

# God's Kingdom of Peace

Devotional Reading: [John 16:20–33](#)

Background Scripture: [Isaiah 65:17–25](#)

## Isaiah 65:17–25

- 17** “See, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.
- 18** 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.
- 19** 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.
- 20** “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.

**21** They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

**22** 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.

**23** 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.

**24** Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.

**25** 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.

## Key Text

*"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

# The Righteous Reign of God

## Unit 1: The Prophets Proclaim God's Power

### Lessons 1–5

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State the reason why weeping will be undetectable.
2. Defend identifications of figurative imagery in the text.
3. Write a prayer of thanks to God for the future he plans for him or her.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. New Creation in This World?
- B. Lesson Context
- I. **Celebrating Newness (Isaiah 65:17–19)**
  - A. Source of Rejoicing (v. 17)
  - B. Call for Rejoicing (v. 18)
  - C. Promise of Rejoicing (v. 19)
- II. **The New Reality (Isaiah 65:20–25)**
  - A. Long Life (v. 20)
    - A Promise to Inspire*
  - B. Housing and Sustenance (v. 21)
  - C. Safety and Security (vv. 22–23)

## *A Permanent Home*

D. God Answers Prayers (v. 24)

E. End of Violence (v. 25)

## **Conclusion**

A. Embracing Life

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

## How to Say It

Assyrians Uh-*sear*-e-unz.

Babylonians Bab-ih-*low*-nee-unz.

Chaldeans Kal-*dee*-unz.

Nehemiah *Nee*-huh-my-uh.

Zechariah *Zek*-uh-rye-uh.

Zephaniah Zef-uh-*nye*-uh.

## **Introduction**

### **A. 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. 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 to new creation. But it's not the approach taken by the prophet Isaiah.

## B. 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 (see [lesson 1](#)). 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 BC ([2 Kings 17:6](#)). The two tribes of southern Israel, collectively known as Judah, came under Babylonian dominance in about 609 BC ([24:1–7](#)). The Babylonians (also known as the Chaldeans) tightened the screws in 597 BC 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 BC.

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](#)).

## I. Celebrating Newness ([Isaiah 65:17–19](#))

### A. Source of Rejoicing (v. 17)

**17a.** “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The poem that begins here describes a radically different future reality. But does this refer to the ultimate new creation that God will bring about at the end of time? Similar wording in [2 Peter 3:13](#) and [Revelation 21:1](#) tempts us to think so (compare and contrast [Isaiah 66:22](#); [Hebrews 12:25–27](#)).

But the opening word in Hebrew leads us to reconsider. This is a word that appears also [Isaiah 26:3](#); [40:7](#); and [43:20](#), where the translation is “because,” as in “here’s the reason why.” As such, this word connects the thoughts of the verse at hand with those of the previous verses. Those previous verses announce two things: (1) the end of foreign domination of Israel (see [48:14](#), [20](#) regarding Babylon and [52:4](#) regarding Assyria) and (2) the end of unholy rebellion by the Israelites ([65:11–12](#)). The end of imperial aggression would mark such a dramatic change that

the language of new creation is appropriate for it. When added to the extreme language regarding elimination of unholiness, an end-times interpretation of the destruction and replacement of planet Earth is very inviting.

But two other options should be considered. One is that a double fulfillment is intended. The first fulfillment, focused on ancient Israel, sees the language as figurative and hyperbolic; the second fulfillment is then end-times literal. Another option is that the text features what is known as “prophetic foreshortening” (see explanation of this possibility in [lesson 5](#), concerning [Zechariah 9:9](#)). The verses that follow will provide clues as to which interpretation is more likely the correct one.

**17b.** “The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

Under any of the above possibilities, a feature of the new era will be a kind of forgetting. The Bible speaks of issues involving requests to remember and promises to forget—between people and God (examples: [Isaiah 43:25](#); [Jeremiah 15:15](#)). The type of forgetting in view here is the kind when an event or experience fades into the background because something more important has replaced it. This is an image of the end of suffering.

