

June 18, 2023

"God's Kingdom of Peace"
Lesson 2

Isaiah 65:17-25

Intro

Chapters 56-59 of Isaiah show numerous examples of human failings. But the chapters that follow, especially chapters 63-66 add the important element of hope, specifically because of the power of God. These last chapters of Isaiah contrast human inability to *be* righteous to God's ability to *produce* righteousness.

Israel's exile in Babylon (beginning in 586 BC) was still several decades in the future at the time that Isaiah prophesied. Still, his words deliver the hope that the people would need of better days to come.

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

1. vs. 17: This verse may refer to the world at the end of time, but it seems to be connected to that time
 - The verses prior to this describe two things concerning Israel at that time
 - the end of foreign domination of Israel
 - the end of unholy rebellion by the Israelites themselves
 - So the verse appears to have a double fulfillment option
 - It is meant for Israel in Isaiah's time
 - It is meant as a reference later to the end times
 - In both cases, the last part of the verse holds true
 - "The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."
 - This phrase comes true because something more important has replaced the other
 - Things that are not as significant are no longer thought of
 - Our text says this phrase is an image of the end of suffering

2. vs. 18: This verse invites the people to celebrate in worship
 - This is typically done following God's bringing about rescue or salvation
 - See Is. 9:14, Is. 13:5, Is. 14:7, and Is. 35:9
 - The word "forever" comes from the Hebrew concept of "age enduring"
 - It likely means "to the end of the age" more than "eternity"
 - Part of their celebration/worship comes from the restoration of Jerusalem
 - God says He will "create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy"
 - In captivity, that will certainly not be their sense of themselves
 - The people will need to see what God will do to maintain their hope

3. vs. 19: Here, God is One who is rejoicing—it is not just people who rejoice!
 - God will "take delight" in His people because they have turned their hearts back to Him
 - He notes that "weeping and crying will be heard no more"
 - The people will cry when taken captive and the temple is destroyed
 - But God will return them to Jerusalem and the temple is rebuilt
 - Who will feel like crying when these two things have occurred?

4. vs. 20: This verse seems more like a prophecy to be fulfilled than a potential human reality
The phrase “never again” begins the verse
However, in our world, there are many infants who live but a few days
There are many who do not “live out their years”, but die relatively young
There are few who live to be as old as 100
This verse indicates a return to the way human lives were intended to go at creation
A long life was to be the norm, not the exception
5. vs. 21: The promise of this verse is one of stable, productive lives
The exile allowed the land and the buildings to decay and regress
But the promise is one of building houses and planting vineyards which produce fruit
This is life restored and revitalized to a group which had lost it
6. vs. 22: This verse reminds the people of their earlier experience in coming to the Promised Land
God allowed them to take over an area already settled
The previous group forfeited their rights to the land due to sin
This included houses, wells, and vineyards in working condition
The people were warned not to commit the sins of those being removed
Yet they did sin against God resulting in their being exiled to Babylon
The promise here is that they will no longer be in that situation
“No longer will they build houses and others live in them”
They are now compared to trees, that will stay in the land and enjoy it
7. vs. 23: This verse concludes the promise of change, of reversal, in the lives of the people
Children are a sign of hope and blessing from God
They are crucial for the continuation of a people and a place
Here is the promise of the blessing of children for the people, a promise of life
8. vs. 24: The promise here supersedes all the others listed in the previous verses
Those were all physical promises, of things which are necessary for human life
This is a promise of relationship with God, even more necessary for spiritual life
He promises to hear and to answer when we pray
He will act *before* we even ask, and understand before we finish our thought
This shows how intimately God knows what we are thinking and feeling
9. vs. 25: This verse is reminiscent of Is. 11:6-9, talking about the peaceable kingdom to come
The images here contrast with the reality of life as we know it
But it’s not just a promise of what life will be like when God reigns eternally
It’s also a call to draw closer to this reality of what God wants His world to be like
For us to pursue righteousness and peace in our thoughts and actions

Application: Our text summarizes these verses better than I can.

“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. This text offers a vision of a world in which the communication between God and humanity remains open, free, and life-giving.

“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: Father God, You are the One who creates everything. Create in us a new heart that will lead us to doing what You desire, and thinking as You think. We want to be a part of Your world, and to help by your guidance in our lives to model the world You intended this one to be. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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