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God Restores

The one true God promises to restore His creation for His people through faith in His Son.

ISAIAH 65:17-25

Life's challenges can cause us to lose hope. If we are not careful, we can begin to believe all is lost and our best days are behind us. When that happens, the present becomes darker and we lose sight of the lessons we can learn. The Bible teaches that the future should impact how believers live in the present. Isaiah revealed to his audience glimpses of what God would do in the future so that they might be encouraged to be faithful as they wait on Him. Hope in the future gives strength in the present.

How does having hope for a greater future give people strength in the present?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ISAIAH 61:1–66:24

In Isaiah 61, the prophet told of the appearing of the Messiah. In His first coming, He came to save His people. Here, Isaiah described how the Messiah would come a second time to vindicate His people. Their shame would be replaced with honor and blessing, and they would be ministers of God as they rejoiced in His salvation and righteousness. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue and proclaimed that He was the fulfillment of this prophecy. (See Luke 4:21.)

Isaiah 62 focuses attention on Jerusalem. Even though sin had separated God and His people in Jerusalem, there would come a time when God fully restored their relationship. The Lord would delight in Jerusalem like a groom delights in his bride.

Isaiah 63–64 turns attention to God’s judgment on the nations and the vindication of His people. Edom serves as a representative of every enemy of the people of God that would experience His wrath. Either Isaiah or the people as a whole then recounted how God saved His people from their enemies in the past, especially at the Red Sea.

In chapters 65–66, the Lord answered their prayers, promising to judge idolaters and to deliver and bless the righteous. For God’s righteous remnant, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and their lives and work will flourish with great abundance. God will respond to their prayers immediately. They will ultimately experience peace, even though leading up to that time their enemies will torment them. When God finally deals with their enemies, there will be a rebirth of His people and God’s glory will extend to every nation. Those who trust in God will be saved, while those who reject Him will experience enduring judgment. People’s eternal destiny will be determined by their faith in the Lord or their rejection of Him.

As you read Isaiah 65:17-25, circle the things God says will no longer happen. How does the elimination of the things circled give hope?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A PLACE OF JOY (ISA. 65:17-20)

¹⁷ “For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ Then be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I will create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. The sound of weeping and crying will no longer be heard in her. ²⁰ In her, a nursing infant will no longer live only a few days, or an old man not live out his days. Indeed, the one who dies at a hundred years old will be mourned as a young man, and the one who misses a hundred years will be considered cursed.

VERSE 17

Verse 17 expounds on the promises the Lord made in verses 13-16 concerning His servants. The word *for* is the key word that makes this link. Verses 13-16 contrast what will happen to those who reject the Lord with the blessings God has in store for His servants. Verse 17 answers these questions: “How will God turn things around from the present disaster and the humiliation of His people? How will He do what appears to be the impossible?”

The answer to both questions literally begins with “For behold I” in Hebrew. The word *for* often functions to indicate suitability or fitness to accomplish something. God was saying emphatically: “Look at Me; I am able to do these things.” Often believers have difficulty believing God’s promises simply because they have a skewed perspective of Him or are not looking to Him at all. If only they would look at Him and see Him for who He really is, then there would be no question about how God will do whatever He promises.

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What did God promise? First, He promised to *create a new heaven and a new earth*. In the Old Testament, God is the only subject of the verb *create*. God is going to do what only He can do.

The new era that God will create for His new creations in Christ will commence with the creation of a new heaven and new earth. God will not merely patch things up. He will create everything new in the heavens and the earth. His work will be comprehensive. It fits with Isaiah's promises of a future newness. He spoke of "new events" (42:9; 48:6), "a new song" (42:10), "something new" (43:19), "new things" (48:6), and "a new name" (62:2). This message corresponds to the messages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who prophesied of a future when God would give a new covenant and His people would have a new heart and new spirit (Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 18:31). This new era will be so wonderful that the Lord's second promise is that the burden of past regrets and sufferings will be no more. God's new creation will usher in a holy forgetfulness where human failure and sin along with its consequences will be remembered no more.

VERSES 18-20

The only appropriate response to such amazing news is gladness and rejoicing. Therefore, the Lord exhorted the people to ***be glad and rejoice forever*** in what He was creating. The people of God need to cast away their disappointments and discouragement and look to what God is going to do. The old Jerusalem will be replaced with a new one that will bring joy to God, to Jerusalem's inhabitants, and to others. Jerusalem, along with its inhabitants, will be a place of holiness, harmony, and happiness. As God delights in them, they will be a delight to others as they reflect God's character.

