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# Isaiah Series 2

## Lesson 16

### “Isaiah 65:17-25”

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**Objective** - To understand the meaning of specified passage from Isaiah for both the original audience, and what it came to mean to those that came later; especially to the Jews of the first century A. D. The passages were specifically selected because of their usage in the Gospel of Mark, either as direct quotes, or as allusions. The goal is to understand this material better in its original context, to its original audience, and in the fall to be able to examine the Gospel of Mark with a better understanding of the role of Isaiah in the theology of that Gospel and of the church.

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**Materials** - Commentaries, Journal articles, Targums, Books.

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**Procedures**

- 1. We will seek to set the basic background for the writing of the book of Isaiah.**
- 2. Choose the texts that are applicable to Mark's Gospel.**
- 3. Translate those texts from the Masoretic Text, with reference to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targum of Isaiah.**
- 4. I will search commentaries, journal articles, and books for understanding of these texts both to their original audience and to later Judaism, especially the Judaism of the 1st century A. D. and the early church.**

**<sup>17</sup> Behold, I am ready to create new heavens and a new earth;  
and the first things will not be remembered or come upon the  
heart. <sup>18</sup> But rejoice and be happy forevermore over what I am  
creating because behold, I am creating Jerusalem as a source of joy,  
and its people as a delight. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight  
in my people; no longer shall be heard the voice of weeping or the  
cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No longer will there be from there an infant which  
lives a few days, or an old person which does not fill out their days;  
for the one who dies at one hundred years will be considered as a  
child and the one who misses a hundred will be considered cursed.  
<sup>21</sup> They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant  
vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> They will not build and another  
inhabit; they will not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree  
the days of my people will be, and my chosen the work of their  
hands they will wear those things out. <sup>23</sup> They shall not toil for  
vanity, or bear children for terror; for they will be a seed of the  
blessing of Yahweh and their offspring with them. <sup>24</sup> Before they  
call, I will answer, while they are still speaking I myself will hear. <sup>25</sup>  
The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion like the ox**

**will eat straw, but the serpent's food will be dust! They will not do evil, or destroy on all of my holy mountain says Yahweh.**

As we come to this final lesson of our series in Isaiah, it is important for us to try and hold in our consciousness all that we have seen and heard as we have gone on this journey. There is much in this section that anticipates and draws heavily upon that which has gone before, but here in this section the clarity and the challenge of those previous oracles are multiplied and compounded both with hope and with challenge. The hope is multiplied in the power of the images drawn upon in this oracle in a way that inspires while at the same time challenging us to the very core of our existence. Some see in this oracle a call to wait and watch for what the Lord will do next, very much as a passive observer.<sup>1</sup> Others, powerfully counter that we are to be active participants in the utopian future projected in this oracle.<sup>2</sup> There are almost certainly some that rest somewhere in the middle of these two views, perhaps most do, but the way one


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<sup>1</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "A New Heaven and a New Earth, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*," 105 (1999), pp. 65-74.

<sup>2</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "A New Heaven and a New Earth, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*," 105 (1999), pp. 65-74. Janet Carroll, "The Mission of the Churches in Realizing a New World Order" Morality - Justice - Peace," *Missiology: An International Review*, XIII (1985), pp. 387-408.

interprets this passage, and others like it, will dramatically and profoundly affect how they interact with the world around them.

C. W. Post experimented with his utopian ideal by buying 225,000 acres of ranchland along the escarpment of the Caprock in 1906. C. W. Post is famous primarily for breakfast cereals such as Post Toasties and Grape-Nuts. He amassed a huge fortune in the 20th century ultimately committing suicide due to his fear that he had stomach cancer. The town of Post was devised as model town and would later become the County seat of Garza County. C. W. Post experimented with rainmaking by using explosive charges set off in the air above the area, but those efforts proved fruitless. I am not sure that any of Post's efforts were based in religious beliefs, but the religious beliefs of some people have inspired them greatly in their efforts to transform the world in which we live. Alexander Campbell held a Post-Millennial view of Scripture that drove him, and many of his followers, to believe that they were acting as agents for God in transforming the world by carrying the gospel message to the world. During the period when this theology was held the Disciples of Christ made massive inroads in reaching the lost. They believed that they



would win the world for Christ thus inaugurating a new era when the reign of Christ, and his principals would be augmented by his return to establish his kingdom on earth.

