

# ISAIAH 23

Trust in the Lord Forever<sup>a</sup>  
(Isaiah 26:1-21)

Isaiah 26:1-21 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

## Judah's Song of Victory

**26** 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.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Open the gates,  
that the righteous nation which keeps faith  
may enter in.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thou dost keep him in perfect peace,  
whose mind is stayed on thee,  
because he trusts in thee.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Trust in the Lord for ever,  
for the Lord God  
is an everlasting rock.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For he has brought low  
the inhabitants of the height,  
the lofty city.  
He lays it low, lays it low to the ground,  
casts it to the dust.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The foot tramples it,  
the feet of the poor,  
the steps of the needy.”<sup>g</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The way of the righteous is level;  
thou dost make smooth the path of the righteous.<sup>h</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In the path of thy judgments,  
O Lord, we wait for thee;  
thy memorial name  
is the desire of our soul.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>9</sup> My soul yearns for thee in the night,  
my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee.

For when thy judgments are in the earth,  
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.<sup>j</sup>

<sup>10</sup> If favor is shown to the wicked,  
he does not learn righteousness;<sup>k</sup>  
in the land of uprightness he deals perversely  
and does not see the majesty of the Lord.

<sup>11</sup> O Lord, thy hand is lifted up,  
but they see it not.

Let them see thy zeal for thy people, and be ashamed.

Let the fire for thy adversaries consume them.<sup>l</sup>

<sup>12</sup> O Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us,  
thou hast wrought for us all our works.<sup>m</sup>

<sup>13</sup> O Lord our God,  
other lords besides thee have ruled over us,  
but thy name alone we acknowledge.<sup>n</sup>

<sup>14</sup>They are dead, they will not live;  
 they are shades, they will not arise;  
 to that end thou hast visited them with destruction  
 and wiped out all remembrance of them.<sup>o</sup>  
<sup>15</sup>But thou hast increased the nation, O Lord,  
 thou hast increased the nation; thou art glorified;  
 thou hast enlarged all the borders of the land.<sup>p</sup>  
<sup>16</sup>O Lord, in distress they sought thee,  
 they poured out a prayer  
 when thy chastening<sup>q</sup> was upon them.<sup>f</sup>  
<sup>17</sup>Like a woman with child,  
 who writhes and cries out in her pangs,  
 when she is near her time,  
 so were we because of thee, O Lord;<sup>s</sup>  
<sup>18</sup>we were with child, we writhed,  
 we have as it were brought forth wind.  
 We have wrought no deliverance in the earth,  
 and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.<sup>t</sup>  
<sup>19</sup>Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.  
 O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!  
 For thy dew is a dew of light,  
 and on the land of the shades thou wilt let it fall.<sup>u</sup>  
<sup>20</sup>Come, my people, enter your chambers,  
 and shut your doors behind you;  
 hide yourselves for a little while  
 until the wrath is past.<sup>v</sup>  
<sup>21</sup>For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place  
 to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,  
 and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her,  
 and will no more cover her slain.<sup>w</sup>

**Revised Standard Version (RSV)**

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<sup>a</sup> **Chapter 24** begins a four chapter oracle of judgment upon the whole earth, often called Isaiah's Apocalypse. Much of the imagery in these chapters will reappear in later apocalyptic literature, including Revelation. In the prior chapters Isaiah delivered prophecies first against Judah, then Israel, then the surrounding nations, and now, finally, to all of Mankind. These four chapters describe the last days when God will judge the whole earth and eliminate evil from the world. While Chapter 24 predicts judgment upon everyone, high and low, there are hints that some, a remnant, will be left after the tribulation. **In Chapter 25** the focus shifts to the time after God's judgement, with the surviving remnant from all the nations worshipping the God of Abraham in Jerusalem. The Chapter is primarily in the form of a victory song celebrating the destruction of the City of Chaos, Is 24:10, the worship of the God of Abraham by the Nations (Is 24:15), and a victory over pride and arrogance (24:21-22). The Song of the Redeemed continues in **Chapter 26**, describing particularly the resurrection of the dead. The song resembles the Hallel Psalms Ps 113-118 which consist of a series of blessings on the Lord and other praise psalms such as Psalms 48, 76, 84, 87 and 122. There

