

Lesson 12 Isaiah 24-27 The Third Cycle: Two Cities in Contrast: Endurance through to Glory

Introduction

Motyer gives chapters 24-27 a long title, calling this section, “The Third Cycle: Two Cities In Contrast: Endurance Through To Glory.” He emphasizes each part of his title, and I find it helpful. He calls it “The Third Cycle,” connecting these chapters to the two cycles of oracles we just covered in 13-23. But he does not call this “The Third Cycle of Oracles.” So, he intentionally leaves off the word “oracle.” This section doesn’t use the word “oracle.” Still, we can discern a five-part division that parallels our previous two cycles.

The second part of the title, “Two Cities in Contrast,” recognizes the central theme of the whole section of the contrast between the city of chaos and the city of Zion. That is our driving image. We will see that the city of chaos is not a particular city, such as Babylon or Nineveh. Just as the lines were less clearly drawn in the second cycle as compared to the first cycle, the lines are even less concrete in this third cycle. The city of chaos is an abstract representation of all of human civilization. It is the city of man. We are not considering specific nations. The language of this sections wraps all peoples up into one whole. We are looking into the far future: to the end times at the final judgment of human civilization and the establishment of the eternal city of God. Two cities in contrast.

The third part of the title, “The Third Cycle: Two Cities In Contrast: Endurance Through To Glory,” emphasizes God’s redemptive purposes for those who trust Him. A remnant of His people Israel and a remnant of the peoples of the Earth will endure through to glory, to feast with God in His holy city.

I am using Motyer’s structure in this series, grouping together the three cycles of chapters 13-27 as one major section, which he titles “The Universal Kingdom.” None of the other commentaries I have group this section together with the oracles to the nations in 13-23. Just Motyer does that. But I did notice that most of the other commentaries suggest that connection in the titles they use when they break this up into two sections. They all give 13-23 a title having to do with judgment on the nations, and then give 24-27 a title indicating God’s victory.

For example, Knider titles 13-23 “*Messages For The Nations*,” and 24-27, “*God’s final victory*” (*New American Commentary*). Constable titles 13-23, “*Divine Judgments Over The Nations*,” and 24-27, “*Divine Victory Over The Nations*” (*netbible.org*). And Oswalt titles 13-23, “*God’s Judgment On The Nations*,” and 24-27, “*God’s Triumph Over The Nations*” (NICOT). Oswalt notes,

There is an emerging consensus that these chapters cannot be understood independently but must be understood in context with chs. 13–23, as indeed those chapters must be understood in context with these...[This section] sums up the great themes of the preceding segment and puts them in the most glorious settings. Like a finale, the chapters can be read by themselves, but their greatest contribution is made within the total piece.¹

So, Motyer seems to be on solid ground making the connection between our present section and the two previous cycles. When we move linearly down this current passage in 24-27, there is going to be a five-part division that parallels the five oracles of those two previous cycles. But I am going to hold off on looking at that parallel relationship across the three cycles until the beginning of our next lesson.

So, after setting all that up and arguing that there is a parallel, and that there are five sections, I am not going to look at that five-section structure. I am going to wait, because I find it more helpful to first recognize the chiastic structure of this present passage. When reading through these chapters linearly, just straight down the text, there seems to be a lot of jumping around between related ideas, from destruction to remnant, to song, back to destruction, and then another song. It is not easy to get a handle on what Isaiah is doing. But when we recognize the chiastic structure of the text, the well-balanced integrity of the whole passage falls nicely into place.

¹ J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chs 1-39*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986) 440-441.

I'll give you an overview of the chiastic structure and then discuss the text according to each chiastic pair. Remember that a chiastic structure is a type of inverted parallelism where the first section parallels the last section, the second section parallels the second to last section, and so on. And there may or may not be a central section.

There is a central section in this chiastic passage. Right at the center, the people of God feast with Him in Zion. That feast in Zion is going to be in 25:6-12. That is our central point, and also the hinge around which the two parallel halves of the chiasm swing. I have referred back several times to the image of Zion in chapter 2. That image includes a double pilgrimage. God has judged both the city of man and His own city of Jerusalem: present Jerusalem is under judgment. And as there are two judgments, there are also two remnants: a remnant of faithful Jews and a remnant of seeking Gentiles. And they are both streaming into Zion.

