

Prayer

All praise to You, Lord Jesus. From when I awoke and through every moment of this day, You have been with me. Break through my stubborn self-centredness so I may hear Your voice, and defeat my stubborn will to enable me to take Your advice when I most needed it. Hear my prayer, Lord Jesus,, and guide me through this day, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

Try praising God in the midst of each of the circumstances you face this day. Does it make a difference? Does it challenge you? Let the Lord speak to you through this.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who have little food.** *Pray for those who have little to eat because they are enslaved and not given much to eat. Pray against all those forms of slavery that still persist within our world*
- *Pray for FIFA and the presidential election due to take place today. Pray that football will be served by proceedings at the FIFA congress*
- *Give thanks to God for the provision of the land and its ability to supply us with food*

Meditation

The glory of Christ's presence is like

the unsurpassed perfection of a well loved, homely meal;
the sense of being at peace when walking across the hills;
the thrill that flows through the caring touch of a lover's hand;
the pleasure of beginning a task you have always wanted to do;
the delight of completing a project that has required your all;
the joy, energy and promise of a new vision and a fresh day;
the enjoyment of a precious conversation with a close friend;

The glory of Christ's awesome presence,
Never fails to inspire, strengthen, encourage,
And motivate us to look forward with joy
To the wonders of the Kingdom, awaiting us!

Bible passage - Isaiah 65:17-66:2

- ¹⁷ Look! I am creating
new heavens and a new earth!
The first ones will not be remembered
nor will they come to mind;
- ¹⁸ Instead, rejoice and be glad forever
because of what I am creating.
- Look! I am creating Jerusalem as a delight,
and its people as a joy.
- ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and be glad in my people;
the sound of weeping will not be heard in her,

or a cry of distress.

- ²⁰ No more will it ever happen there
that a baby only lives a few days,
or an old man does not live a lifetime;
for he who dies at a hundred years
will be but a youth,
and he who falls short of a hundred
will be considered accursed.
- ²¹ They will build houses and live in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- ²² They will not build
For another to live there;
They will not plant
so that another may eat;
For the lifetime of my people
will be like the lifetime of a tree,
And my chosen will enjoy to the full
the work of their hands.
- ²³ They will not work hard for nothing,
or bear children and bring disaster;
But they will be children blessed by the LORD,
and their descendants as well.
- ²⁴ So it will come about that
before they call I will answer,
and as they are speaking I will hear.
- ²⁵ A wolf and a lamb will graze as one,
a lion will eat straw like an ox;
and a serpent will eat dust!
They will not harm or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.
- ^{66:1} This is what the LORD says:
The heavens are my throne
and the earth a stool for my feet;
What is this?
a house you have built for me?
What is this?
a resting place for me?
- ² My hand has made all these things,
By which all this has happened!
says the LORD.
But this is the one for whom I have regard,
he who is humble and contrite in spirit,
and who trembles at my Word.

Bible Study

Review

There is no doubt that this passage stands at the climax of Isaiah's prophecies. It is true that for us, the description of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 is probably the most stunning and powerful passage in Isaiah, speaking as it does of the way that God redeems His people through the mystery of suffering. It is deeply moving and strangely uplifting, knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ has walked the path described there for our salvation and both endured and overcome all that is described. However, here in this passage is a prophetic description not about the 'how' of God's mission to redeem the world, but about 'why'. Here,

we find a ray of light shone into the heart of the Father to illuminate for us His intentions and purposes, and we see His desire is love and passion for all, as shown by what he does for those who accept Him.

This is an amazing vision of recreation, and its only parallel in scripture is the great Revelation of John, where in chapter 21 we read 'then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ...' (Rev 21:1f.). It is of course entirely possible that John knew the work of Isaiah and as God revealed His glorious future, it made sense to John in terms of words similar to those he knew from Isaiah; 'Look, I am creating a new heavens and a new earth! The first one will not be remembered, nor will they be called to mind!' (65:17f.) Of course, John's vision quickly revealed far more detail about the new creation, but as it came to him, John spoke about the coming of a new Jerusalem, adorned as a bride, and as the dwelling place of God with people (Rev 21:2,3). Here in Isaiah, the prophetic vision speaks equally about a heavenly Jerusalem in which people live and dwell in peace with themselves and with God (65:18,19).

