

The oracles concerning of the nations have spoken of God’s judgment against the nations – but also of his purposes in bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 24-27 concludes the third section of the first part of Isaiah’s prophecy.

Chapters 1-5 set up the problem of the sin of Judah and Jerusalem, and the warning of the coming judgment.

Chapters 6-12 spoke of the terminally ill house of David.

King Uzziah had died, which was symbolic of the future of the Davidic line.

Yet Isaiah also promises that from the stump of Jesse a branch will spring.

The Davidic line will yet prevail.

Now in chapters 13-27 Isaiah has cast his net broadly over the nations, showing how every nation—from the mighty Assyria to the lowly yet proud Moab—will be cast down and swept away by the broom of destruction in the hand of the Holy One of Israel.

Ten oracles in chapters 13-23 set forth the judgment of God against the nations, yet also held out hope that the nations would repent and be brought into the house of God.

Now in chapters 24-27 Isaiah reminds his hearers that in all history, there are but two cities: the city of man and the city of God.

24:1-13 The Lord’s harvest (Israel’s sin as the reason for judgment)

24:14-16 The song of the remnant

24:16-20 The earth overthrown

24:21-23 The earth waiting for judgment

25:1-5 The song of the ruined city

25:6-12 Mount Zion

26:1-6 The song of the strong city

26:7-21 The people of God waiting for deliverance

27:1 Leviathan overthrown

27:2-6 The song of the remnant

27:7-13 The Lord’s harvest (Israel’s atonement as the reason for blessing)

(From J. Alec Motyer, [The Prophecy of Isaiah](#), pages 194-195)

We heard last time how 24:10 spoke of the “wasted city” the city of “tohu”-- a reference to Genesis 1:2 where the earth was barren and empty (formless and void)

The city of man has been returned to its primeval state of chaos.

All that is left for the city of man is destruction.

And while Isaiah speaks of this in terms of the nations,

he also uses language that suggests that Jerusalem is no better.

And yet, at the end of chapter 25 Isaiah promises that Yahweh of hosts will make a feast for all peoples on “this mountain.” (25:6)
This promise forms the heart of chapters 24-27.
And while chapters 24-25 focused on the destruction of the city of man, now chapters 26-27 focus on the establishment of the city of God.

The first thing to notice is that the city of God is established in the same day of the Lord, when the city of man is destroyed. We are still talking about judgment and destruction. But in chapters 24-25, the city is laid waste. In chapters 26-27, the city stands firm. Both the judgment of the city of man, and the stability of the city of God are the fruits of the Day of the Lord.”

The language of “In that day” is used four times in these two chapters, signaling the coming of the Day of the LORD.

1. The Song of the Strong City (26:1-6)

First we hear the song of the strong city in verses 1-6.

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

“We have a strong city;

*he sets up salvation
as walls and bulwarks.*

² *Open the gates,
that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.*

³ *You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.*

⁴ *Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.*

⁵ *For he has humbled
the inhabitants of the height,
the lofty city.*

*He lays it low, lays it low to the ground,
casts it to the dust.*

⁶ *The foot tramples it,
the feet of the poor,
the steps of the needy.”*

This contrasts with the destruction of the fortified city in 25:1-5.

Indeed, in 25:1-5 Isaiah had already spoken of Yahweh as “a stronghold to the poor.”

He is the one who destroys the fortified city;

He is the one who is himself a strong city for those in distress.

And the city of God here in chapter 26 is not especially identified with Jerusalem.
Because again God has “humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city.
He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust.”
This is the description of what God will do to Moab at the end of chapter 25.
Now it is used in contrast to what God will do for his people.
He is the everlasting rock,
and those whose minds are stayed on him, he will keep in perfect peace.

What does “perfect peace” look like?
Think of how Paul says it:
“Let the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”? (Phil 4:7)
Paul is building off of Isaiah.
A perfect peace – a peace that passes understanding –
is a peace that exists even in the midst of chaos.

Listen to this:
“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.”
The city of God – the righteous nation – is that people whose mind rests in God.
The last year has been a mess!
The last year has been a chaotic, tumultuous time in the city of man!
And yet we have had peace!
Why?

Because you have trusted God! (and thus loved one another!)
The city of God has remained at peace
in spite of all the assaults of the devil!

2. The People of God – Waiting for Deliverance (26:7-21)

Verses 7-21 then speak of the people of God waiting for deliverance.

