

Praise for Deliverance

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 1:3–14
Background Scripture: Isaiah 25; Daniel 6:10–28

Isaiah 25:1–10a

1 O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; For thou hast done wonderful things; Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

2 For thou hast made of a city an heap; Of a defenced city a ruin: A palace of strangers to be no city; It shall never be built.

3 Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, The city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.

4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, A strength to the needy in his distress, A refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, When the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

5 Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, As the heat in a dry place; Even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: The branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

6 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

7 And he will destroy in this mountain The face of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death in victory; And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: For the LORD hath spoken it.

9 And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; We have waited for him, and he will save us: This is the LORD; we have waited for him, We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest.

Key Text

In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.—Isaiah 25:6

Worship in the Covenant Community

Unit 2: Songs of the Old Testament

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the historical context of Isaiah the man.
2. Connect Isaiah’s historical context to his specific assurances of God’s faithfulness.
3. Write a personal testimony to God’s faithfulness.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. When the Darkness Lifts
- B. Lesson Context

I. Praise the Lord (Isaiah 25:1–5)

- A. For His Judgments (vv. 1–3)
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- B. For His Mercy (vv. 4–5)
God’s Levee

II. The Lord Hosts a Banquet (Isaiah 25:6–8)

- A. Invitation to Dine (v. 6)
- B. Deliverance from Death (vv. 7–8)

III. Testify About Him (Isaiah 25:9–10a)

- A. What Will Be Said (v. 9)
- B. What Will Be Done (v. 10a)

Conclusion

- A. Living Gratefully in Hope

- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It
AhazAy-haz.

apocalypseuh-*pock*-uh-lips.

AramAir-um.

JothamJo-thum.

TyreTire.

UzziahUh-zye-uh.

Introduction

A. When the Darkness Lifts

At times, darkness overwhelms. It happens to all; no one is exempt. Whether that darkness comes in the form of grief, poverty, sickness, or national tragedy, believers cry out to God for deliverance.

When we experience God's rescue, we naturally ... do what? That's a crucial question because it will reveal the level of our spiritual maturity and devotion. There are affirmations of this in various places in the Bible. One New Testament example is Luke 17:17. One Old Testament example is found in today's text.

B. Lesson Context

Today's text comes from a section of Isaiah that is often called "The Isaiah Apocalypse" (chap. 24–27). This is because the scenes pictured are similar to the apocalyptic language (which is imagery describing the end of the world) found in the book of Revelation (compare Zechariah 9–14; Mark 13:24–27).

Isaiah became a prophet in the year King Uzziah of Judah died around 740 BC (Isaiah 6:1–10). By the time Isaiah appeared on the scene, the Israelites had been divided into two countries for almost 200 years: the northern kingdom of Israel

and the southern kingdom of Judah. The prophet had a long ministry of several decades in Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Isaiah's ministry began during a time of economic and military prosperity (Isaiah 2:7). But spiritual rot had set in (2:8), and it was only a matter of time before God intervened (2:9–4:1).

God's interventions took the form of oppression by foreign powers (Isaiah 7:20). One such oppression occurred during the reign of Ahaz of Judah (735–716 BC) when Aram (Syria) and the northern kingdom of Israel joined forces against Judah (2 Kings 16:1–10). Ahaz "saved" Judah by means of an unholy alliance with Assyria (16:7–9). That country eventually conquered northern Israel and exiled its inhabitants in 722 BC (17:6). The city of Jerusalem (in Judah) barely escaped the same fate in 701 BC (18:13–19:27). But that was only temporary. Jerusalem's reaction to that time of forthcoming darkness would reveal where the inhabitants' hearts actually lay (Jeremiah 7:1–8; compare Isaiah 42:20–25).

Isaiah not only served during difficult times, but he also foresaw them—not only for Judah, but for the idolatrous nations around her, such as Egypt, Edom, and Tyre (Isaiah 14:28–23:18). But while confrontation about sin was a critical part of the task of the prophets, that was not their only function; the prophets also provided hope. The situation looks utterly hopeless by the time the reader gets to Isaiah 24. That chapter's 23 verses are dire in their prediction of the devastation of the whole earth. The reason is given in Isaiah 24:5: "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." The utter holiness of God that is unmistakable in Isaiah 24 is followed by a message of God's love in Isaiah 25. It bears a message of hope—today's lesson.