The truth about God is that He wants to have a peaceful and loving relationship with His people (65:18), where 'weeping will not be heard' (65:19), where the finite limitations of life will be irrelevant (65:20), where people will have a fruitful life (65:22) and their children will always be a blessing (65:23,24)! The picture is extended further by verse 25 which speaks of the peaceful co-existence of animals in God's recreated future, a picture typical of Isaiah, as we remember from previous prophecies (11:6f., and hinted at in chapter 35). The addition of wider creation in God's scheme of salvation and re-creation is typical of scripture as a whole, and its addition here reminds us of Paul's great comment about the purposes of God; 'all creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God ... that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Romans 8:19,21).

The vision is concluded with God's chiding and yet utterly incisive comment on human endeavour; 'Heavens are my throne ... what is this? A house you have built for me? ... My hand has made all these things!' The Lord does not require His people to make a house for Him; there is no Temple in the new Jerusalem, because God lives with His people and needs no dwelling place, and He is the One who has made all things! This is an often forgotten yet majestic statement of God's creative power and authority. We should place it in our minds together with the opening of Genesis to help us understand the breadth of God's creative power, for people so often ask 'what will heaven be like? The answer is here, it is like our world but re-created without the pain and suffering, and with the perfect love of God revealed. This is what this passage describes, for those who read far enough into Isaiah to discover it!

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at:

- The new Jerusalem (65:17-19)
- Life in the presence of God (65:20-24)
- The recreated world (65:25)
- The Lord's re-creative power (66:1,2)

Notes on the text and translation

V17 'Look! I am creating ...'

The Hebrew here is very emphatic at the beginning, wishing to make it plain that this is a vital work of essential importance. God's new creation is as significant as the first creation, and possibly more so; even though we cannot see it except through the words of prophecy.

V20 'for he who dies at a hundred years ...'

The Hebrew here is demonstrably using the masculine to indicate either man or woman; it means people in general.

V22 'they will not plant so that another may eat.'

This does not mean that people should not share food in God's new creation! The verse tells us that people will not find that their work is taken over by others, as when a land is invaded, for example. The idea is expressed poetically.

V22 'for the lifetime of my people ...'

The Hebrew says 'for the days of my people ...' and most translations follow this literally. However, the expression clearly means the length of days a person lives; that is in English, a 'lifetime'. I have translated this accordingly and it makes better sense.

V23 'bear children and bring disaster.'

The idea is clearly expressed in Hebrew that it is possible to bear children who bring disaster upon their parents and society.

V23 'and their descendants as well'

The Hebrew says; 'and their produce with them.' As is common elsewhere in the Old Testament, the language of fertility and farming is used to refer to families and descendants, hence my translation.

V25 'and a serpent will eat dust'

The Hebrew says 'and a serpent, dust is its food.' Here, dust is regarded as valueless and to 'eat dust' is an expression indicating punishment and humiliation, and possible penitence under certain circumstances.

Going Deeper

In studying this passage further, we will firstly look at the creation of the new Jerusalem (65:17-19); then the characteristics of life in the presence of God (65:20-24). The wider vision of creation comes next (65:25), and finally, the Lord's pronouncement of His creative power, which concludes with a simple and clear description of those who live in God's newly re-created heaven and earth (66:1,2).

The new Jerusalem (65:17-19)

The whole of Isaiah's work has been characterised by the prophet's horror at the sins of Israel and their consequences. From the very beginning of his life as a prophet, Isaiah railed against the awful nature of these sins (see Isaiah 1 and 2), and yet he was always optimistic, and this is reflected in his powerful insistence that human sin could never be the final answer in this world or the next. He spoke from his earliest days about the glories of God's work and His ability to overcome all human sin; 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord ... that He may teach us His ways, that we may walk in His paths.'

Then, the drama of Isaiah's call recorded in Isaiah 6 is not simply within the nature of the experience, which is remarkable in itself, but the insistence of God that the consequences of human sin could not be dealt with by people; only by the Lord (6:9-13). Through his life's journey of many years, including encounters with the Kings Ahaz (7,8) and Hezekiah (36-39), Isaiah came to appreciate what had been revealed to no one else. He received the message that God would work through one who would come as 'God with us' ('Immanuel' – 7:14), as a king (9:6, 11:2) and also supremely as God's true Servant (53). The Suffering Servant would be able to face the suffering of humanity head on, receive it in his own body by way of suffering, and yet by the power of God rise above suffering to offer redemption.

Only the work of the Servant enables God to be at peace with rebellious humanity, for He offers people a way, through redemption, of being at peace with God. Isaiah revealed in his prophecies that the result of this was a new complex relationship between God and those who would respond to the Servant after he had done His work (as we have seen in chapters 54 to 64), and finally, the long awaited peaceful co-existence with the Almighty in a new heaven and a new earth. Most scholars would not accept that the book of Isaiah has any such coherence, but we have found it in these studies without being ignorant of the other explanations of this complex book. These final chapters and verses of Isaiah do in fact create a fitting conclusion to Isaiah's whole prophetic work.