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is a weariness in the heart of every person of good will, a weariness of the World in its fallen state. It shows itself in a reluctance to read the newspaper or watch the news and see yet another story of murder, senseless violence, scandal or human failure. There is a longing in the hearts of these people of good will for something better that Isaiah expresses for us. It is a strong city, Jerusalem recreated, into which we, both Jew and Gentile, by the Grace of God through faith, can be welcomed. Much of the imagery found in the Messianic Writings (the New Testament) can be found in Isaiah. Isaiah is using the events of his time, the Assyrian conquests of the places around Jerusalem but leaving Jerusalem unconquered, as a way to describe what God's ultimate judgment will be like. It is the person of Jesus Christ who brings all this longing for a better world, and this imagery together in His own person.

<sup>b</sup> (1) Is 4:2, 12:1, 27:2; Is 14:31, 31:5-9, 33:5-6, 33:20-24; Is 60:18; Ps 87:1. This is the **Song of the Redeemed**. At the close of the celebration of the Jewish Seder it is often the custom to recite the **Hallel Psalms**, Ps 113-118. These are songs of praise to the Lord, but also carry with them a Messianic message. The Songs of celebration in Chapters 25-28 of Isaiah are similar in tone and look forward to the coming of Messiah. For us, however, we can celebrate that the Messiah has come and that his work of salvation, reconciliation and recreation has been completed, yet we also look forward to the culmination of that work when the Lord returns **"in that Day"**. The Lord will protect His people as strong walls protect a city. This **strong city** was strong by its very nature, and is in contrast with the City of Chaos of the prior chapter. This strong city was prepared for, and not by, the righteous because it was already there before the righteous are allowed in. The righteous who are allowed in are those who keep faith. This is analogous to Paul's doctrine that we are justified by grace through faith, and not by anything that we have done, Rm 3:21-4:25.

<sup>c</sup> (2) Is 60:11, 62:10; Is 2:1-2, 25:6, 45:25, 54:14-17, 58:8, 60:21, 61:3, 62:1-2; 1Ch 2:7; Rm 3:22. The phrase **"Open the gates"** is an element of processional psalms, Ps 24:7, 100:4, 118:19-20, There is a sense in which no nation, no person, can be righteous (Rm 3:9-20; Is 57:12, 64:6). Instead righteousness is attributed to God's people, the people who He chose, as a result of the suffering of the Lord's Righteous One, the Suffering Servant, Is 53:11. Isaiah is writing of the time, in that Day, when the followers of the Messiah form a Nation of Priests, 1Pt 2:9 [fulfilling the promise of Ex 19:6]. The Septuagint for verses 2-5 reads, "Open the gates, let the nation enter that keeps righteousness, and keeps truth,<sup>3</sup> supporting truth, and keeping peace; for on You, O Lord,<sup>4</sup> they have trusted with confidence forever, the great, eternal God;<sup>5</sup> who has humbled and brought down them that dwell on high; You shall cast down strong cities, and bring them to the ground."

<sup>d</sup> (3) Is 2:4, 9:6, 27:5, 30:15, 44:23, 52:7, 57:19, 66:12; Jn 14:27; Rm 5:1; Php 4:7. **"Perfect peace"** is literally "peace, peace" (שלום, *shalom* or *shalom*) and carries with it not only lack of conflict, but also wholeness, completeness, safety, health, prosperity and contentment (Jr 6:14, 8:11; Ezk 13:10).

<sup>e</sup> (4) Is 12:2, 50:10, 51:5; Is 17:10, 30:29, 44:8; Dt 32:4; Ps 62:7. The **"Everlasting Rock"** or literally "Rock of Ages". Isaiah is describing something to which he was looking forward, but which had not yet happened. But we are to trust in the Lord until that happens, Rm 5:5.

<sup>f</sup> (5) Is 25:12; Jb 40:11-13. The **strong city** is secure because the Lord has defeated all the enemies of the righteous.

<sup>g</sup> (6) Is 25:4, 28:3; Is 3:14-15, 11:4, 29:19. The **poor and needy** will trample the enemies, not because they are powerful enough to defeat them on their own, but because the Lord had already defeated them. Thus the poor and needy did not defeat the enemies, but did benefit by the Lord's actions.