⁷ *The path of the righteous is level;
you make level the way of the righteous.*
⁸ *In the path of your judgments,
O LORD, we wait for you;
your name and remembrance
are the desire of our soul.*
⁹ *My soul yearns for you in the night;
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*
¹⁰ *If favor is shown to the wicked,*

*he does not learn righteousness;
 in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
 and does not see the majesty of the LORD.*
¹¹ *O LORD, your hand is lifted up,
 but they do not see it.
 Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
 Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.*
¹² *O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
 for you have indeed done for us all our works.*
¹³ *O LORD our God,
 other lords besides you have ruled over us,
 but your name alone we bring to remembrance.*
¹⁴ *They are dead, they will not live;
 they are shades, they will not arise;
 to that end you have visited them with destruction
 and wiped out all remembrance of them.*
¹⁵ *But you have increased the nation, O LORD,
 you have increased the nation; you are glorified;
 you have enlarged all the borders of the land.*

This contrasts with the prisoners waiting for judgment at the end of chapter 24.
 The kings of the earth of 24:21 are also echoed here in verses 13-14. (Read)

¹³ *O LORD our God,
 other lords besides you have ruled over us,
 but your name alone we bring to remembrance.*
¹⁴ *They are dead, they will not live;
 they are shades, they will not arise;*

Even as the rulers of the city of man wait for judgment in the land of the dead,
 the people of God wait for deliverance in the land of the living.
 The path of the righteous is level, Isaiah says, because it is the path of God's judgments.
 "My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you."
 Why do the righteous yearn for God?
 Because when his judgments are in the earth,
 the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

All of you who are parents know the next line:
 "If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness."
 How often have you let your children get away with something,
 thinking—it was only one time—I'll let it slide—
 only to have them do it again on purpose!
 Mercy, by itself, does not teach righteousness.

Because the wicked do not see the majesty of the LORD.
Indeed, even when the hand of Yahweh is lifted up, “they do not see it.”
And so Isaiah cries out, “Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.”
God has purposed to destroy his enemies and deliver his people.
But Isaiah is pointing out that not all of Israel is Israel.
The fire intended for his adversaries will fall upon the wicked in Israel as well.

But then Isaiah speaks of the mercy that does teach righteousness.
With Zion in ruins—returned to the tohu of the unformed creation—
Isaiah says that the LORD is the one who ordains peace for us;
“You have done for us all our works.” (24:12)
Judah and Jerusalem have failed and fallen,
but Yahweh himself has accomplished their salvation.
Isaiah will later return to this theme in Isaiah 59,
which speaks of the futility of human efforts for salvation,
and the necessity of God’s work in salvation.

Isaiah has been emphasizing the judgment that comes upon the Jew first,
but also to the nations.
Only God can save.
Only he can ordain peace for his people.

Other lords have ruled the people of God (v13).
Who are these other lords?
I would suggest that Isaiah is referring to *faithless* sons of David.
A faithless son of David was no better than Ahab,
And Ahab’s name was wiped out of all remembrance.
His descendants were visited with destruction.
Just as Jerusalem had become the city of man,
so also the house of David had become like the kings of the earth.
In spite of the failure of the kings, however,
Yahweh has increased the nation and enlarged the borders of the land.
Isaiah describes the City of God as a woman in labor (v17)

¹⁶ *O LORD, in distress they sought you;
they poured out a whispered prayer
when your discipline was upon them.*

¹⁷ *Like a pregnant woman
who writhes and cries out in her pangs
when she is near to giving birth,*

so were we because of you, O LORD;

¹⁸ *we were pregnant, we writhed,
but we have given birth to wind.*

*We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth,
and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.
19 Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead.*

Why are the people of God in such pain?
“Because of you, O LORD.
We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind.”

Just imagine!
And you mothers – you can truly understand how awful this is!

Imagine going through all the agony of childbirth –
all the pains of labor –
and at the end as you are pushing, pushing, pushing...

you fart.

And that’s it.
You give birth to wind.
You pass gas.

There is no baby.

The city of God was to give birth to many children,
bringing the salvation of God in all the earth.

But instead, “We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth,
and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.”
Israel has brought neither justice nor peace.

In spite of their failure, yet Isaiah declares that
“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” (26:19)
The people of God have given birth to wind–
all the agony of labor–only to pass gas!
But God’s purpose is to bring life to the dead.
The earth itself will give birth to the dead.

*20 Come, my people, enter your chambers,
and shut your doors behind you;*

*hide yourselves for a little while
until the fury has passed by.
21 For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place
to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,
and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it,
and will no more cover its slain.*

Israel will not be the agent of God's judgment upon the nations.