Like a father who takes delight in seeing his child's joy, the Lord will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in His people. This is in contrast to what God would do with Jerusalem in its near future. Before this future time of restoration, there would be a time of tearing down, and the Lord would be the one who did it. In Isaiah 29, God said He would oppress Jerusalem, and there would be mourning and crying. He would encircle it, lay siege to it, and bring it down as He would lead many nations against it. Over a hundred years after Isaiah's prophecy, these words came to fruition as God directed the Babylonians, along with many nations under their control, to execute God's judgment on Jerusalem and its inhabitants. When a remnant returned to Jerusalem from exile, they came home to a city in ruin and mourned over the reproach that the city had become.

However, in the new era God has in store for His people, not only will the city be rebuilt and restored and the past be forgotten (v. 17), but God's righteous anger against Jerusalem and its inhabitants will be replaced with the Lord's rejoicing and gladness in them. This message also echoed David's words concerning the Lord and His people: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor, a lifetime. Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). The people's rejoicing will replace their weeping, and God's delight in Jerusalem and its inhabitants will replace His disfavor. God will eradicate every possible source of sorrow for His people.

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When God created the heavens and the earth, He looked at His creation and saw that it was "good." Nonetheless, it was only after He created man and woman He saw all that He had created was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). No doubt, when God creates a new heaven and new earth it will be good, but the object of His greatest delight will be His holy people who reside there.

What is the difference between joy and happiness? What is the significance of Isaiah using joy to describe the reaction to the promised future?

Verse 20 provides examples of how things will be different for the people of God in this future new era. Premature death was common for children and adults alike during Isaiah's day. However, the children who are born on this new earth will not die in infancy, and adults will live to a ripe old age. The Israelites appear to have understood seventy years to be a normal lifespan (Ps. 90:10), but in the new era, a man who would live only one hundred years would be thought of as having died young and if a man died younger than that then he would be ***considered cursed***. God was rhetorically making the point that people will live long

lives; the context suggests a premature death will not occur in this new age. Having children and living a long and healthy life were both understood to be signs of God's blessing in ancient Israel and as God's rewards to those who served Him in faithful obedience. (See Ps. 127:3-5a; Prov. 9:11; 10:27.) The passage indicates that in this new era the people of God will be devoted to God and He will bless them immensely.

What do God's plans for His people in the future reveal about His disposition toward His people?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end (2 Pet. 3:7-18).

A PLACE OF PROSPERITY (ISA. 65:21-23)

²¹ People will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They will not build and others live in them; they will not plant and others eat. For my people's lives will be like the lifetime of a tree. My chosen ones will fully enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They will not labor without success or bear children destined for disaster, for they will be a people blessed by the LORD along with their descendants.

VERSES 21-23

Deuteronomy 28:15-68 is a list of curses where Moses described what would happen when the Israelites broke God's covenant by disobeying His law. These curses involved agricultural disaster, foreign invasion, deportation into exile, the reproach of foreign nations, and famine. Deuteronomy 28:30b particularly states that because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord the Israelites would

build houses but not live in them and plant vineyards but not eat the fruit that they produce. This implied that others would come and take these things away from the people.

In Isaiah 65:21-22a, the Lord stated just the opposite. He repeated this idea in both verses in order to emphasize the stark contrast between what the people had experienced with what they would experience in the future new era. The people of God would enjoy living in the homes they build and eating the fruit from the vineyards they plant. The implication should be apparent. Those living in the new creation will be devoted to Yahweh and keep their commitments to Him. Consequently, they would enjoy the blessings of the new covenant with the Lord. Their inheritance would be safe and secure. What God has in store for His people is imperishable, unspoiled, unfading, and eternally secure.

In the last part of verse 22, the Lord spoke of more blessings: longevity of life, productivity, and the satisfaction of enjoying the fruit of their labors. The Lord used the simile of a tree to represent the vitality and durability of His people. The expression *my chosen ones* serves as a reminder that all of these blessings are expressions of God's incomprehensible grace toward His people. God chose them to be His treasured possession even though they had done nothing to deserve it. He did it in spite of them.

How should the blessings God has in store for His people affect how they live today?

A PLACE OF PEACE (ISA. 65:24-25)

²⁴ Even 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 cattle, but the serpent's food will be dust! They will not do what is evil or destroy on my entire holy mountain," says the LORD.

VERSES 24-25

The Lord emphasized that the new heaven and earth would be characterized by peace between the created and the Creator—

before they call I will answer—and peace between creatures—*the wolf and the lamb*. God will be attentive to the needs of His people. When they had strayed away from God in rebellion against Him, apparently, He had ignored their cries, but that would be no more. Thus, it indicates the sins that separated the people from God will be no more (Isa. 59:1-2). What is more, the harmony the people of God will enjoy with God will extend to all of creation. Nevertheless, the curse on sin will continue to stand as indicated by the serpent’s food being dust. Evil will be unable to destroy what God will establish on His *holy mountain*. God gave His word on it.