In this passage, the feast in Zion takes central place, and on either side we are going to see parallel descriptions of destruction and pilgrimage. The first half of the passage focuses on the peoples of the Earth. So, the Gentiles who are destroyed and making pilgrimage to Zion, and the second half of the passage focuses on God's people Israel, who are also destroyed and making pilgrimage to Zion.

The chiasm consists of five frames, which I will label A through E and A' through E'. F is our central point. It has no pair. Moving from the outermost frames into the center, A describes the Lord's harvest from a destroyed world, while A' describes the Lord's harvest from a destroyed people. Moving to the second frame, we have in B the song of the world remnant and in B' the song of the remnant of God's people; then C, the sinful world overthrown, and C', spiritual forces of evil overthrown; then D, the waiting world, and D', the waiting people of God. And finally, on either side of the central feast in Zion we have E, the song of the ruined city, and E', the song of the strong city. If you'd like a visual to help you see the structure, I have included a chart of the chiasm in the structure charts on the Isaiah resources page at observetheword.com. If you go there, download the pdf or the powerpoint and you can see the chiasm.

- A¹ - The Lord's Harvest From A Destroyed World (24:1-13)
 - Destruction (1-12)
 - Gleanings (13)
- B¹ - The Song Of The World Remnant (24:14-16a)
- C¹ - The Sinful World Overthrown (24:16b-20)
 - D¹ - The Waiting World (24:21-23)
 - E¹ - The Song Of The Ruined City (25:1-5)
 - F - MOUNT ZION (25:6-12)
 - E² - The Song Of The Strong City (26:1-6)
 - D² - The Waiting People Of God (26:7-21)
- C² - Spiritual Forces Of Evil Overthrown (27:1)
- B² - The Song Of The Remnant Of The People (27:2-6)
- A² - The Lord's Harvest From A Destroyed People (27:7-13)
 - Destruction (7-11)
 - Gleanings (12-13)²

This pattern will come into view better by addressing the text in pairs, so that's what we're going to do. This is different from my normal linear movement down through the text. We start with A, the beginning of the passage, and A', the end of the passage. So, we are starting with the beginning and the end. These two sections are titled, "The Lord's Harvest From A Destroyed World," and "The Lord's Harvest From A Destroyed People."

A and A' - The Lord's Harvest from a Destroyed World and the Lord's Harvest from a Destroyed People (24:1-13 and 27:7-13)

² J. A. Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 194-195.

Remember that the first element of each pair is always going to focus on the world of the Gentiles, and the second element of each pair is going to focus on God's people Israel. In both A and A' we begin with an image of destruction and end with an image of gleaning the remaining fruit after the harvest. The Lord's harvest from a destroyed world is in 24:1-13. The destruction is in verses 1-12, and the harvest is in verse 13. So, here we go, Isaiah 24:1-12.

A: The Lord's Harvest from a Destroyed World (24:1-13)

- ¹ Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants.
² And the people will be like the priest, the servant like his master, the maid like her mistress, the buyer like the seller, the lender like the borrower, the creditor like the debtor.
³ The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word.
⁴ The earth mourns *and* withers, the world fades *and* withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away.
⁵ The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant.
⁶ Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.
⁷ The new wine mourns, The vine decays, All the merry-hearted sigh.
⁸ The gaiety of tambourines ceases, The noise of revelers stops, The gaiety of the harp ceases.
⁹ They do not drink wine with song; Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.
¹⁰ The city of chaos is broken down; Every house is shut up so that none may enter.
¹¹ There is an outcry in the streets concerning the wine; All joy turns to gloom.
The gaiety of the earth is banished.
¹² Desolation is left in the city And the gate is battered to ruins.

The section begins, "Behold, the Lord lays the earth waste" and continues on with a description of devastation. No one holds any title over another, "the servant becomes like the master and the maid just like mistress," because there is no civilization left to establish difference. Everyone is laid low together. This is not one nation. It is the whole Earth, "The earth mourns and withers...the exalted people of the earth fade away." Verse 5 describes the Earth as polluted by the immoral behavior of its inhabitants. That image takes us back to the conquest of Canaan. The Amorites were given an extra 400 years before their moral pollution forced the land to spit them out (Genesis 15:16). Leviticus 18:24-28 warned the people of Israel that if they defiled the land, it would spew them out as well.