In the new heaven and new earth described in Isaiah's vision, the past sins are finally deleted from the mind of God and the mind of men and women (65:17). People today often agonise over why it is that although our sins are forgiven, they still have consequences in this world, and the truth is that only in heaven will the remembrance of sin cease, and as Isaiah says 'nor will they come to mind' either to God or to men and women. This, surely, is true liberty. What God does will be joyous and blessed; 'the sound of weeping will no longer be heard in her' (65:19). Peace is more than the absence of strife and anguish, as this whole passage suggests, but to be without it will be bliss!

Life in the presence of God (65:20-24)

Isaiah describes the bliss of life with God, but it is not as we often like to say today 'in heaven', but in God's re-created total universe of a new earth and heaven. If we read with care, we will find that this holds true for the New Testament as well as the Old, so perhaps our mental picture of the future 'in heaven' is not as accurate as we think! Isaiah proceeds to tell us that length of life will no longer be an issue. Isaiah speaks as if a 'lifetime' is still something measurable, but the whole direction of his prophecy suggests that length of life becomes irrelevant. The curtains of revelation have not yet been drawn back far enough for Isaiah to see that death will be no more (Rev 21:4), so he sees death at 'a hundred years' as reflecting mere youth (65:20 – though the imagery is rather awkward), and later says 'the lifetime of my people will be like the lifetime of a tree!' (65:22). Everything Isaiah sees is still merely relative, but points towards the irrelevance of the passing of time in terms of age or decay, moreover, the work people do, he says, will be fruitful.

Those of us who have lived in peaceful countries know what it is like to enjoy security, but I do not have to travel far in my own country of England, to see the effects of human strife and war. The destruction during the second world war of cities, buildings, heritage and churches (and much more) has left a scar on England that cannot be removed and is there for all who will look. Together with my own experiences as a missionary, this reminds me of the devastating horrors of inhumanity and war, which destroys property, ways of life, culture, history and tradition as people fight each other with sinful violence. Those who have not known it do not always appreciate the dehumanising effects of having one's family, house, work and culture destroyed, but this has been a constant feature of human life on this planet for centuries. So when Isaiah spoke about the great bliss of being able to 'build houses and live in them', and 'plant vineyards and eat their fruit' (65:21), the absence of war was on his mind.

Israel and Judah had been pumelled by a series of foreign powers during Isaiah's life, and he had seen the invasion and destruction of northern Israel, the invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians (36,37), and many other wars (7,8). He prophesied that God had used these events to speak to His people about their sin and lack of dependence on Him. His vision of a life without such war and violence was therefore a vision of peace in which lessons had been learned and the work of redemption had been completed. In a telling picture, Isaiah even described children being born who would not 'bring disaster' on their families and descendants, a glimpse of humanity within the prophecies which might bring a wry smile to our faces today!

The fulfilment of the new life with God in eternity is one of perfect harmony, where 'before they call I will answer, and as they are speaking I will hear.' This is a description of perfect harmony between God, the Creator, and the people He created.

The recreated world (65:25)

We have already noted the significance of verse 25, but the whole prophecy of God's new creation would not be complete without it. Clearly, Isaiah was aware that God's eternal work involved all creation (see above), but scriptures as a whole ask us not to forget the world and creation as a whole, as if it was created just as a backdrop to the human drama of life. All creation is part of human life, and we cannot live without it. Indeed, it is essential that there is a 'new earth' for us to live in, and people were not made like angels as purely 'heavenly beings'. Human life is spiritually bound to 'things', to senses and feelings, intellect and understanding. The fact that the Bible frequently adds a note, even a small note to its story of salvation history which includes all creation helps us to feel that God understands the people He has made; for our future, he has re-created that with which we are familiar, but without the sin!

Similar connections between God's plans for humanity and for the world are made in the book of Job, where God's final speech implores the self important friends of Job to bow before the authority of One who commands the whole created order, from the depths of the sea to the heights of heaven (Job 38-41). Jonah eventually does God's will, but cannot comprehend the fact that both Nineveh and all creation is included in His grand scheme of things (Jonah 4:11). Jesus' own parable stories of course, describe the Kingdom of God, but do so using the most powerful and potent of natural images, growing seed, a fig tree, fruit, and much more. This all reminds us that we find our identity in the setting in which God has placed us; this is why Isaiah's words are so appealing; 'they will not harm or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord'. This is a prophecy which itself spans the whole of Isaiah, having first appeared in one of his first prophecies of the coming Redeemer King (11:9).