Many within the Catholic church today believe that the United Nations is a vehicle whereby the church can challenge the nations of the world in a manner reminiscent of the way Christ challenged the world in his own day. The Catholic church supports a mission at the UN and powerfully advocates change through the forums and organizations of the UN. For those with such a conviction, the UN is considered to be the only organization currently in existence with a voice loud enough to be heard by the nation states, and especially by the so-called superpowers, a voice that can challenge change to a more just, peaceful, and moral world order.<sup>3</sup>

You may be asking what does any of this have to do with this oracle from Isaiah 65? Just how one views this passage, and others like it, can profoundly affect the way a person, or even an organization, or church, sees the world and their responsibilities in that world. For those that believe that Isaiah 65, and the other

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<sup>3</sup> Janet Carroll, "The Mission of the Churches in Realizing a New World Order" *Morality - Justice - Peace*, *Missiology: An International Review*, XIII (1985), pp. 387-408.

passages like it, are a proclamation of what God will do on his own, unaided, with humans as mere spectators the world looks very different from those who view that the world vision given here by Isaiah as words meant to challenge the followers of God to follow his vision of the world and to roll up their sleeves and get to work doing their part to accomplish these things. The degree to which God acts in this second view varies from person to person and from group to group, with some thinking that almost total responsibility for this dream falls on the shoulders of redeemed humanity, to those who think it is moderate to small amount. I certainly believe that as we examine this passage within the context of the history of Israel that there is no sense in which Yahweh expects his chosen people to be passive spectators, nor does he leave them alone as orphans to act in their own strength, and with their own power to accomplish that which is clearly beyond human powers, or capabilities. The answer must lie somewhere in between, with Yahweh expecting and empowering his people to be active, divinely-empowered, participants while at the same time expectantly anticipating the hand of God to complete the promises of this oracle.

Another view, often taken of this oracle, is that what is envisioned here is a perspective of heaven and yet there are a number of signs here that this is not the case. The oracle here is giving an image of life on earth, this earth. The fact that death continues to exist at all and that there is the continued existence of evil, and the potentiality of being accursed in this realm very much seems to speak against a view that the description here is of the completed rule and reign of God that we so often describe as heaven. The text here appears primarily to be post-exilic in its historical setting, probably coming in the period when the exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylon and their exile there. This is an event likened in the historical memory of Israel to a second exodus with all the hopes and expectations that the image of the exodus bring with it. Just as God had delivered Israel from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians so too had they now been delivered from their slavery and exile at the hands of Babylon. Perhaps in the same way that the Israelites had been deeply and bitterly disappointed by the harsh realities of life in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt, so too the



returning exiles may have been disappointed by their life in a devastated and ruined Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

Returning to the ruins of Jerusalem across the vast distance, from the opulent and highly developed centers of commerce and sophistication of life near the imperial centers of power must have indeed been shocking, and at times disheartening. This oracle serves as a reminder to the returnees that they are a people in covenant with a great and powerful God who has envisioned a future for his people and who challenges them to continue to follow and participate in that vision. Just as God had saved Israel from calamity in the time of the first exodus he would continue to save Israel from calamity, and more than that, to fulfill their destiny as the people of God.<sup>5</sup> Israel is called upon to be an “authentic community of witness” to the power and faithfulness of God. This witness would be a powerful proclamation to the world of the faithfulness of God and of his power to overcome even the basest of human pettiness as

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<sup>4</sup> John W. de Gruchy, “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 105 (1999), pp. 65-74.


<sup>5</sup> John W. de Gruchy, “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 105 (1999), pp. 65-74.

God's people would live a life of devotion to covenant in a way that would act as a beacon to a lost and dying world.<sup>6</sup>

As we study the words of Scripture we must never forget that these words are more than the correct answers to questions on a quiz, they are meant to act as signposts for our feet as we walk the path of this life. We are called to live life as a covenant people that reflect that belief in every aspect of our being, whether it be how we live and interact with one another, to our hopes and dreams for the future. We are called to fulfill the destiny of the call of our creator. Sin is more than getting the wrong answer, or even of doing the wrong thing it is in reality anything, and everything, that is not the living out of the destiny for which human beings were created as image-bearers of Yahweh. This is one of the reasons that there is so much emphasis placed on proper sexual conduct. Improper sexual conduct not only serves as an expression of disloyalty to covenant with another human being it is an expression of disloyalty, and even rebellion, against God. Improper sexual conduct says I will do as I please, as I am inclined, and not as my creator has ordained. We as

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<sup>6</sup> Janet Carroll, "The Mission of the Churches in Realizing a New World Order" Morality - Justice - Peace," *Missiology: An International Review*, XIII (1985), pp. 387-408.