<sup>h</sup> (7) Is 40:3-4, 57:2; 1Sm 2:9; Ps 25:4-5, 27:11, 37:23; Is 42:16, 52:12; Mt 24:8; Mk 13:8; Jn 16:20-22. There is a change from the plural "we" in verses 7 and 8, to "my" in verse 9 indicating that while there is a sense of salvation brought to a community, there is also a personal responsibility and relationship with God. There is a sense in which the way is not straight and level as we walk it, and thus our lives are not free of trouble and tragedy. God will walk with us and straighten the path as we walk it.

<sup>i</sup> (8) Is 51:4, 56:1; Is 12:4, 24:15, 25:1, 26:13; Ex 3:15; Ps 37:4. The Septuagint for verses 8-9 reads, "For the way of the Lord is judgment; we have hoped in Your name, and on the remembrance of You,<sup>9</sup> which our soul longs for; my spirit seeks You very early in the morning, O God, for Your commandments are a light on the earth; learn righteousness, you that dwell upon the earth."

<sup>j</sup> (9) Ps 42:1, 63:5-6, 77:2, 119:62; Is 50:10; Lk 6:12; 2Ch 33:12; Ps 63:1, 78:34; Mt 6:33; Is 55:6; Hos 5:15. The Hebrew for "judgements" of the Lord (מִשְׁפָּט, *mishpat*) could refer to the righteous walking in accordance with God's law, God's judgments themselves, or God allowing us to suffer the consequences of our disobedience. But in any case it represents an opportunity for the righteous to learn from God. God teaches mankind of God's nature and justice by (1) showing his judgments to mankind, (2) bringing blessing on both the righteous and the unrighteous, and (3) lifting up His hand against his people, but for all that the wicked are not grateful to God, and do not acknowledge Him as Lord, Rm 1:18-32. For this reason, and though in the end the wicked will know that God is God but will not follow Him, He will destroy the wicked.

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<sup>k</sup> (10) Is 22:12-13, 32:6-7; Ps 73:3-11; Hos 11:7; Jn 5:37-38. Even the unrighteous receive God's blessings in their lives, yet continue to do evil.

<sup>l</sup> (11) Is 44:9, 44:18; Mic 5:9; Is 5:12, 9:7, 37:32, 59:17; Ps 21:9; Is 5:24, 9:18-19, 10:17, 33:14, 66:15, 66:24; Hab 10:27. The Septuagint reads, "O Lord, Your arm is exalted, yet they knew it not; but when they know they shall be ashamed; jealously shall seize upon an untaught nation, and now fire shall devour the adversaries."

<sup>m</sup> (12) Is 9:7; Mic 5:5; Jn 15:5; Eph 2:10. There is a God-ordained peace for the righteous that will be provided to us, not because of anything that we ourselves do, but because of His grace. Even those good works that we do are ordained by God for us, Eph 2:10. The Septuagint reads, "O Lord our God, give us peace, for You have rendered to us all things."

<sup>n</sup> (13) Is 2:8, 10:5-11; 2Ki 16:3-4, 18:4-6; Is 2:20, 63:7; Ps 20:7. God's people have had to live under tyrants, Babylon, the Greeks, the Romans, Hitler and Stalin, yet there will come a Day in which God's people who keep faith will be saved. The Septuagint reads, "O Lord our God, take possession of us; O Lord, we know not any other beside You; we name Your name."

<sup>o</sup> (14) Dt 4:28; Ps 135:17; Is 8:19; Hab 2:19; Is 10:3, 39:18-19; Rv 20:5. Only the living can praise God, Ps 6:5, 30:9, 49:10-20. In the time of which Isaiah speaks, not only will the oppressors be destroyed, but all memory of them, and presumably their oppression of God's people, will have been wiped away with our tears, Is 25:8. The Septuagint for verses 14-15 reads, "But the dead shall not see life, neither shall physicians by any means raise them up; therefore You have brought wrath upon them, and slain them, and have taken away every male of them. Bring more evils upon them, O Lord; <sup>15</sup> bring more evils on the glorious ones of the earth."

<sup>p</sup> (15) Is 9:3; Is 33:17, 54:2-3. God, not human efforts, have increased the nation by the incorporation of faithful gentiles. And while this is the act of God, He has allowed us to participate through preaching and teaching, Rm 10:14-17.