The Lord's re-creative power (66:1,2)

It is often thought that the next two verses at the beginning of chapter 66 are more attached to what comes next than what has gone before, but by including these verses in this study, I hope to emphasise the power of these words to add a few more important themes to our understanding of God's new 're-creation'. The words of verse 1 are not to be read merely as some kind of chastisement of God's people for failing to understand that God could build His own home. The questions God asks reveal the difference between the old earth on which we still live and the new earth of His re-creation. Now, people try to build places where God is especially present, whether in the form of churches or temples, altars or communion tables (and much more); however, it is the Lord who makes His dwelling place where He wants to be. We do not determine God's presence, He does.

What God wants to do is to make His home in the hearts of those who are 'humble and contrite in spirit', and who 'tremble at my Word' (66:2). This is a powerful text, and one that reminds us of the deep humility of all who truly know their Maker. Isaiah concludes that only those who can follow the example of the humility of the Servant, as described in full in chapter 53, are worthy of God's 'regard'. This is a salutary word, as well as the last phrase about 'trembling' before God's Word. We should not think of the 'Word' here as meaning scriptural text alone, but words of prophecy and whatever form of 'Word' God chooses by which to reveal Himself to us. He is awesome, and if we have not reached a place of utter humility before this truth, then we

are not in the right place to enter His new 're-creation'. Other scriptures discuss this issue more fully, but it is important as part of Isaiah's vision of God's future.

Application

There is so much to these prophecies of Isaiah, but it is important to try and see the whole pattern and structure of what he says, for this will guide us into developing even further our own understanding of God's Word through the prophecies. One of the difficulties many Christians have is that they may read a piece of the Old Testament, but find it impossible to understand it because they have no real 'feel' for the context of the word. This means that all they can do is to take a phrase here or there which springs from the text, such as verse 25 in this passage, or verses 17 and 18, and make something from the plain sense of what the text says. This can sometimes be helpful, but our challenge is always to find the fullest understanding of God's Word we can by studying the complete text. As anyone who has followed these studies through from Isaiah 1 to 66 might agree, we have trembled before God's awesome Word!

It is completely mind blowing to realise that God's plan, since the days of Isaiah more than two and a half thousand years ago, has been to draw His people and His creation towards a time when He will re-create earth and heaven, so that His people can live with Him in peace. God has always had this plan with us in mind, and it is the plan of salvation, the Gospel we proclaim as Christians! We tell people that through Christ, we can have a foretaste of this Kingdom, but the promise is for more; our inheritance through Christ is peace with God and a life of perfection! What else matters in the light of this? Is this not the 'pearl of great price' worth more than anything else we own or possess?

The prophecies of Isaiah have travelled over an enormous track of 'theological ground, and it is true to say that of all the books in the Old Testament, it is probably quoted more often in the New than any other book. Perhaps it is because Isaiah caught a vision, even if at times it was a fleeting vision, of God's perfect message found in His Servant, and the eternal future for all humanity of peace with God. It is there for us to take hold of or reject. Why would anyone want to reject it?

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What is contained within the 'new earth and new heaven'? Does this passage help you envision life beyond this world?
2. In your group, read through verses 20 to 24, and add other 'pictures' which you believe could add to this description of God's eternal Kingdom.
3. Why must all creation be included in God's salvation? Why does Scripture saying nothing about God rejecting any part of his creation?

Personal comments by author

This is a tremendous passage of scripture, and after writing about the day's text, I often wonder whether I have written well enough about it. In truth, I have to let go of what I have written as I place it on the computer and upload it onto the internet. Once written and made available, the words are at God's disposal, and the Holy Spirit will use them as He will. Satan attempts to create misunderstanding where God is at work, but the message of His great love can never be defeated. This amazing message has an eternal place in God's Word and stands for ever to inspire all who will receive it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- **Something to think about:** Spend some time thinking about your own future. Think about what it means to be with God and other people in the new creation described in this passage of Scripture. Let the Lord guide your thoughts.
- **Something to pray about:** pray for people you know who do not believe in God, and who find it hard to believe that God loves them. Pray that they will one day know His love and accept that God has a 'home' for them in His new world. Pray for their blessing.

Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, open up our lives to the possibilities of Your grace. May we value the disciplines of our faith and also the freedom of Your Spirit, both of which are essential to the life of faith we seek to live. Lead us graciously, and show us how to live in the light of Your love, we pray; AMEN