I do not think the reference to eternal covenant in verse 5 refers to the Mosaic covenant. I think the reference takes us further back, to the common grace covenant first established with Adam and then renewed through Noah and applying to all of his descendants. The Earth had become polluted by the immorality, injustice, and pride of humanity. So, God washed the land clean. Looking ahead to the end of time we do not see another flood, but we do see another judgment and for the same reason. Humankind has broken covenant with God through immorality, injustice, and pride. I think this breaking of statutes is breaking of the moral law that, in some sense, is in every human heart. As a result, "the city of chaos is broken down...desolation is left in the city and the gate is battered to ruins."

That's the destruction of humanity. And it is comprehensive but not absolute. It looks absolute. But verse 13 refers to a gleaning after the harvest of judgment.

- ¹³ For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples,
As the shaking of an olive tree, As the gleanings when the grape harvest is over.

There is a little bit of hope here. The devastation of human civilization will look like an olive orchard whose trees have all been shaken out, and a vineyard after the harvesters have finished their work. There is nothing left. Well, almost nothing. The harvester has left some olives and grapes to be gleaned. And that gleaning, those leftover olives and grapes, that is going to be our remnant.

A': The Lord's Harvest From A Destroyed People (27:7-13)

Moving to the end of our passage, 27:7-13 also depicts destruction followed by gleaning. But this destruction applies to God's people. Isaiah begins with a question, and it reminds me of Paul's question in Romans 11:11, "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall did they?" It's not quite the same question, but listen how it starts with a question. This is Isaiah 27:7-11.

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| <p>⁷ Like the striking of Him who has struck them,
has He struck them?</p> <p>⁸ You contended with them by banishing them,
by driving them away.</p> <p>⁹ Therefore through this Jacob's iniquity
will be forgiven;
When he makes all the altar stones</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>When Asherim and incense altars will not stand.</i></p> <p>¹⁰ For the fortified city is isolated,
There the calf will graze,</p> <p>¹¹ When its limbs are dry, they are broken off;
For they are not a people of discernment,
Therefore their Maker will not have compassion
on them.</p> | <p>Or like the slaughter of His slain,
have they been slain?</p> <p>With His fierce wind He has expelled <i>them</i>
on the day of the east wind.</p> <p>And this will be the full price of the pardoning
of his sin:
like pulverized chalk stones;</p> <p>A homestead forlorn and forsaken like the desert;
And there it will lie down and feed on its branches.</p> <p>Women come <i>and</i> make a fire with them,
And their Creator will not be gracious to them.</p> |
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Has God struck Israel? Has he slain His people? Not exactly. Though many fall in the judgment executed on Israel and Judah, the majority were exiled, banished. The earlier language from 24:5 said the people of the Earth were destroyed for filling it with moral pollution. The text here in verse 8 says, "with his fierce wind he has expelled them." Because of their immorality they are spit out of the land. The forgiveness, the pardoning of Jacob will come about after a cleansing of the land in which altar stones are pulverized. The Canaanite Asherim and incense altars must be torn down. And I don't think Isaiah goes on to explain how the forgiveness and pardon comes about. In fact, we are waiting really to get into that in our middle section of the book of Isaiah.

The fortified city here in 27:10 is most likely the same idea as the city of chaos in 24:10. Israel has been banished. But there is no security in the cultures to which they have been expelled. They may have been expelled to a fortified city, but the fortified city, the city of man, will also become forlorn and forsaken, like the ruins of a city in the desert. The city now hosts calves who come to graze on the branches of its trees. The calves strip branches off their bark. Women then break off the branches for firewood. All is dry and dead. This is a deserted city.

Why? Because they are not a people of discernment. Implied is man's arrogant rejection of God. They scoff at God's call. They insist on their own way. It is a futile choice. Polluted in heart and depraved of mind, the way mankind devises for himself leaves a trail of broken relationships and damaged souls. And they don't have the discernment to recognize the justice of God's punishment, or even to recognize the consequence of their own sin. So, they don't see the wholesomeness of God's way and they continue to steadfastly refuse Him. They have no discernment. So, we read in verse 11, "Therefore, their Maker will not have compassion on them. And their Creator will not be gracious to them." God, whose name is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger (Exodus 34:6), has brought wrath onto His people and then also onto the world city where they have been exiled, because they have turned their backs on His compassion. In wrath, He punishes, though in wrath He also intends that some may be saved. Maybe there will be some who get it, who get the devastation wrought by their own sin, that they have brought this wrath on themselves. Maybe there will be some who turn to believe. The gleaning of verses 12 and 13 envision a believing remnant.