I. Praise the Lord (Isaiah 25:1–5)

A. For His Judgments (vv. 1–3)

1. O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

Isaiah's response to the vision of devastation in chapter 24 was a prayer of *praise*. The prayer involves the prophet's use of two names for the same recipient: *Lord* and *God*. By adding the word *my*, the prophet leaves no doubt where his loyalties lie (compare Isaiah 40:27; 49:5; 61:10). The people of Judah were to have

a personal relationship with and loyalty to the only true God. He is not a fictitious regional god (1 Kings 20:28) but the God who reigns over the whole earth.

Isaiah's reflection on God's *wonderful things* echoes a key element of some psalms: pondering God's accomplished works as indicators of His identity and character (example: Psalm 77; contrast 78:9–20). But in this regard, there's a difference between the psalmist's recall of God's wonders and Isaiah's recall: the psalmist speaks of God's wonders that were tied to positive elements of His works and provisions, while Isaiah's praise was for the destruction God had wrought on sinful people and places. See the next verse.

What Do You Think?

What effects could you anticipate if you reminded yourself daily of the wonderful promises God has fulfilled?

Digging Deeper

What if that practice included reminding others of God's fulfilled promises?

2a. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city.

History witnesses to the arrogance of those who trust in earthly protections. It's not wrong to take steps to protect oneself or others from harm (example: Nehemiah 3). But reliance on such human efforts to the exclusion of God leads to arrogance and disaster (examples: 2 Samuel 5:6–8; Proverbs 18:10–11; Daniel 4:19–33).

As we read the verse before us, we may wonder which *city* Isaiah refers to. Jerusalem could be the reference, given its destruction in 586 BC (Isaiah 64:10–11), but mentioning a palace of strangers (foreigners) works against this. Similar language of destruction is used for Damascus (Isaiah 17:1; compare Amos 1:3–5; compare 2 Kings 25:8–10). Another candidate is Tyre (Isaiah 23; compare Ezekiel 26:4). Given the grammatical construction of the phrasings, the best answer is "none of the above, specifically." Instead, the prophet acknowledges God's power over every city anywhere. No matter how *defenced* (fortified) a city or location may be, it is not, nor ever will be, able to resist God's plans (Deuteronomy 3:4–6; 28:49–52). As the previous chapter of Isaiah 24 speaks of the entirety of the earth, so also does Isaiah 25 by considering God's sovereignty over all the earth's cities. In effect, the prophet uses the metaphor of a city for the whole earth.

2b. It shall never be built.

Destroyed cities and towns were often rebuilt. Ideal places for cities in the ancient world involved three criteria: (1) access to water, (2) access to one or more trade routes, and (3) defensibility. So a city that had been destroyed was subject to being rebuilt if those three criteria still held for a given location. For God to forbid a city ever being rebuilt indicates His extreme displeasure of what went on there (examples: Deuteronomy 13:12–18; Jeremiah 49:13). To ignore this prohibition was to invite the wrath of God anew (Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34).

Flipping the Script

See if you can identify what these four structures have in common: the Tower of Babel, the Reich Chancellery, Solomon's Temple, and the statue of Saddam Hussein that stood in Firdos Square. *Answer:* They are all no more—destroyed!

The Tower of Babel and its city were abandoned and left incomplete when the motive of the builders invited God's judgment (Genesis 11:1–9). The stunning Reich Chancellery, the seat of power of Hitler's Nazi regime in Berlin, was destroyed when the city fell to the Soviets in 1945. Solomon's Temple, built with holy motives, was destroyed because of eventual idolatry (Ezekiel 8). Hussein's statue was pulled down as his oppressive dictatorship was terminated by force.

Although those four destructions have one or more common themes, we take care not to equate them with one another too readily or glibly. There are differences and unknowns to acknowledge. One thread of commonality among scriptural destructions is that such acts of divine judgment are usually connected with the deliverance of God's people from harm or oppression. But sometimes, the script is flipped, as judgment comes upon God's people by the hands of God-sent oppressors (Isaiah 7:18–20).

As we live in this fallen world, we know that relief from ungodly oppression does not always happen on our preferred timetable. Even so, God is still looking for those who would speak His Word to unholy power structures (compare Isaiah 6:8; Ezekiel 22:30–31). How will you recognize God's call if or when it comes to you?

—C. S.

3. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.

In the older language of the King James Version, the word *terrible* refers to "something that strikes terror." The concept speaks of those who live by the

principle of “might makes right” (compare Isaiah 13:11). Such people have no regard for God (Psalms 54:3; 86:14).

The parallel between the first and second lines in verse 3 indicates *the strong people* and *the terrible nations* refer to the same group. That may make us wonder if repentance is the way they will *glorify* God. That’s a possibility (compare Jonah 3). Another possibility is that any respect they have for God is forced and grudgingly given (compare Revelation 6:15–17).