the creation of God have not only forgotten our place, our origin, we actively seek another, a place that is not ours to occupy. This oracle challenges us on all of these levels, and more, as it draws us not only into the other oracles of Isaiah it draws us into the entire history of God's dealings with his people. The dreams and aspirations of this oracle and the others that it touches upon would be powerfully picked up in the words, actions, and aspirational dreams of Jesus of Nazareth. We will see that more as we, in the Fall, examine how Isaiah's oracles are powerfully proclaimed as an integral part of the proclamation of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Verses 17-25 serve as an affirmation of the promises of God given to those who would seek Yahweh in obedience and faithfulness (cf. verses 9-15). This oracle (17-25), portrays the latter time as opposed to the former troubles. Although the oracle here is exceedingly large in scope the structure of verses 1-15 suggest that the newness offered in 17-15 is a limited offer not offered generally to everyone. The offer made here is made only to the obedient (those who faithfully seek God). They are the ones who are being given the hope of being inducted into the gospel newness. Yahweh

speaks as the governor, and creator of the world and just like in the remainder of the book of Isaiah attention is focused on Jerusalem. The initial particle (כִּי), which is really left out in the NRSV, may be intended to refer back to verse 16, if so, there is a linkage in both of these verses to the former time.<sup>7</sup> We then have words that are meant to draw our mind back to the very beginning of Scripture, to Genesis 1:1 with the exact same words being used to describe what Yahweh is about to do. Only this is going to be something new (חֲדָשׁ), something that would replace the old things that are associated with the memory of much that is the opposite of that which is to come. What is new will be something associated with joy and rejoicing, while the old, by implication, is associated with the opposite of this.

Those old things will now not come to be mind or be remembered because that which is new will erase the heartache and pain associated with those things. Note that this verse is about the heart and not the mind as is indicated by most English translations. The newness here is described in large terms as being as large as the

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, in the Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 245-246.


heavens and the earth, but even in this the heart, the center, of this new vision is Jerusalem and its people (verse 18). Jerusalem, which had been the scene of much distress, heartache and pain, and likely even as the people contemplate this vision stands in ruins, will be transformed. It is even here that we come to questions about whether this is the miraculous act of Yahweh, or something that takes place through the human agency of the followers of Yahweh? Such questions are perhaps more of a modern apparition rather than an ancient concept. What is important here is the result not the ascription of agency. If Yahweh places the desire and the skills upon the hearts of the builders of such a society as is described, and there hands and their efforts are agents of change perhaps this is even more miraculous than the waiving of the hand of God and the change instantaneously popping into existence. Surely, the transformation of the human heart and conditioning to be agents in the changes that are described here is a miracle of astronomical proportions and is indeed more godlike than the magic of physical transformation. The obedient hands and hearts of the image bearers of God carrying out their destiny is surely a creative act that is only possible through

divine fiat. What could be harder than calling people to obedient action as covenant keepers and proclaimers of divine power not only through words but through actions.

The indication is that because of what Yahweh does here there will cease to be the sounds of weeping and the crying of distress (verse 19). Life will become abundant as infants will not die within a few days of birth and the old person will live a full life, even living well beyond a hundred years of age. Truly for us, this is something that is beyond our current capacity. The imagery here still indicates what we might term an earthly existence as death is still in view (verse 20) all though it appears to be placed in retreat because of the active hand of God, but also because the people are living in righteous obedience to God. No longer will they build houses and plant vineyards that will be enjoyed by others, they will live in security in what they themselves have built and planted (verse 21). These are the chosen (בְּחִיר) of God. To be sure, numerous volumes have been written on the meaning of being the “chosen of God;” here however the context indicates they are the obedient.

These chosen shall now be blessed by not laboring in vain or fearing for the future of the children that they bring into the world. They bring these children into the world and fully entrust them to God and they are at the center of the “new” creation that surely has as a central feature the newness of truly obedient followers of Yahweh. The blessing of Yahweh (verse 23) will follow not only them, but their descendants. Verse 24 indicates the extreme attentiveness of Yahweh as he answers their call even before it goes out. This is powerful imagery and perhaps answers accusations made elsewhere that God had been inattentive and distant from his people. Here the promise is that he will be close and give great attention to his people. God will be actively a part of the city of Jerusalem life and its people. What powerful and poetic imagery of being heard even before a word is spoken.

Verse 25 continues the theme of the local and cosmic change that is to be ignited by Yahweh. The new creation of Yahweh is not merely a localized phenomenon, or something that can all be attributed to the activity of mankind that has perhaps finally grown up and matured. Animals that have traditionally been hostile, even



fed one upon the other, will now have that hostility removed; the wolf and lamb will now feed together without fear. The implication here is that even the physiology of the animals will be transformed and this change is powerfully stated in the next strophe as the lion is described as eating straw like the ox. The third line of this verse gives a wonderfully curious image in which the serpent shall have dust as its food. The serpent here is the only creature who continues to rest under the curse of Genesis 3. This leaves us with the realization that the oracle here is not about the apocalyptic change that we see envisioned in other places such as Revelation 21. The vision here is still centered in the present reality of a world that can, even before the apocalyptic recreation of all things, be renewed and transformed.<sup>8</sup>


The comment, here in verse 25, would seem to indicate that this vision is meant to be about a transformation of this present world into something new and powerfully different even though remnants of the old world still linger.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps it is here, and in other places, that down through the centuries there have been those who

