

Isaiah 65:17-25 (NIV 1984) ¹⁷“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ¹⁹I 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; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²²No 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 works of their hands. ²³They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ²⁵The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Not Short Sighted but Delighted

It was sophomore year and he stepped out on the basketball court to show his stuff. He was good. He had a whole bunch of skill and was able to play the game at a high level. Yet then the coach didn’t call his name for being on the varsity team. The basketball didn’t go away. He was still able to shine on the JV squad. But at just that time, it didn’t seem to be all that great. With a little bit of short sightedness he could have given up completely but then we probably wouldn’t know the name Michael Jordan. It got much better because he hung in there and didn’t give up. To the delight of arenas full of fans who watched him play not to mention the padding of his own pocketbook, number 23 aired it all out and has been exalted to basketball glory. He didn’t look behind but kept striving for what was ahead.

We, Christians, also step out into times when we are met with all the struggles of life and worries of the world. We remember the past and all the concerns we have on this world. We easily could give up with all the bad news—wars, disasters, famine. When we hang our heads to look down at all that is wrong God lifts them up to look at the future to give a vision of glory.

Isaiah saw the vision God placed before him. About 700 years before Christ came; God lifted his eyes to the Messiah in whom he could delight. It was a time not unlike our time. The people around Isaiah rejected God. There was plenty of struggles in life and worries of the world to catch Isaiah’s attention. People were so bad that Isaiah had to wonder how long it would be

before God had enough. Isaiah knew God would punish the people while he kept his small group faithful to him. To these believers God spoke words to lift them past the present struggles to the delight of the coming new heaven and new earth. **“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.”**

God told them to look far into the future, to a time when their loving Savior returns to recast the world. He says look past this earth and life upon it to the time after Jesus judges the entire world, after he separates the believers from the unbelievers, to the time of heaven. “Heaven” the place where glorified believers live forever with God.

You may have an image of what that place will be like. Sitting on clouds playing harps or walking on perfect grass like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But since God doesn't give us details about what this new place will be like it's better not to speculate. Here is part of what God tells us about this new place. **The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.** People who carry with them the horrors of death and the pain of sickness, all shameful things we have done and encouraged. All the ways we have run into sin and led others to follow. All the things we remember from our youth that if we could go back and change. All the times we have failed won't come to our minds again.

What is even better is God doesn't have them stored up in his mind either. On the day when God opens this eternal place for us, he won't do it by going through a long list of all the wrongs we have done. Those wrongs have been removed by Jesus. In fact God right now washes them all away in the blood of Christ. Our sins are dissolved.

Hear what God's says, **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.** God says he will take away any sting that remains. No more sorrow will confront us in heaven. We will be in perfect harmony with God. We will even rejoice in God's righteous judgment.

God gives us all another reason for the rejoicing in heaven. **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; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.** There won't be still births or babies that die after a short time in life. People won't pass away suddenly. Accidents won't end lives because there will be no more death. All the celebrating of life we have done by the side of a departed relative will be completed as we realize the delights in heaven.

I'm sure you knew there would be no more death in heaven. But we have even more to look forward to in that new place. **They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 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 works of their hands.** God lets us know that in heaven we aren't going to just sit down and do nothing for all eternity. We will be working. But our work won't be work. Each moment in heaven everything will work out just like we planned. No longer will we do something only to see that it is all messed up or ruined. We will never be frustrated because someone else gets the benefit of our work. We won't think the people we encounter are a burden. Instead we'll live to serve them because we'll be perfect just as Jesus is perfect and lives to serve us.

Yes, we'll live in everlasting harmony with one another in that new world. God illustrates well that point when he says, "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 65:25a). On the new earth, things will go back to the way they were meant to be. Animals (if in fact there will be animals on the new earth) will no longer tear each other apart like you see them do now on the Nature Channel. They'll live in harmony and so will we. No longer will be blame each other for our sins because there will be no more sin!

So, are you excited for the new earth? I hope so. But perhaps you're wondering how a text like this helps you face the challenges on Monday or get ready for that test on Thursday? Studying this lesson is like circling your important days on your kitchen calendar. You do that, not because you'll forget to go on vacation otherwise, but as a motivational tool to keep you plugging away until then. When the shortened daylight hours lengthen your dark mood, it helps to flip ahead on the calendar and be reminded that in a month or a few days you'll be basking in the sunshine or freezing in a tree. Circling these dates may also motivate you to eat right, get your sleep, and exercise so that you are at your tip top. In the same way reminding ourselves that we are headed to a better place will keep us from giving up on life or from getting wrapped up in this life so that we lose focus and direction.

Yes, the words of this lesson about the new earth do motivate and strengthen us for every good deed and word. For when we speak carelessly to one another and damage a friendship, we know that all is not lost. Jesus will create a world where that painful memory will disappear. So why bother holding on to grudges now? Get an early start on that new life and forget the sins that have been committed against you, just as God has already forgotten the sins that you commit daily. *Forgetting what is behind and straining for what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14).*

Remember even with all the hardships and troubles around you right now you are still in God's place of your delight. Even though you might not be where you want to be or with the people you would like to see you are still one of God's people who can look forward to the delight and joy of heaven. Rejoice then that you are part of that group. Don't let your short-sightedness cloud your view of what is to come. Each day we have the peace that surpasses all understanding of the sacrifice of Christ for us. Every day we get to enjoy God's best.