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| <p>¹² In that day
the LORD will start <i>His</i> threshing</p> <p>and you will be gathered up</p> <p>¹³ It will come about also in that day
and those who were perishing in the land
of Assyria will come
and worship the LORD</p> | <p>from the flowing stream of the Euphrates
to the brook of Egypt,
one by one, O sons of Israel.
that a great trumpet will be blown,
and who were scattered in the land of Egypt
in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.</p> |
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The focus here is on the sons of Israel, scattered throughout from down south in Egypt to up north in Assyria. The people of God exiled among the city of man are called to make a pilgrimage back to the city of God.

B and B' - The Song Of The World Remnant and The Song Of The Remnant Of The People Of God (24:14–16a and 27:2–6)

Moving to the first inner frame of the passage B and B', we come to songs of the remnant, first the world remnant and then the remnant of God's people. This is B: The Song Of The World Remnant in 24:14-16a.

B: The Song Of The World Remnant (24:14–16a)

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| <p>¹⁴ They raise their voices, they shout for joy;</p> <p>¹⁵ Therefore glorify the LORD in the east,
In the coastlands of the sea.</p> <p>^{16a} From the ends of the earth</p> | <p>They cry out from the west concerning the
majesty of the LORD.
The name of the LORD, the God of Israel,
we hear songs, "Glory to the Righteous One,"</p> |
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"They" are the remnant that come from the gleaning that was left over after the destruction of the world. Robert Alter translates verse 14 this way, "It is they who shall raise their voice, sing gladly." "We have a glad song" contrasts in verse 11 where "there is an outcry in the streets concerning the wine; all joy turns to gloom." This joyful song may come from a small remnant, but it is still a global remnant. It sounds from east and west, "Glorify Yahweh, the God of Israel!" Verse 16 reminds me of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 when he tells the Apostles that they are going to be empowered by the Spirit to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. Isaiah writes in 16a, "From the ends of the earth we hear songs." This is the fulfillment of the ministry of the Apostles. They go out to gather the remnant. And that remnant is going to come in, singing "Glory to the Righteous One."

This is The Song Of The World Remnant. Now, let us consider The Song Of The Remnant Of The People Of God. B' is in 27:2-6.

B': The Song Of The Remnant Of The People Of God (27:2–6)

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| <p>² In that day,</p> <p>³ "I, the LORD, am its keeper;
So that no one will damage it,</p> <p>⁴ "I have no wrath.</p> <p><i>Then</i> I would step on them,</p> <p>⁵ "Or let him rely on My protection,</p> <p>⁶ In the days to come Jacob will take root,</p> | <p>"A vineyard of wine, sing of it!
I water it every moment.
I guard it night and day.
Should someone give Me briars <i>and</i> thorns
in battle,
I would burn them completely.
Let him make peace with Me,
Let him make peace with Me."
Israel will blossom and sprout,
And they will fill the whole world with fruit.</p> |
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Do you remember when we spoke of the vineyard, and God is the vinedresser, God is the keeper of the vineyard. Remember when that happened? This first verse delivers the imperative, "A vineyard of wine, sing of it!" The last line declares, "Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and sprout, and they will fill the whole world with fruit!" So, this song of the remnant is a song about a vineyard, and it's a fruitful vineyard. There is good wine, and it fills the world with fruit. It contrasts the vineyard

that came before. It was in chapter 5. It was the vineyard that produced stink-fruit. God cared for that vineyard, but finally gave up since there was no response to His grace. Here, God’s care for the vineyard, watering every moment, guarding day by day produces healthy vines. They take root and they grow, and they produce good fruit. In chapter 5, God’s wrath descends on Judah. God declares over this vineyard, “I have no wrath.” Instead, His anger turns against briars and thorns that try to infest His vineyard’s cultivated ground, but those who would rely on the protection of the Lord, those who would trust in Him, He says, “Let them make peace with me! Let them make peace with me!” and enjoy His care; to enjoy Him as the One who watches over and provides for His vineyard.