Israel must hide in their inmost chambers and wait until the fury of the LORD passes by.

Yahweh is coming—he himself will arise—and

“punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,
and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it,
and will no more cover its slain.” (26:21)

3. The LORD Will Slay the Dragon (27:1)

The sovereignty of God in salvation is nowhere more clearly stated than in 27:1

27 In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

Because here is the problem.

Zion was overmatched.

The problem was not merely that the nations were opposed to Israel.

The nations were fueled by the power of Leviathan.

In ANE mythology, Leviathan (or Lotan)

was a fierce sea serpent who fought against the gods.

He makes his appearance from time to time in the scriptures,
fulfilling different purposes.

Genesis 1 speaks of the great sea monsters as creatures made by the hand of God.

There is no conflict at the creation.

God is the sovereign creator.

Job 41 speaks of Leviathan as a mighty sea monster,

far too strong for any man to tame;

but he is but the servant of God, who does Yahweh's bidding.

Here, however, Leviathan is portrayed as an enemy of God.

Like in Genesis 3 where the serpent is to be understood as a manifestation of the devil,

so also here, Leviathan is seen as the malevolent power of the evil one

in the heart of the nations.

The reason why Israel never succeeded at overthrowing the nations

and establishing the kingdom of God

was in part because the nations were ruled by a power beyond their control.

Leviathan, the dragon that dwells in the sea, is the power behind the city of man.

The sea is frequently used to refer to the nations.
Remember in 17:12-13 how Isaiah referred to the coming of the nations as
“the thunder of many peoples;
they thunder like the thundering of the sea!”
“They roar like the roaring of mighty waters.”

Now we understand why the nations are like the sea.
Because Leviathan is in their midst.

The ruler of this world pours his hate and fury into the nations,
and they do his bidding.

When Paul says that our battle is not against flesh and blood,
but against the principalities and powers,
he is drawing on Isaiah.

There is very little in the NT that does not have its foreshadowing in the OT!

But in the day of the LORD, when God casts down every mighty nation,
he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

(Remember in Revelation 12 the dragon who pursued the woman
stood on the shore of the sea, and a beast arose out of the sea to do its bidding?
Revelation is merely drawing on the images of Isaiah)

God has promised that he will slay Leviathan.
Salvation will indeed come to his people—
but they will not be able to accomplish it themselves.
Only God can save.
Only he can deliver his people from Leviathan.

4. The Song of the Pleasant Vineyard (27:2-6)

Then in verses 2-6 of Isaiah 27, we hear of the song of the pleasant vineyard.

² *In that day,*

“A pleasant vineyard,^[a] sing of it!

³ *I, the LORD, am its keeper;
every moment I water it.*

*Lest anyone punish it,
I keep it night and day;*

⁴ *I have no wrath.*

Would that I had thorns and briers to battle!

*I would march against them,
I would burn them up together.*

⁵ *Or let them lay hold of my protection,
let them make peace with me,
let them make peace with me.”*

⁶ *In days to come^[b] Jacob shall take root,
Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots*

and fill the whole world with fruit.

Isaiah 5 contains the song of the vineyard—the pleasant vineyard that produced stink fruit.

Now Isaiah 27 returns to the theme of the pleasant vineyard.

As 24:14-16 spoke of the song of joy of the remnant in the midst of destruction,
so now 27:2-6 speaks of the growth of the remnant and its future triumph.

In that day—when God overthrows Leviathan—then the vineyard, the people of God,
will once again flourish.

And only then will Jacob take root, and Israel blossom
and fill the whole world with its fruit.

Only when Leviathan is overthrown will the gospel go forth to the ends of the earth.

And this is what happened in Revelation 12 – when the dragon was thrown down!

In the ascension of Jesus, Leviathan has been defeated!

Isaiah 24 started with the idea that

Israel's sin was the reason for the judgment of the earth.

Now at the end of Isaiah 27 we discover that

Israel's atonement is the reason for the blessing of the earth.

We are back to the imagery of gleaning and harvest,
desolation and exile.

But now with an eschatological focus.

What was the purpose of God's judgment against Israel?

5. The Atonement for Jacob Will Bring Salvation to the Nations (27:7-13)

⁷ *Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?*

Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?

⁸ *Measure by measure,^[e] by exile you contended with them;*

he removed them with his fierce breath^[d] in the day of the east wind.

⁹ *Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for,*

and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin:^[e]

when he makes all the stones of the altars

like chalkstones crushed to pieces,

no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.

¹⁰ *For the fortified city is solitary,*

a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness;

there the calf grazes;

there it lies down and strips its branches.

