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# Peaceable Kingdom

## Isaiah 65 v 17-25

### Introduction

It's the end of the year. Time to reflect on the year just past and look forward to the year to come.

At my work we get an email round the department telling us how the year has gone, and it's always full of praise for the accomplishments of the year and for all the hard work that everyone has put in. Everything is going swimmingly and the company is heading in just the right direction. Funnily enough that's a different message than the one we get in June when it's pay review time. Suddenly the company is struggling, costs are increasing and there isn't too much money about to reward the staff. They also forgot to mention the major incident that led to us being in all the papers in August. And then looking forward to the next year, it's all about the great improvements we'll be making and how everything will just keep getting better.

How has your 2023 been? The answer is different for everyone. For some it might have held marriage, the birth of a child, good times with friends, job satisfaction. For others it might have involved loss, difficulty in relationships, health struggles, loneliness. For most there will be a mixture of light and dark.

What about the world in 2023? There have been advances in technology, in medicine, in agriculture. Artificial intelligence is taking leaps forward, and I'm sure that nothing bad can come from that! And yet the war in Ukraine is dragging on. In Israel Hamas staged a terror attack and Israel responded with force. And just as Christmas came close, villages in Nigeria were attacked and over 140 people killed in a largely Christian area.

And what do you want for 2024? World peace? That would be good, but is it likely? Is there a trend towards things getting better or do we see the same old problems year after year?

In our passage today God speaks to a people who are looking around and looking ahead with anxiety and fear, and he reassures them that the future is better.

### Background

This passage in Isaiah is written to a people who have turned away from God, who have been taken away into exile. A remnant, those who are faithful to God, return to Jerusalem but they are still surrounded by enemies and are living in the midst of ruins. The message from Isaiah is that God is going to do a new thing. He has promised the messiah and here is the result of the messiah coming.

### A Brand New World (v17-19)

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth,*

*and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.*

*But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;*

*for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.*

*I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people;*

*no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.*

*[Isaiah 65 v 17-19]*

The Bible starts with the creation of the heavens and the earth, and it ends with a new creation: new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah gives us a glimpse of that end game. In the beginning when God created the earth he said it was good. Here he tells us to rejoice in his new creation. This new earth will be a place without sadness, the former things will not be remembered. There will be no regrets or wishing things had gone differently, God's people will rejoice in God's creation. And that will include a new Jerusalem, not built by men but created by God. And he will rejoice in that creation, and be glad in the people who are his.

For people who long for a better world there is a promise from God - it's coming.

What will it be like?

## A Healthy World (v20)

*No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,*

*or an old man who does not fill out his days,*

*for the young man shall die a hundred years old,*

*and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.*

*[Isaiah 65 v 20]*

One of the hardest parts of life in this current world is when death comes early. And that can be a child who is just days old, or an elderly person who still had a few years in them yet. Not so the new creation, where life is long. In fact it is eternal. Now many have tried to resolve this passage with the picture of eternity as it seems to be saying that people will die, after long lives. But I think it's just using poetic language to get across that image of a long life in a way the hearers will understand.

## A Secure World (v21-23)

*They shall build houses and inhabit them;*

*they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

*They shall not build and another inhabit;*

*they shall not plant and another eat;*

*for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,*

*and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*

*They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity,*

*for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord,*

*and their descendants with them.*

*[Isaiah 65 v 21-23]*

When the Jews were taken into captivity all of their possessions were taken away from them. They were taken to a place where they worked for others and didn't get the rewards of their labours. God's promise is that they will be secure in the new Jerusalem. They will work and gain the reward. They will build and live in their houses. He compares their lives to the tree. A tree lives a long time, is fruitful again and again and has a real solidity and stability. God's people are going to feel secure in the new land.

## A Peaceful World (v24-25)

*Before they call I will answer;*

*while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

*The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;*

*the lion shall eat straw like the ox,*

*and dust shall be the serpent's food.*

*They shall not hurt or destroy*

*in all my holy mountain,"*

*says the Lord.*

*[Isaiah 65 v 24-25]*

And there will be peace. People will be at peace and even nature will be at peace. There will be no danger in God's new Jerusalem. The Quaker minister Edward Hicks made a series of 62 pictures of this idyllic scene, called the Peaceable Kingdom pictures, featuring lions, leopards, cows and people, all living in harmony. We also read of this in chapter 11 of Isaiah. And who is the one responsible for this peace? The Root of Jesse - the promised messiah from the line of David - the Lord Jesus.

So the new Jerusalem promised by God will be a place of joy, without death, a place of fulfilment and a place of peace.

## Kingdom Past

Now the big question is: is this for us? Is this a promise we can look for in 2024? Well, as with a lot of prophecy there are layers of fulfilment.

For the post-exile Jews, returned to a broken down Jerusalem and surrounded by enemies, this is a promise to encourage them. In a partial fulfilment of the prophecy they would rebuild Jerusalem and live for a while in a place that was relatively secure.

## Kingdom Present

For the new testament church there is a greater fulfilment. Jesus has brought new life to those who believe in him. We have eternal life through his sacrifice. We are secure in him and we know that the works that we do for the Lord are rewarded by treasure stored in heaven, which can't be taken away from us. We have peace with God. God's kingdom is no longer just a place in the middle east but a people - all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

However we still face physical death. We still can have our earthly works go unrewarded and our earthly possessions taken from us. There is a peaceable kingdom in the spiritual sense, but in the world around us: war rages.

## Kingdom Future

And so there is the future total fulfilment of God's promise. An end to hostility as Jesus comes back and judges the world. His people go on to live eternally with him. There will be no death, no weeping, no conflict, no insecurity. The lion will lie down with the lamb. The new Jerusalem is not a place but a people who live with God at their centre. It is the church come down from heaven, given resurrected bodies and living in peace in the peaceable kingdom.

## Application

How does that make you feel? In my email from the big bosses at work there are lots of promises of great things in the future. But do I trust them to deliver? And what about now, never mind the future?

Firstly we can look back at how God restored his people to their homeland after the time of exile in Babylon. They did return to Jerusalem as he had promised, and he gave them a level of security there until the son of God walked in that city.

Secondly we can know that there is a present blessing from God for those who call his son their saviour. No matter how hard life is we know that he is with us and will help us. We have the Spirit to guide us and comfort us. We have the Son living in us and through us. And we have the Father to call upon. And what does the verse say? *Before they call I will answer [Isaiah 65 v 24]*.

And finally we have an assurance of a future that is glorious. One day Jesus will return, and the world will be changed. All pain, suffering and death will be put behind us. *the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind [Isaiah 65 v 17]*. We will not be idle, but we will receive the reward for our work, and we shall dwell in security and in peace. Maybe with some lions - I'm hopeful.

Do you know that you are part of that promise? The Jews knew that God's promises were for their people by their birth into the nation of Israel. We know that we have these promises for us if we have been born again into the family of God.