and His knowledge will cover the earth (Isaiah 11:9).

While we have experienced the power of prayer, we have also experienced its frustration. Sometimes we wonder if God really hears our prayers, because we don’t get the answers that we expect. At other times, we find ourselves trying to pray but not knowing how—or mouthing clumsy words that seem inadequate to express the longings of our hearts—or we fall asleep while trying to pray—or we want to pray for someone but forget to do so. This verse suggests that our inadequacy in prayer is no barrier to communicating with God. He is quite capable of understanding our clumsiest prayers—even the unspoken prayers of our hearts.

This does not mean that everyone on the millennial earth will be saved; only that the *opportunity* for such close relationship will be widely enjoyed. We know that not all will be saved during the millennial earth because:

At the conclusion of the time of the millennial earth, Satan is released from his confinement and finds many willing servants on the earth (Revelation 20:7-9), whom he gathers for one last – and strikingly futile – rebellion against God.

Zechariah 14:16-19 and Psalm 2 describe the firm rule of the Messiah during the millennial earth, dealing decisively with those who do not surrender to His reign, enforcing righteousness all over the earth.

**The wolf and the lamb shall feed together:** The millennial earth will also see a remarkable *ecological* transformation. No longer will predators stalk their victims. Much earlier the prophet promised, “The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them” (Isaiah 11:6; see also verses 7-9). Now Yahweh reiterates the promise that “my chosen” (v. 22) will see a world where predators coexist in peace with prey. Instead, even the wolf and the lamb will get along, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

As the result of sin entering our world nature changed. Not all of the animals remained friends of one another or human beings. Some animals began to eat their neighbors; similar to sinners taking unholy advantage of others. All this will return to normal, and all will be friends after the return of Jesus Christ.

**... and dust shall be the serpent’s food:** This alludes to Genesis 3:14, where God cursed the serpent, saying: “On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.” Now God says once again that the serpent’s food shall be dust—suggesting that the serpent will no longer be a threat to other life. This, then, represents a danger neutralized—another facet of a newly peaceful world.

**“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” says the LORD:** This is the glorious result of the transformation that happens during the millennial earth. The holy mountain is Mount Zion, on which Jerusalem and the temple are located—the dwelling place of God and holy ground to the faithful. This is a promise, expressed in poetic language, that God’s people will again enjoy peaceful lives on God’s Mountain. The world will be different biologically, spiritually, socially, and ecologically.

## Lesson Summary

Isaiah 65:17-25 describes how promises of a new creation envelope the whole: a new heaven and a new earth (v. 17) will include a peaceable kingdom the likes of which have not been known since the beginning (v. 25; see Genesis 1:29-30). The promise of peace between wild and domestic animals on “my holy mountain” echoes the messianic promise of Isaiah 11:6-9.

Three themes emerge in the description of the coming new creation, any one or all of which could serve as a basis for the proclamation of the good news.

1. **Joy.** The LORD enjoins the people to be glad and rejoice. Indeed, gladness and rejoicing are the hallmarks of the new creation envisioned by this Isaiah:

Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;  
for I am creating Jerusalem as a rejoicing and her people a gladness.  
I will rejoice in Jerusalem and I will be glad because of my people.

2. **Life.** As the Genesis creation account makes clear, death is a consequence of rebellion (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:3) and not a part of God's intention in creation. Speaking biologically, death is a necessary factor in our existence. We all have a biological expiration date! Speaking theologically, however, death is the antithesis of God's intention. It is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). God wills that His people might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Isaiah 65:20 rejoices in the claim that, in the new creation, infant mortality will be unheard of, as will be the death of anyone younger than one hundred years (with the exception of most determined sinner). The claim of believers this side of the cross, however, is even more expansive for we have heard Jesus say, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).
3. **Just rewards for labor.** Isaiah 65:21-23 imply a condition of economic injustice where some labored in vain and bore children anticipating terror (v. 23). Verses 21 and 22 are set in opposition. If the situation presently is such that those who build and plant do not enjoy the rewards of their labor (v. 22), that condition will not persist (v. 21). They shall be like a long-lived and fruitful tree (v. 23b; see Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:8). They will enjoy the work of their hands and as will their children and their descendants.

Economic inequalities and unjust distribution of resources is a growing problem in the so-called developed world, and it is a problem of long standing for developing nations. This text includes a condemnation of that status quo. Strains of "The Canticle of the Turning" are, even now, wafting through the air. How will the Church be involved further in the work of economic justice? How can preachers help the people God understand that justice is a central concern not just of this text but of the Scripture as a whole?

Before returning to the theme of the new creation with which this prophecy began, the prophet Isaiah forwards one more promise in Isaiah 65:24. The LORD will answer before anyone calls and hears while they are yet speaking. If in the new Jerusalem, there is no weeping or crying (verse 19b; Revelation 21:4) it will be because any potential cause for grief will be anticipated and answered even before it can be fully articulated. If, previously, the people's iniquities prevented God from responding (Isaiah 59:1-2), that barrier will be overcome. If the hallmarks of our days are death, including a shortened life, grief, economic injustice, and terror, then believers anticipate an unspeakable joy that is guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.