¹¹ *When its boughs are dry, they are broken;*

women come and make a fire of them.

For this is a people without discernment;

therefore he who made them will not have compassion on them;

he who formed them will show them no favor.

12 In that day from the river Euphrates^[1] to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel. 13 And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

“Has he struck them as he struck those that struck them?”

Has God treated Israel like the rest of the nations?

God has blown them away by the breath of his mouth (wind or spirit),
in the day of the east wind.

Why is the east wind important?

The east wind blows off the desert.

It never brings rain.

It is hot and dry—a scorching wind that brings drought and death.

But through this judgment that falls upon Jacob,

his guilt will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin:
when he finally destroys idolatry from his midst and worships only the true God.

Jerusalem—the fortified city—is forsaken and barren like the wilderness.

When Jerusalem becomes the city of man,
then God’s judgment falls upon the city of man,
and they will be left desolate and alone.

But in that day, the very act of bringing judgment against his people
will also bring salvation to the exiles.

From the Euphrates to the “brook of Egypt”(the Nile), Yahweh will glean his people out
and bring them back.

The exiles will be restored.

The idea here is that the exiled Jews in Egypt and Assyria will be restored,
but in chapter 19 Isaiah made it clear
that Egypt and Assyria as a whole would be included as well.

Finally the city of God will be restored in Zion, and the nations will come to worship him.

This is what our God has done in Jesus Christ.

The day of the LORD has come.

Jesus has thrown down Leviathan and crushed the head of the serpent.

The nations are no longer in bondage to the devil,
but are now free to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has become the king of kings and the Lord of lords,
who rules over a kingdom not of this world,
in order that the nations might bow the knee to his sovereign will.

We are to live—as the church has always lived—as those for whom every foreign land is home,
and every homeland is foreign.

We have here no abiding city,
but yet we seek the welfare of the city where God has placed us.

We do not expect the city of man to abide by the standards of the city of God,
yet we live according to those righteous standards in the midst of the city of man,
and call the citizens of the earthly city to repentance.

As temporary citizens of the United States,
we vote according to a higher standard than the Constitution,
and we expect politicians who call themselves Christians to live by that standard as well.

When the Emperor Theodosius ordered the slaughter of the Thessalonians,
after they had murdered one of his leading generals,
Ambrose of Milan rebuked him for the murder of innocent people.
It would have been just to put to death those who were guilty of murdering the general,
but Theodosius's soldiers slaughtered 7,000 in Thessaloniki.
He could have blamed the result on poor communication,
or an overzealous local captain who went further than his orders.
But Theodosius acknowledged his own fault.

In one of his greatest sermons Ambrose preached on David's sin with Bathsheba
and the murder of Uriah from Psalm 51:
"David sinned, which is usual for kings.
But he repented, wept and groaned, which is unusual for them.
He confessed his fault and begged for mercy;
lying prone he cried out in misery, fasted, and prayed.
By expressing his grief, he transmitted his confession to all future generations.
A king was not ashamed to make a public confession,
something ordinary men hesitate to do!...
He sinned; it is a token of his condition;
He humbled himself; it is a token of his amendment.
His misdeed is the common lot, but his confession is his distinctive merit."

Now, it appears that Ambrose had already convinced Theodosius before the sermon,
but still after the sermon, Theodosius came forward and publicly repented of his sin.

Rulers often offer apologies for mistakes.
But how often do they repent?

How often do they *change* and turn away from their former ways?

The me-too movement has raised lots of questions for how we handle sexual abuse.

Often the attitude is that the abuser is simply an evil person who must be destroyed.
Of course, this raises the stakes for those who are accused!

But if the abuser is willing to humble himself and confess that he is guilty,
he would be as rare as David and Theodosius.
The irony in our world is that if a powerful person admits fault,
he would probably be forced to resign;
but if he denies it, he may get re-elected.
There is something perverse about a culture that forbids repentance and forgiveness.
But we live in a world that demands perfection.

It is hard for a citizen of the city of God to be a ruler in the city of man.
But a Christian ruler must live by the standards of the city of God wherever he is.

So also a Christian subject.
As we live as elect exiles in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,
we must live as those in whom the kingdom of God has come.
We must do justice.
We must love mercy.
We must treat others with the same covenant faithfulness that God has shown to us.

Or as Jesus put it,
we must love our neighbors as ourselves.
The city of God resides in our midst.
Let us live as citizens of that heavenly city, and thus be a blessing to the city of man,
bringing salvation to those who are perishing.