

# **A Vision of Hope**

*Isaiah 65:17-25*

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We live in troubled times. Sometimes it seems that the world is falling apart. It couldn't get any worse, and then it does. We look at the world we live in, and there seems to be no hope. There are famines and disasters, conflicts and wars. When there are glimmers of hope, they seem to be dashed by a hopeless reality.

We hope of peace and justice in our own country, and at every turn it seems to be thwarted. Often times we cannot even agree on what is real and what is fake. One sees something as a problem, and another thinks that same thing is the solution and vice-versa. When we do try to talk to one another, we can't seem to understand each other. Where can we find hope in what seems like a world of hopelessness? What will become of us? Will things continue to fall apart and go from bad to worse? Where can we turn?

The prophet Isaiah could understand our feelings of hopelessness. In our lesson today Isaiah speaks to a time when the children of Israel had returned to Jerusalem. Israel had been defeated. God had allowed the Babylonians to conquer them. They had destroyed the temple and Jerusalem. Then they carried off the artisans and the scholars to serve the Babylonian empire.

You remember that the prophets had said they would return to Jerusalem, but not until after they had spent a long time in Babylon living their lives and serving their captors. When they did return, the city was destroyed and the country in a disarray. The temple was rubble, and when they did rebuild the temple, the older people cried because it was not as beautiful as it had been before the destruction. They had suffered generations of destruction. They had been through banishment and disappointment. However, they had learned to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

That is the circumstances which Isaiah was addressing when he spoke the word of the Lord recorded in chapter 65. It was a word of hope. God is about to do a new thing! God would make a new heaven and a new earth. The devastation of the past would be forgotten because of the vastness of this new creation.

In the past people would spend time building a life and a community only to see it devastated. Now that would no longer happen. People could build and grow and not fear destruction and devastation. Jerusalem was a pile of rubble, but God would make it great again. There was violence and injustice, and there would be again, but God would bring an end to it. Crying would no longer be heard in the streets.

The completeness of this transformation even extended to the natural world. The wolf and the lamb would eat together, and even the lion would eat straw like the ox. There would no longer be violence and bloodshed. Jerusalem and all God's children, even the animals, would live in peace.

The temple in Jerusalem was built to be grander than before. By the time of Jesus it was one of the wonders of the world, but they were still occupied and had been for centuries. The occupiers of their day were the Romans. The Romans barely tolerated their religion, and they were often on the edge of having the Romans crack down on them.

One day Jesus and his disciples were in the Jerusalem Temple. The disciples were commenting on how beautiful and wonderful the Temple was. Perhaps they thought, now that Jesus the messiah was with them, the rest of the prophesy would come to pass. Jerusalem would be free again and the wolf and the lamb would lie down together.

Yet, Jesus said, "The day will come when not one stone will be left on another. They will all be torn down." A few decades later the Romans destroyed the temple and it has not been rebuilt since. For the last 2,000 years there have been wars and rumors of wars. False prophets and messiahs have arisen. There have been famines and plagues and earthquakes ever since.

So where is the vision of hope? It is the same place it has always been. It is in the God that created the heavens and the earth. The same God who will create a new heaven and a new earth.

There is a passage at the end of the book of Revelation, in the closing chapter of the Bible, where John sees a new heaven and a new earth. John was one of the early disciples of Jesus who was in prison on account of the word of God. It was a time when the Romans were imprisoning and killing Jews and Christians. Like Isaiah speaking to the children of Israel, John was telling the early church that God would recreate this world and do away with all the evil in it.

This vision of hope has bolstered the faith of the church for millennia. It has strengthened us with the knowledge that the sovereign God of the universe is in charge. No matter how bad things get, in the end, justice will win. As one modern day prophet said, "The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

So what do we do with this vision of hope in our day? Put your faith in the God that gave us this vision. Look for that day when there is an end to injustice, and people can live in peace. A day when our sword is turned into plowshare and our spears into pruning hooks. When nation will not lift up sword against nation and we will learn war no more. When even the wolves of our age will eat with the lambs instead of eating the lambs.

It may be many more millennia before this vision of justice and peace comes to pass. In the meantime, it can give us hope and strength to live with this vision in mind. It can guide us to seek justice and love mercy and walk humbly with our God. It can bolster us to stand up to injustice in the here and now. It can help us be peacemakers in a world of violence and war.

Take this vision of hope and live it. Then your actions and attitudes will bring just a little of it into fruition. Let the assurance that God the Almighty will bring an age of peace about inspire you. Then God can use you to inspire others. By the power of God Almighty there will be an age of peace and justice!