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, p. 250.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, p. 250.





have caught hold of the vision that something better, more godly, more like God intended is possible, not only through the miraculous intervention of God on a cosmic scale, but through hard, consistent effort as the result of the miraculous touch of the hand of God on the heart of those who diligently seek him. Such people are impatient for the kingdom of God and rather than becoming passive spectators they engage with all that they are in the active transformative, creative work of the hand of God. These are people that fight poverty, invoke justice, seek the physical health of others. We see this spirit alive and well in the best of the human race as they give all that they are to be a part of transforming the world into a better place. Verse 25, indicates that Jerusalem will become a zone of freedom from the destructive influence and pain causing venomous bite of the serpent. No longer will it be an agent of hurt and destruction among the people that dwell on God's holy mountain.

This passage rings with a sound that should be familiar to us. It rings with the Gospel message that was proclaimed by Jesus Christ and the message is one that is not meant to be an individualized overly spiritualized message. This is a message that brings good news

to all that God created, to body, and soul: and the transformative power of God is actively involved in this new creative act. We are called to be active agents of change in our world, not just surviving or cowering in the corner wringing our hands and hoping that Jesus will come back and remove all that hurts, maims, and destroys; we are to actively be a part of doing that in the here and now with a fearlessness, and a power that is from a divine source. A part of this story is perhaps what inspired the rebuilding of the temple against incredible odds during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the call of God continues to go out and his creative voice continues to call for change and transformation. That change and transformation must begin with us and challenges us to answer the call as his image bearers to fulfill our destiny to become “authentic communities of witness” that will draw those who have not yet heard, or chosen the life of obedience to God, to choose and be drawn to the light of their father.<sup>10</sup>


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<sup>10</sup> Janet Carroll, “The Mission of the Churches in Realizing a New World Order” Morality - Justice - Peace,” *Missiology: An International Review*, XIII (1985), pp. 387-408.

# Synopsis

This oracle draws heavily upon the remainder of Isaiah and challenges us to hold that in mind as we begin our interpretation of this passage. There are many challenging things in this short oracle, but there is also a tremendously powerful message of hope given here. As we approach this passage, it must be remembered that this oracle is meant to bring the light of hope and promise to those that are obedient seekers of Yahweh. This is not a blank check given to all, it is a continuation of the call of Yahweh to be faithful covenanters: this passage promises help, relief, and hope to such people as they seek to follow their God.

The promise here, is that Yahweh will begin a new act of creation and that because of this new creation the heartache and pain of the old order will pass from prominence. Jerusalem will stand at the center of this new creation with the city becoming a source of joy and rejoicing rather than a place of lament and mourning. Jerusalem will become a source of delight, particularly for Yahweh, whereas in the past they have been something very different. The



blessing of Yahweh will flow into the city in the form of infants not dying soon after birth and people living long and full lives in excess of a hundred years. They will build houses and they will actually get to live in their houses and enjoy the fruit of their labors. They shall not work only for what they have built to be taken and used by others.

They will bear children without fearing for the life that they will live. They need not fear terror; they and their offspring will be blessed. In verse 24 there is the indication that Yahweh will be attentive, so much so that he will answer even before the people cry out. Verse 25 brings us to the transformation of the physical world and to the removal of the old order and its being replaced with the new. A part of this change will be for traditional enemies, the wolf and the lamb, and lion and the ox, to eat together without fear. Though evil will still exist as is highlighted by a reference to the serpent the holy city will not be threatened by him and his reign of destruction will come to an end there.

This passage powerfully calls for the obedience and active participation of God's children in his vision for the world. It calls for the image bearer of Yahweh to fulfill its destiny and become a true

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authentic community of witness drawing all of God's children back to him.

# Questions

- 1.** What does it mean when we say we are going to create something?
- 2.** Is creation of something only about the physical, or is there the power to create in ideas?
- 3.** How do some of your memories act as a hindrance to your service of God?
- 4.** What are some things that bring you joy and cause you to rejoice? Why?
- 5.** Why do you think the issue of infants dying young is addressed by God in this oracle?
- 6.** What does it mean for someone to be cursed?
- 7.** What are some things that you have made that brought you joy? Why did they bring you joy?
- 8.** Have you ever wondered what the world would be like for your children and their children? How do you feel about what you foresee there?
- 9.** What does it mean for God to call even before we can ask?
- 10.** What are some instances that you have seen people help others even before they asked? What was the affect?
- 11.** What do you think it means for the wolf and the lion to feed together?
- 12.** What do you think it means for the lion to eat grass?
- 13.** Why do you think this oracle leaves us with the image of the serpent at the end?
- 14.** What images does this oracle inspire in you?
- 15.** What are some things that you think this oracle challenges you to change in the way that you live and perceive the world?