C and C’ - The Sinful World Overthrown and Spiritual Forces Of Evil Overthrown (24:16b–20 and 27:1)

So far, in the beginning and the end we encountered the destruction of the world and the destruction of Israel. Both of those destructions were followed by the gleaning of a remnant. That outer frame was followed by a first inner frame of paired songs sung by a remnant. In the next frame, C and C’, we return to judgment. In C, the sinful world is overthrown. Then in C’, the spiritual forces of evil are overthrown. First, the overthrow of the sinful world. This is 24:16b-20.

C: The Sinful World Overthrown (24:16b–20)

<p>^{16b} But I say, “Woe to me! Woe to me! Alas for me!</p> <p>¹⁷ Terror and pit and snare</p> <p>¹⁸ Then it will be that he who flees the report of disaster And he who climbs out of the pit For the windows above are opened,</p> <p>¹⁹ The earth is broken asunder,</p> <p>²⁰ The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard For its transgression is heavy upon it,</p>	<p>The treacherous deal treacherously, and the treacherous deal very treacherously.” Confront you, O inhabitant of the earth. will fall into the pit, will be caught in the snare; and the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is split through, The earth is shaken violently. And it totters like a shack, And it will fall, never to rise again.</p>
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Verse 18 gives us that narrative movement of the inhabitants of the Earth fleeing from the inevitable. “Terror and pit and snare...” And then we get, if you run and fall into a pit and even manage to climb out of the pit, you will be caught by the snare, like a rabbit in a trap. The Earth here is all human civilization. “It will fall, never to rise again.” God has triumphed.

C’: Spiritual Forces Of Evil Overthrown (27:1)

We move from the Earth to the heavenly places in C’: Spiritual forces of evil overthrown. This is 27:1.

<p>¹ In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, And He will kill the dragon who <i>lives</i> in the sea.</p>	<p>With His fierce and great and mighty sword, Even Leviathan the twisted serpent;</p>
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What is this? This is interesting. We should have already read 24:21 if we were going through it linearly, but since I am following the chiastic pairs from outside in, we haven’t yet. We will get to 24:21 in the next frame. There, we read of God’s punishment against hosts on high and kings of the Earth. So, we actually have already been set up for thinking of spiritual forces. And we have both of those in C and C’. First, the Earth falls, now the powers in the heavenly realms fall, referred to here as Leviathan. And that is a recognizable image in the ancient Near East.

According to Robert Alter, “The entire line invokes the Canaanite myth of Leviathan as the primordial sea monster that the weather god Baal must subdue in order for dry land, safe from the raging sea, to come into being.”³ So the separation of water from land requires this act of warfare in the heavenly realms. It’s a common element of creation myth in the ancient Near East, whether the names are Leviathan and Baal, or maybe you’ve heard of Tiamat and Marduk, whatever the name;

³ Robert Alter. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019) 1823.

Here is that reference to host of heaven and kings of Earth. Both will be punished, confined in a prison. The verset “and after many days they will be punished” does not necessarily mean that they will be punished many days after being confined to prison. If we are reading it linearly, that could work. I take it to be a restatement telling us something about the punishment. They will be punished. After many days, they will be punished, they will be thrown into prison. The restatement is adding the element of time. They will be punished, but not right away. After many days. I think that’s the way to take that.

Following that punishment, God will reveal Himself in glory on Mount Zion. My English translation does not catch what Isaiah emphasizes when he says, “the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed.” Isaiah did not use the normal words in Hebrew for Sun and Moon. He used poetic references. The Moon is “the white one,” and the Sun is “the hot one”. So, he is emphasizing in his references the brightness – “the white one” and “the hot one” – the brightness of the Sun and the Moon. And what are they embarrassed or ashamed of? They are embarrassed of how dim they look in comparison to the glory of the Lord shining from Jerusalem on Mount Zion. It’s a wonderful piece of poetry right there.

D’: - *The Waiting People Of God (26:7–21)*

So in this D, the powers of the world await punishment. In D’, the people of God wait for the glory of His presence. This passage is longer, 15 verses. Listen for the overall sense of the message as the faithful wait for the Lord to complete His work of judgment, to punish the powers of the Earth. This is 26:7-21.