## B. Call for Rejoicing (v. 18)

**18a.** “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,

An invitation to celebrate in worship occurs often in the psalter for times of communal festivity (examples: [Psalms 32:11](#); [48:11](#); [149:2](#)), especially following some action by God to bring about rescue or salvation (examples: [9:14](#); [13:5](#); [14:7](#); [35:9](#)). This attitude is built into Old Testament religious expression. It is an attitude that rests on confidence in

God’s sure promises to overcome evil in its various forms. The wording *forever* may automatically cause us to think in terms of eternity without end, but the underlying Hebrew may signify “age enduring,” or to the end of the age (compare [132:12](#)).

**18b.** “for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

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](#)).

### C. Promise of Rejoicing (v. 19)

**19a.** “I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people;

Celebration is not reserved for humans only—God himself can join the celebration (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.

#### What Do You Think?

What biblical examples can you point to of God’s rejoicing over his people?

#### Digging Deeper

What analogous examples do you see in your congregation?

**19b.** “the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.



*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](#)).

## II. The New Reality ([Isaiah 65:20–25](#))

### A. Long Life (v. 20)

**20a.** “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 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](#)). As we consider this change, we should take care to distinguish between humans' life span, which is 120 years ([6:3](#)), and life expectancy, which is 70 years ([Psalm 90:10](#)). The high rate of *infant* mortality in the ancient world meant that life expectancy on average was probably no more than 35 years. But if a person could make it to age 5, then the chances of reaching age 70 were pretty good. Therefore the change of life expectancy promised in the verse at hand is a major one (see also [Zechariah 8:4](#))!

We also note that this verse provides a clue regarding the alternatives presented in commentary on [Isaiah 65:17a](#), above; the “new heavens” and “new earth” predicted there are not the same as those predicted in [2 Peter 3:13](#) and [Revelation 21:1](#), since the renewal in those two passages

will feature an end to death altogether ([Revelation 21:4](#)). Even so, the newness promised in our lesson text may serve as a type, or pattern, of the ultimate, eternal reality to come (compare [Matthew 11:13–14](#); [Romans 5:14](#); [Galatians 4:24](#); [Colossians 2:17](#); [Hebrews 9:24](#); [13:14](#)).

## A Promise to Inspire

I, the hospital chaplain, stood near the tiny cradle and looked at the perfectly shaped head of the newborn baby boy. His father stood silently as the mother, trying to smile, said, “I keep reminding myself that God is here in this storm. I try to remember that he will heal my baby and keep him safe in Heaven. But it’s so hard when he’s here with me, and all I want to do is snuggle him close forever.” Her eyes brimmed with tears. I prayed for her baby that night, even though I knew the doctors said he would only live a few more days.

[Isaiah 65:17–25](#) provides us with a launching point for anticipating the fulfillment of [Revelation 21](#). God has promised to create a new heavens and new earth; absent will be weeping and death. How does that future reality influence how you think and live right now? How *should* it?

—L. M. W.

### What Do You Think?

What is the role of mourning in the Christian life?

### Digging Deeper

How can you participate empathetically in the depth of heartbreak while affirming the hope and joy of life to come?

**2ob.** “the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

This line is more difficult to understand. Clarity comes in the fact that the Hebrew verb in the phrase translated *the one who fails to reach* can also be translated “miss,” as it is in [Judges 20:16](#). Therefore the idea is that someone who misses the mark of reaching age 100 is to *be considered accursed*. In that case, the line would simply amplify the idea of the previous one rather than adding a new idea.

## B. Housing and Sustenance (v. 21)

**21. “They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.**

The ruins of Jerusalem rendered stark testimony of disobedience long after the destruction of 586 BC ([1 Kings 9:6–9](#); [Jeremiah 19:8](#)). Today’s text, however, promises that those returning from that exile will regain stable, productive lives. The mention of *vineyards*, a word occurring more than 100 times in the Old Testament, reflects an important part of the diet and economy of the ancient Israelites (see also [Ezekiel 28:26](#); [Amos 9:14](#)).