B. For His Mercy (vv. 4–5)

4–5. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

The opening word *for* ties the previous discussion of the oppressive nations to a recognition of God’s concern for *the poor* and *the needy*. When people groups neglect or abuse the most vulnerable, God comes to their defense. In that regard, Isaiah compares God to a *refuge from the storm* or a *shade from the heat* (compare Isaiah 14:30; contrast 30:2–3). A military image can be detected here because the word translated *strength* is also translated “fortress” elsewhere (Jeremiah 16:19; Daniel 11:7, 10).

A pithy description of how God acts is that He “comforts the disturbed” and “disturbs the comfortable.” What we just considered describes the former; what Isaiah prophesies next describes the latter. The phrase *Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers* is reflected more specifically in Jeremiah 51:55, where God is predicted to have “destroyed out of [Babylon] the great voice.” Loud noise is a characteristic of war and other conflicts (Psalms 46:6; 74:23; Isaiah 13:4). But no matter how much noise the enemies of God and His people make, the God of Israel can silence it with His voice (66:6).

What Do You Think?

In what ways does the church demonstrate God’s concern for the poor?

Digging Deeper

What roadblocks prevent your community from recognizing God’s concern for the poor?

God's Levee

Have you ever filled thousands of sandbags in a single day? I did—or at least it seemed as if I did. The Mississippi River was overflowing its banks, and the dikes that held the river at bay needed to be raised and strengthened. Living nearby, I volunteered to help. As the day ended, I was as tired as I had ever been! But our team may have saved dozens of homes.

Dikes and levees are used everywhere to protect areas from flooding. But human instruments are subject to failure, whereas God's protection is not. Neither is His wrath. We decide whether we shall avail ourselves of His protection from the floodwaters of sin or be objects of the oncoming flood of His wrath.

See the outcome of option 1 in Psalm 124:1–5 and Isaiah 66:12; for the danger of option 2, see Job 27:20 and Isaiah 28:2.

How do you know which side of God's levee you are on?

—C. S.

II. The Lord Hosts a Banquet (Isaiah 25:6–8)

A. Invitation to Dine (v. 6)

6a. And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things.

This mountain refers to God's holy mountain in Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13). The prophet locates a future banquet here as he uses that phrase a total of three times in 25:6, 7, 10). Beyond the devastation of the earth in Isaiah 24 and the judgment of the nations in Isaiah 25:1–5, Isaiah offers a hopeful vision because of what will happen on the mountain where Jerusalem is located. It is important to note that the forthcoming feast will be available *unto all people* (the word *people* is plural in the Hebrew text—people groups). The guest list for this feast is limitless (compare Luke 14:15–24; Revelation 19:19). No one is meant to be excluded, “on the outside looking in.”

What Do You Think?

How could or does your congregation benefit from interaction with Christians from different nationalities?

Digging Deeper

What challenges prevent deeper relationships in this area, and how can your congregation address those?

6b. A feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

This half-verse indicates the celebratory nature of the festival to come. The nature of the food and beverage indicates that this was not the regular diet of people who lived in Judah. Meat, which has bones *full of marrow*, was a rare delicacy, and *wine* was expensive and reserved for special occasions. These two are depicted together in a positive sense here and in Proverbs 9:1–2; they are depicted together in a negative sense in Proverbs 23:20 and Isaiah 22:12–13.

The phrase *wines on the lees* may sound strange to us. “The lees” refers to what is left over from the grapes after the initial stage of their pressing. Leaving wine on the lees strengthens its taste. Then when the wine is strained before consumption, what remains is wine of the highest quality. Clearly, God will serve only the best to those who attend this special feast (compare John 2:10). No shortcuts here!

This feast looks back to Exodus 24:1–11 where Israel ate and drank in the presence of God. They enjoyed a banquet where they saw God and experienced God’s saving presence on God’s holy mountain. This vision also looks forward to the messianic banquet in the age to come, where people will come from all over the earth to eat and drink in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:29).

B. Deliverance from Death (vv. 7–8)

7–8. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

The *mountain* on which God will host a feast is the same mountain on which He will destroy something. There is salvation, and there is destruction. This salvation is deliverance from death itself. Death covers *the face of* all people. Everyone wears this veil as a shroud. Everyone is appointed to die (Hebrews 9:27). No one escapes death.