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| <p>7 The way of the righteous is smooth;</p> <p>8 Indeed, <i>while following</i> the way of Your judgments,
O LORD,
Your name, even Your memory,</p> <p>9 At night my soul longs for You,
For when the earth experiences Your judgments</p> <p>10 <i>Though</i> the wicked is shown favor,
He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness,</p> <p>11 O LORD, Your hand is lifted up <i>yet</i>
They see <i>Your</i> zeal for the people and are put
to shame;</p> <p>12 LORD, You will establish peace for us,
13 O LORD our God, other masters besides You
have ruled us;</p> <p>14 The dead will not live,
Therefore You have punished and destroyed them,</p> <p>15 You have increased the nation, O LORD,
You have extended all the borders of the land.</p> <p>16 O LORD, they sought You in distress;
Your chastening was upon them.</p> <p>17 As the pregnant woman approaches <i>the time</i>
to give birth,</p> <p>18 We were pregnant, we writhed <i>in labor</i>, we gave
birth, as it seems, <i>only</i> to wind.</p> <p>19 Your dead will live; their corpses will rise.
For your dew <i>is as</i> the dew of the dawn,</p> <p>20 Come, my people, enter into your rooms</p> | <p>O Upright One, make the path of the righteous level.</p> <p>We have waited for You eagerly;</p> <p>is the desire of <i>our</i> souls.</p> <p>Indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently;
The inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.
He does not learn righteousness;
And does not preserve (should be perceive)
the majesty of the LORD.</p> <p>they do not see it.
Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.</p> <p>Since You have also performed for us all our works.
<i>But</i> through You alone we confess Your name.</p> <p>the departed spirits will not rise;
And You have wiped out all remembrance of them.</p> <p>You have increased the nation, You are glorified;</p> <p>They could only whisper a prayer,
Your chastening was upon them.</p> <p>She writhes <i>and</i> cries out in her labor pains,</p> <p>Thus were we before You, O LORD.</p> <p>We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth,
Nor were inhabitants of the world born.</p> <p>You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.</p> <p>And close your doors behind you;</p> |
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Hide for a little while	Until indignation runs <i>its</i> course.
²¹ For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place	To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
And the earth will reveal her bloodshed	And will no longer cover her slain.

God must punish wickedness. And we who are faithful must wait for it. It happens in God's timing, not in our timing. So, we know it's going to happen. They must wait for punishment. We must wait for justice.

There is much to notice here. I am going to mention just four things. First, this faithful remnant delights in God, saying, "You are the desire of our souls." Second, this faithful remnant acknowledges their dependence on God, "We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth... You have performed for us all our works." Third, they are promised that God will grant life. They gave birth to the wind, but they say of God, "Your dead will live... you who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy!" And fourth, patience is encouraged. "Hide for a little while... The Lord is about to come."

E and E' - The Song Of The Ruined City and The Song Of The Strong City (25:1-5 and 26:1-6)

We come now to the final inner frame before reaching the central point. And we encounter two more songs of exaltation. The first is the song of the ruin city and the second is the song of the strong city. So, this is E, the song of the ruined city, 25:1-5.

E: *The Song Of The Ruined City (25:1-5)*

¹ O LORD, You are my God; For You have worked wonders,	I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; Plans <i>formed</i> long ago, with perfect faithfulness.
² For You have made a city into a heap, A palace of strangers is a city no more,	A fortified city into a ruin; It will never be rebuilt.
³ Therefore a strong people will glorify You;	Cities of ruthless nations will revere You.
⁴ For You have been a defense for the helpless, A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat;	A defense for the needy in his distress, For the breath of the ruthless is like a <i>rain storm against</i> a wall.
⁵ Like heat in drought, You subdue the uproar of aliens; <i>like</i> heat by the shadow of a cloud,	the song of the ruthless is silenced.