## C. Safety and Security (vv. 22–23)

**22a. “No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat.**

This verse reminds us of the old saying “What goes around comes around.” Hundreds of years before this text was written, God had granted the Israelites a new homeland where they took ownership of houses they hadn’t provisioned, wells they hadn’t dug, and vineyards they hadn’t planted ([Deuteronomy 6:10–12](#)). This happened after the original owners forfeited their place in that land due to sin ([Genesis](#)

15:16).

That change of ownership came with a warning not to commit the sins of those ejected, lest the Israelites suffer the same consequences (Leviticus 18:24–28; Deuteronomy 28:15–68). But that’s exactly what happened (1 Kings 21:25–26; 2 Kings 16:1–4; 21:10–16; compare Judges 6:1–6). Results of the exile of 586 BC included loss of houses and fields, which became occupied and tended by others (see Jeremiah 52:16). The devastation was so complete that areas of human habitation became again habitations of wild animals (9:11; 10:22). God kept his promise. But that reversal was to be itself reversed.

### What Do You Think?

How do you react to seemingly futile work or effort on your part?

### Digging Deeper

Does considering even futile work as fertile for God’s reversal change your attitude? Why or why not?

**22b.** “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.

The theme of reversal continues as the imagery shifts to the longevity of a tree. Although trees are not immortal, they do often long outlive humans. The promise that *my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands* couples longevity of life with enjoyment of that life, creating a word picture of a people who will flourish (compare Psalms 1:3; 92:12–14).

## A Permanent Home

During the time of Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), a certain newlywed

couple was assigned free housing in the area known as Crimea. That area was in Ukraine when it was still part of the USSR. When the couple arrived at the assigned house, they found it fully furnished, with clothing in the dressers, dishes on the table, and food in the pantry.

An eerie feeling overcame the couple. What had happened to the previous inhabitants of the house? The neighbors whispered stories. But no one voiced questions in the post-World War II Soviet Union. So the couple suppressed their fear that something terrible had happened. Years later they learned that Stalin had deported an entire people group known as the Crimean Tatars. Having accused them of collaborating with Hitler, he herded them onto trains bound for central Asia. Then he brought people from other parts of the USSR to inhabit their empty houses (compare [2 Kings 17:24](#)).

In this fallen world, we may suffer the consequences of our own actions or the actions of others—or not at all, given the (sometimes intentional) imperfections of human justice. But no one escapes the ultimate and perfect justice of God. Because he is perfect, he pursues everyone in love, wanting us all to enjoy his eternal, permanent home.

—L. M. W.

**23. “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.**

This verse ties together the previous three verses in summarizing the people’s new condition to come. The loss of sons and daughters was predicted as an anguish of the exile ([Deuteronomy 28:32, 41](#)), so again we have promise of reversal.

[Isaiah 49:19–21](#) and [54:1–2](#) note surprise and joy at the uptick in the birthrate as the text predicts the situation of the postexilic era (that is,

following 538 BC). During the 40-year penalty of wandering in the wilderness (about 1447–1407 BC), Israel had experienced a decline in population (compare [Numbers 2:32](#) with [26:51](#)). Nations obviously cannot survive, much less flourish, unless they bring new generations into the world. Children are a sign of hope and blessing ([Psalm 128](#)), tokens of God’s presence both in the present and the promised future ([Isaiah 61:9](#)).

#### D. God Answers Prayers (v. 24)

**24. “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.**

Perhaps the most significant promise in the list is right here. Whereas exile from their homeland would mean an estranged relationship between God and the people, the new era will see deep and immediate communication between the two. Thus we have another reversal (compare and contrast [Jeremiah 7:16](#); [11:14](#); [14:11](#); [Lamentations 3:8, 44](#)).

The book of Isaiah opens with condemnations of the people because of their stubbornness and oppression. Their acts of piety were designed to cover up their sins rather than lead them to correct them ([Isaiah 1:12–17](#)), causing great offense to God. Since they would not defend the poor, the widows, or the orphans, God would not even give ear to their prayers ([1:15](#)).