How do the expectations of the coming of the Messiah a second time compare to the expectations of His first coming?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary.*

The Hebrew concept of *shalom*, often translated “peace,” occurs in Isaiah 66:12 and pervades this week’s study passage (65:17-25). Read the article on “peace” in a Bible dictionary. Read some of the Bible passages included in the article, recording insights gained from those passages. How does the description of the new heaven and new earth point to peace between God and humanity? How is peace with God different from peace with a nation or group of people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can live with hope, knowing that God will one day create a new heaven and a new earth.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that they will experience God’s blessing for eternity.
- Believers can live with expectancy, knowing that God’s peace will reign in eternity.

What situations and challenges do you face that rob you of hope? List ways the promise of a new heaven and earth restores hope while facing those situations.

Review the characteristics of the new heaven and new earth described by Isaiah. What can you do today to live in anticipation of one of these characteristics?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 65:17. Discuss why you look forward to sin being forgiven and forgotten in the new age as Isaiah 65:17-25 describes. How should that future reality impact how your Bible study functions today?

PRAYER NEEDS

Getting the Most Out of Your Personal Study Guide



Getting the most out of your Personal Study Guide (PSG) requires you to begin early in the week. Life tends to get busier as the week wears on. Starting early gives time to reflect on the passage and the truths discovered throughout the week. Reading the study a few minutes before the group meets doesn't give much time to process anything. Completing steps 1 through 4 during Monday lunch would be a great way to start the week.

The Bible Reading Plan found near the front of the PSG organizes all the verses in the Bible book or books being studied that quarter into a quarterly reading plan. You may want to read these each evening right before going to bed.



STEP 1

Read the core Bible passage for that session in your Bible.

Use the observe question(s) printed at the end of the Understand the Context section to give some focus to your reading. Make notes as you read.

- Complete the Bible Skill.
- Reflect on what the passage means. Use the questions included in the Explore the Text section to process the meaning of the core passage.

STEP 2

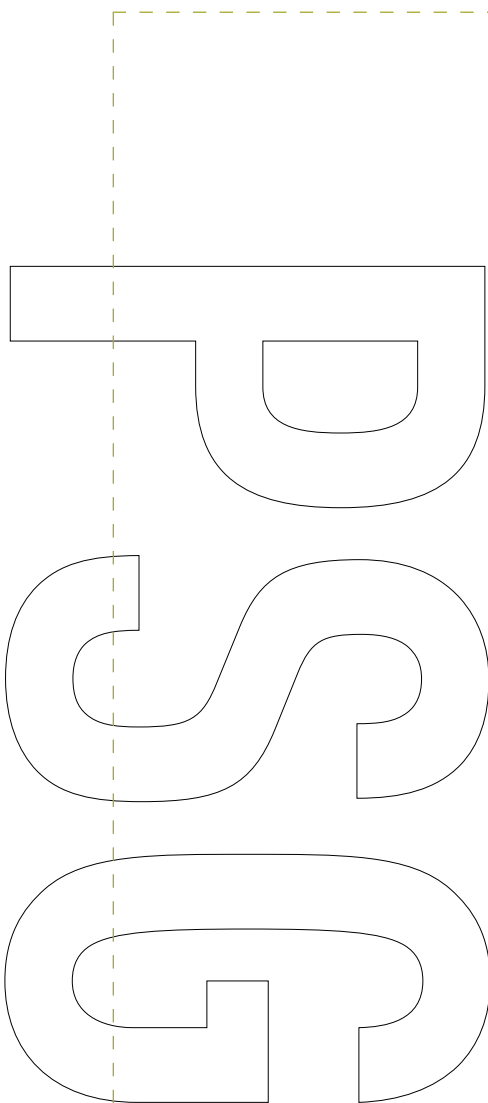
Read Understand the Context for that session in the PSG.

This will help you get a clearer understanding of how the core passage fits into the whole.

STEP 3

Study the core Bible passage.

- Read the Bible text, following the outline in Explore the Text.
- Review the commentary for each verse (or set of verses) to gain a clearer understanding.
- When needed, look at the map on the inside back cover.
- Review any included key words (see Word Wise on p. 6) for clarification.



STEP 4

Record your thoughts and questions.

Highlight sentences and paragraphs that are especially meaningful or helpful. Identify sentences needing clarification or that raise questions by placing a question mark near it.

STEP 5

Read the core Bible passage each day, reflecting on the words or phrases that stand out to you.

STEP 6

Review your notes and what you have marked in the PSG prior to leaving for the Bible study group meeting.

STEP 7

Make sure you carry your PSG to the Bible study group meeting.

Once the meeting starts, participate in the group time by sharing your comments and questions and comparing notes with others in your group. Record additional insights gained from others in the group.