The banquet, therefore, celebrates the death of death. God will destroy death, and His people will celebrate life; see Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 25:8 in 1 Corinthians 15:54. The apostle John, for his part, quotes Isaiah 25:8 twice:

Revelation 7:17; 21:4. In the new heaven and new earth, there will be no more death or pain, no more mourning, and no more tears. The foundation of the Christian's assurance in this regard is the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:12–28).

What Do You Think?

When considering death, do you tend to dwell on the certainty of God's work or the uncertainty of exactly what life after death will be like?

Digging Deeper

How does either approach allow you to share your hope in the Lord with others who may not know Him?

III. Testify About Him (Isaiah 25:9–10a)

A. What Will Be Said (v. 9)

9. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Isaiah 25 begins with the prophet's tribute of praise. Now the praise is on the lips of all who will come to the mountain of the Lord to share in the "wonderful things" to be provided there (Isaiah 25:1). Note the use of the pronouns *our*, *we* (thrice), and *us*. The language is similar to the often-sung words of Psalm 118:24: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

We should note that the Hebrew name Isaiah means "the Lord saves" or "the Lord is salvation." Given that the words *save* and *salvation* appear in this verse, also consider that the name *Jesus* means the same thing (Matthew 1:21). He is the one who has and will accomplish the wonders Isaiah described.

When banquet day arrives, no better words can be uttered than *This is our God!* The creator and ruler of life became its redeemer at the cross. Death held humanity in its grip until Christ accomplished His work; now Jesus holds "the keys to hell and death" (Revelation 1:18).

B. What Will Be Done (v. 10a)

10a. For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest.

The hand of the Lord is active throughout the Bible. Sometimes it is associated with blessing (Joshua 4:23, 24; Ezra 7:6; Luke 1:66; Acts 11:21); at other times, it is extended for discipline or punishment (Exodus 9:3; Judges 2:15; Ruth 1:13; 1 Samuel 5:6). Here, however, the focus is on the hand's being at *rest* (contrast Isaiah 5:25; 9:21; 11:15; 19:16; 23:11). When God's hand rests upon the land, it gives the land rest and protects it from all enemies, including death. God will rest after He ushers in His new creation—the new heaven and the new earth (65:17–25; Revelation 21–22). Before that rest occurs, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). When death is defeated for good at the return of Jesus, it will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14), never again to cause pain and tears.

What Do You Think?

Why is God's rest good news for people?

Digging Deeper

Can your own rest also be good for others? Explain.

Conclusion

A. Living Gratefully in Hope

Isaiah 25 provided a message of hope for God's covenant people. In response, a song of praise and victory was predicted to be sung by Judah in Isaiah 26. The message of today's lesson text was what assured that song. We mentioned in the Lesson Context that the section of Isaiah 24–27 has been called “The Isaiah Apocalypse”; the final and concluding work of this section is this: there will come a day when God gathers His people to worship Him in a place He has made holy.

People experience oppression in different ways and degrees. But everyone experiences death. We certainly should use godly methods and motivations to overcome oppression and injustice, as well as work for the sanctity of life. But as we do, we should remind ourselves that the complete presence of justice and absence of death in the life to come is what to focus on. It's coming! As we so focus, we experience and expect God's continuing faithfulness for our assured hope in ultimate deliverance.

One way to express this hope is to practice gratitude. We can do so in many ways. Some do so through music as they write and sing songs. Others do so via personal contact. Still others [you fill in the blank]. One of the simplest ways to express gratitude and become thankful, even during trials, is to create a gratitude

list daily, perhaps first thing in the morning or the last thing before bed. A daily gratitude list will remind you of God's many gifts. To name them is to offer thanks. Built into this naming is also an expectation of more good things from God, including the death of death. A gratitude list reorients our experience of the trial, recenters our faith, and expresses hope in the future.

As believers in Jesus, we anticipate and yearn for the messianic banquet hosted by Jesus in the presence of God (Matthew 26:29). As Israel shared in the blessings of God through the altar when they ate the sacrifices, so we share in the fellowship of body and blood of Jesus at the table when we eat and drink (1 Corinthians 10:14–17). It is a foretaste of the messianic banquet. When we eat and drink at the table of the Lord, we give thanks for the body and blood of the Lord. We also remember God's faithfulness and yearn for the death of death. We eat and drink, and we go out into the world to serve, comforted by hope (Acts 20:7–12).

B. Prayer

Father, we thank You for the promise of a banquet to celebrate Your faithfulness. Give us the desire and capacity to faithfully serve You in the present. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Gratefully wait for the fulfillment of the promised death of death.