The future, however, was to be one where God listens intently to their prayers. In extending mercy to the people, God has called them to make prayer an occasion for concern. When we pray properly, we become attuned to God’s love for all human beings. We increasingly share that concern and act on the basis of it. Then God will listen.

## 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?

### E. End of Violence (v. 25)

**25. “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.**

The final verse of the lesson reflects [Isaiah 11:6–9](#), the so-called vision of the peaceable kingdom. The verse at hand applies that earlier vision to the time when Israel will have returned from Babylonian exile and resettled in its land (that is, after 538 BC). In doing so, the vision paints a strong contrast to what would become the actual experience of the people. Old problems would remain or resurface after the return (compare [Ezra 10:10–15](#); [Nehemiah 13](#); [Haggai 1:1–11](#); etc.). Yet the sinful problems need not prevail. If the people turned to God fully, a new era of peace could ensue.

As in almost all prophetic speeches in the Old Testament, this verse intends to speak about a reality that should ideally come about. Yet that possibility remains always just beyond our grasp, as we do not yet live in the peaceable kingdom. Still, the text calls its readers to pursue righteousness and peace so that we may draw closer to the alternative reality—in which God reigns not just in the world as he always does, but also in our thoughts and actions, which he often does not.

## 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

## A. Embracing Life

[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.

Visual for [Lesson 2](#). *Ask volunteers to offer other examples of reconciliation in nature that seem to be a foretaste of God's coming peaceful kingdom.*

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.

## B. 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.

## C. Thought to Remember

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

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Divide participants into three groups and give each group one of the following topics: 1—butterfly metamorphosis, 2—leaf color-change process, 3-plant growth stages. Provide information or have groups do an internet search for their topic. Be sure each group notes how long the full transformation takes and what the in-between steps look like. After

a few minutes of research time, give groups time to report on what they learned.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Word Transformation” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. *Option.* This exercise can be done as a race. Do as many rounds as time allows.

After either activity, say, “Transformation often happens in stages, but it can bring about dramatic changes. In today’s lesson, look for the ways God promises to transform his creation.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read [Isaiah 65:17–19](#). On the board, make two columns and title them *Past* and *Future*. Divide the group in half and designate one as the **Past Team** and the other as the **Future Team**. Instruct the **Past Team** to study these verses in terms of what was in the past. Ask the **Future Team** to study the verses, looking for what will be in the future. Have a volunteer from each team write their findings on the board under their designated columns.

Ask a volunteer to read [Isaiah 65:20–23](#). Have the **Past and Future Teams** add more points to the columns on the board, based on what they find in these verses. Then provide paper and colored pencils/markers to each group, along with the following instructions.

**Past Team.** Imagine and discuss what you might do to celebrate someone’s 200th birthday. Summarize your discussion by creating a birthday party invitation. Be creative in your celebration!

**Future Team.** Imagine and discuss how you might celebrate a retirement from 200 years of fulfilling labor and create a retirement party invitation. Be creative in your celebration!

When they are completed, have the two groups share their invitations with each other.

Ask a volunteer to read [Isaiah 65:24–25](#). Once more invite the **Past** and **Future Teams** to add any final points to their columns on the board. Then invite the teams to think of three to five concept words to summarize the columns. (Potential answers include: past—death, sorrow, violence; future—life, joy, peace.) Give teams an opportunity to study each other’s list and give feedback. Then ask participants to consider what makes all these differences and changes possible. (Expected answer: The sacrifice of Jesus, which defeats the curse of sin and death.)

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Reverse the Curse” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually (in one minute or less) before discussing conclusions with a partner. Allow additional time for pairs to share and discuss their responses and thoughts with the whole group.

## Into Life

Distribute index cards. Have learners think about one item from these verses that they are especially looking forward to experiencing in God’s eternal kingdom. Allow a time of discussion for participants to elaborate on why they are excited for this thing, or to share what they think it will be like to experience it. After the discussion, have learners write a prayer of thanks to God for the future he has planned for them. Invite learners to refer to their index cards frequently during the week. Close the lesson by dividing the group into pairs. Allow partners time to pray together, giving God thanks for his promises.