<sup>q</sup> The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIIB (VI) 54 (1531) states, in part, "ISAIAH SAYS, 'THEY Poured OUT A WHISPERED PRAYER WHEN YOUR DISCIPLINE WAS UPON THEM', THAT IS, AFFLICTIONS ARE A DISCIPLINE BY WHICH GOD EXERCISES THE SAINTS. LIKEWISE, AFFLICTIONS ARE INFLICTED BECAUSE OF PRESENT SIN, SINCE IN THE SAINTS THEY PUT TO DEATH AND EXTINGUISH LUSTFUL DESIRES, SO THAT THEY MAY BE RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT, AS PAUL SAYS, 'THE BODY IS DEAD BECAUSE OF SIN.'"

<sup>r</sup> (16) Is 13:8, 37:1-4; Ps 18:6; Hos 5:15; Ps 77:3; Heb 12:5-11; Hos 13:13. The third person "they" in verse 16 becomes the first person "we" in verses 17-18 in which Isaiah says that their own efforts could not save God's people when they were afflicted. Instead, those efforts were like birth pangs that brought forth wind. The Septuagint reads, "Lord, in affliction I remembered You; Your chastening was to us with small affliction."

<sup>s</sup> (17) Is 13:8, 21:3; Jn 16:21; Mt 24:8; Mk 13:5-8; Rv 6:9-11; 12:2; Rm 8:22. The day of judgment is likened to birth pains or travail as in the anticipation of a new creation. The Septuagint reads, "And as a woman in labor draws near to be delivered, and cries out in her pain; so have we been to Your beloved."

<sup>t</sup> (18) Mic 4:10; Is 33:11, 59:4; Ps 17:14. In this case these birth pains will not bring forth new life. The Septuagint reads, "We have conceived, O Lord, because of Your fear, and have been in pain, and have brought forth the breath of Your salvation, which we have wrought upon the earth; we shall not fall, but all that dwell upon the land shall fall."

<sup>u</sup> (19) Is 25:8; Ps 16:10; Ezk 37:1-14; Dn 12:2, 12:13; Hos 13:13-14, 14:5, 6:2; Jb 19:25-27; Rv 20:12; Mt 11:5; 1Co 15:50-53; Eph 5:14; Php 3:21; Jb 19:26. Though the efforts of God's people were insufficient to bring salvation, God will bring life to the dead of the earth. We are promised a bodily resurrection together with eternal life with God. Looking at this passage, and others in the Hebrew Scriptures including Job, one of the oldest, if not the oldest book in the Cannon, it is impossible to say that the ancient Jews did not have an idea of the bodily Resurrection. The Septuagint reads, "The dead shall rise, and they that are in the tombs shall be raised, and they that are in the earth shall rejoice; for the dew from You is healing to them; but the land of the ungodly shall perish."

<sup>v</sup> (20) Ps 91:1-4; Ps 30:5, 57:1; Is 2:10, 54:7-8; Jb 14:13-15; Mt 6:6; 2Co 4:17; Is 10:5, 10:25, 13:5, 34:2, 66:14; Rm 11:25-12:1. The people of God are told to take shelter for a little while until the wrath of God has passed, just as the Israelites were told during the Passover as described in Exodus, Ex 12:22-23. In Revelation, a book written to people of Faith who are facing imminent persecution and death at the hands of the Roman authorities, the believers are told here to wait and trust in the Lord just as the martyrs found under the altar in Rv 6:9-11 are told to be patient for a little while for their vindication. There is a sense here in which both Heaven and Hell are retroactive. When the unfaithful reach Hell, they will look back and see that their life on earth, with its trials and isolation, were but a foretaste of what Hell would be like. And when the righteous reach Heaven, they

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will look back and see that during their trials on earth, the Messiah walked beside them, showing them a hint of what Heaven would be.

<sup>w</sup> **(21)** Mic 1:3; Jude 14; Is 13:11, 24:5, 30:12-14, 65:6-7; Jb 16:18; Lk 11:50; Mt 10:26; Lv 18:24-28; Rv 3:10, 6:10. There will be no place for the unrighteous to hide from God on the Day of Judgment because even the earth itself will disclose the evil that was done upon it. The Septuagint reads, “For behold, the Lord is bringing wrath from His holy place on those that dwell upon the earth; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall not cover her slain.”