When I read verse 2, "You have made a city a heap and a fortified city into a ruin," I am thinking of that theme through this whole passage of the destruction of the city of man. And I am reminded of a passage from the Greek general Xenophon. Xenophon wrote about coming upon ancient ruins of a massive city that was left uninhabited, millions of sunbaked bricks crumbling into dust. Xenophon had been hired to fight in a Persian civil war. The year was 400 BC. Being on the losing end, he and his 10,000 Greek soldiers fled back to Greece passing through Mesopotamia. On their way, they happened upon this vast, deserted city, only inhabited by scattered nomads and random villagers. But judging by the miles and miles of city wall, hundreds of thousands, possibly a million citizens had lived there once. It was quite a shocking sight to come upon in the wilderness. It's something you expect after a zombie apocalypse. The city was larger and as technologically advanced as anything Xenophon had seen in his travels from Persia to Athens, but he didn't know who built it and he didn't know it was there. He just happens on it.

He asked the natives who built the city. They said, "The Medes." But that is only because the memory of the Assyrian empire had been completely lost, even to those few who remained living right here, at the heart of that former empire. Barely 200 years on and nobody even remembers that they built this enormous city nor that they ruled a vast empire from this spot.

Xenophon was describing the ruins of Nineveh. He measured the base of the walls to be 50 feet wide and 50 feet high, just the base, 15 by 15 meters. And there was still another 100 feet, or 30 meters, of brick wall still standing on top of that base. There were homes, and temples, and palaces, and courts, and streets intact.

- ⁶ And the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *and* refined, aged wine. ⁷ And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ And it will be said in that day,
- “Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”
- ¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, And Moab will be trodden down in his place
As straw is trodden down in the water of a manure pile.
- ¹¹ And he will spread out his hands in the middle of it As a swimmer spreads out *his hands* to swim,
But *the Lord* will lay low his pride together with the trickery of his hands.
- ¹² The unassailable fortifications of your walls He will Lay low *and* cast to the ground, even to the dust.
bring down,

The feast is an image of joy and of relationship, sitting down together with God at a lavish meal. The wine is not just aged. It is aged and refined. I am reminded of the choice wine Jesus produced at the wedding He attended and of His later parables that depicted the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast. This is God inviting us to experience relationship with Him, and it's joyful and it's abundant.

The text says that God swallowed up the covering which is over all peoples. I assume that is the curse of death that hangs over us all. In earlier chapters, it was Sheol that swallowed up the dead. Here it is God who swallows up death. What a powerful reversal. New Testament authors pick up on Isaiah's language here. In 1 Corinthians 15:54, speaking of our imperishable, resurrected bodies, Paul quotes Isaiah declaring, "Death is swallowed up." Also in Revelation 21:4, describing the new Heaven and new Earth, John quotes Isaiah, assuring us, "[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The believer is the one who has waited for the promises of the Lord to be realized. Isaiah proclaims, "This is our God for whom we have waited that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited." As we enter into the feast, we will know that our waiting is over. Our hope is realized. So he says, "Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

The victory of God has two sides. It means peace and joy for those who have entered into the feast; and it means loss for the wicked who persisted in rebellion. In this passage, the faithful have entered in. Moab, like the older brother, chose to remain outside. Moab is not singled out as worse than any other rebellious nation. There is a literary connection, I mentioned this earlier, between the three cycles that we are going to look at in our next lesson. The oracle to Moab is going to be parallel to this passage. So, Moab gets to be the concrete example of those left outside the wedding feast by their arrogant refusal to enter into relationship with God.

And the image is shocking. God's hand rests on His mountain, the place where He feasts with the faithful. But His foot stamps Moab down into the latrine. After being cast into the manure, Moab, the epitome of self-reliant humanity, spreads out his hands in the middle of it to swim himself to safety. That is the image of man's self-sufficiency. And it is that very arrogant self-assurance that seals Moab's fate. He will not say, "Lord save me." God does not respect the cleverness of his hands and his futile attempts to try to swim through the manure. The fortifications of his own worldly achievements are going to crumble to dust. That is the city of man. It will be fully forgotten. Mankind, you cannot yourself! And yet, Moab will not be saved by another.

Two cities stand in contrast. The city of man and the city of God. The city of man will descend back into the primordial chaos, back to where the Spirit was hovering over the waters. It will be desolate and forgotten. But those who trust in the Lord wait faithfully for the completion of His purposes, and they will endure through to glory, and they will feast with Him in His city, a strong city of peace and light that has no end. That is the hope of your salvation. Let us rejoice and be glad in Him!