

Session 24

Isaiah 26:1-19 | A Song in Judah: Peace, Waiting, and Resurrection

Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White

Isaiah 25 closed with Moab's proud fortress brought down to dust. Chapter 26 opens with a strong city whose defenses are God's salvation. The song is expressly located **"in the land of Judah"** and **"in that day."** Read within Isaiah 24-27, it anticipates the LORD's intervention and Israel's restoration under His reign. The righteous nation, its former masters, its chastening, and its resurrection hope belong first to that prophetic setting.

The passage moves from the security of the redeemed city (vv.1-6) into prayer about righteousness, judgment, and former rulers (vv.7-15), then recalls distress and failed deliverance before announcing that the dead will live (vv.16-19). Its shifts between **"we," "I,"** and **"they"** allow personal and corporate voices within the song. They do not require a different historical event for every paragraph. Verse 19 provides the session's climax; verse 20 begins a new address to God's people.

A. The strong city and the lofty city (vv.1-6)

- **Verse 1 - Judah sings of a city secured by God's salvation.** The location and time establish the setting for the promises that follow.
 - **"In that day"** carries forward the prophetic setting of 24:21-23 and 25:9. The LORD reigns in Zion, and those who waited for Him celebrate His salvation. This song gives Judah words for that deliverance.
 - **"We have a strong city"** contrasts with Moab's fallen fortress (25:12). Jerusalem is the natural identification within the surrounding references to Zion and Judah, although the city is not named in this verse.
- **"Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks"** makes divine deliverance the city's protection. A bulwark is an outer defensive work. The strength of this city rests in the LORD's saving action. Compare Isaiah 60:18, where the walls are called Salvation and the gates Praise.
- **Verse 2 - The gates open for the righteous nation that keeps the truth.** The song identifies who enters the secure city.
- **"The righteous nation"** is best read as restored, faithful Israel in this Judah-centered setting. Compare Isaiah 1:26, which promises that Jerusalem will again be called the city of righteousness. Israel's present failures do not cancel the

promise of a righteous people.

- **“Which keepeth the truth”** describes the nation’s fidelity. The verse supplies no formula by which an individual earns eternal salvation; it describes the character of the nation welcomed into the city.
- Psalm 118:19-20 likewise joins opened gates, righteousness, and entrance for the righteous. That parallel helps explain the song’s language without making every detail of the two passages identical.
- **Verse 3 - The LORD preserves the trusting person in perfect peace.** The corporate song includes the assurance of His care for the individual.
 - **“Thou wilt keep him”** places the keeping in God’s hands. **“Whose mind is stayed on thee”** describes a mind resting upon Him, and the final clause explains why: **“because he trusteth in thee.”** Peace is grounded in the One trusted.
 - **“Perfect peace”** describes the fullness of the peace God supplies. The following prayer still speaks of trouble and chastening (vv.16-18); trust can operate amid distress while looking toward the settled peace of His reign.
 - The principle gives a sound lesson about trusting God today. Its first setting remains Judah’s prophetic song. For direct instruction to believers in the present dispensation, compare Philippians 4:6-7, where prayer and thanksgiving accompany God’s peace keeping hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
- **Verse 4 - The song calls its hearers to enduring trust in the LORD.** The assurance of verse 3 becomes an exhortation.
 - **“Trust ye in the LORD for ever”** extends trust beyond an immediate emergency. The city’s salvation and the person’s peace rest upon the same enduring source.
 - **“In the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength”** identifies the

ground of confidence. Human defenses fail, but the LORD’s strength does not expire. Isaiah 12:2 similarly joins trust, salvation, and the name LORD JEHOVAH.

- **“LORD JEHOVAH” is an unusual doubling of the divine name.** The combination occurs only in Isaiah 12:2 and 26:4. The Hebrew is *Yah YHWH*, commonly transliterated *Yah Yahweh*; here the prefixed *be-* makes it *be-Yah Yahweh*, “in Yah, Yahweh.” *Yah* (KJV “JAH” in Psalm 68:4) is the shortened form of the name, while *YHWH* is its full four-consonant form, traditionally rendered “JEHOVAH” in these KJV passages. Thus “LORD” here represents *Yah*, rather than the usual full *YHWH*. The short and full forms name the same God; their pairing gives emphatic force to the confession. Both occurrences connect His name with trust, strength, and salvation. See Psalm 68:4, where the shortened form is printed as “JAH”, the only place in the KJV where this happens.
- **Verse 5 - The LORD brings the lofty city down to dust.** The reason for trust includes His power to overthrow proud opposition.
 - **“Them that dwell on high”** and **“the lofty city”** present elevation as apparent security. The repeated language of laying low, ground, and dust recalls the descent of Moab’s fortress in 25:12.
 - The city is unnamed. The connection with Moab is clear in the imagery, but the verse does not independently identify this city as Moab, Babylon, or another specific capital. Its pride and its overthrow are the stated emphasis.
- **Verse 6 - The poor and needy tread the fallen city.** The reversal is complete when those formerly vulnerable walk over the proud stronghold.
 - **“The feet of the poor”** and **“the steps of the needy”** recall the people for whom

the LORD was strength and refuge in 25:4. The oppressors' height gives way to the footsteps of those they could once threaten.

- God brings the city down in verse 5; the

needy tread it in verse 6. Their triumph depends upon His intervention. The song celebrates deliverance for those who could not secure it by their own power.

B. Waiting for the LORD amid judgment (vv.7-11)

- **Verse 7 - The prayer joins the just person's path to the uprightness of God.** The song turns from describing the cities to addressing the LORD.
 - **"The way of the just is uprightness"** introduces the path theme continued in verse 8. The righteous walk in a way consistent with the God to whom they pray.
 - **"Thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just"** acknowledges God's righteous oversight. The just person's course is before Him; His judgment of it can be trusted.
- **Verse 8 - The faithful wait for the LORD in the way of His judgments.** Their desire is directed toward Him even while judgment unfolds.
 - **"Have we waited for thee"** recalls the twice-repeated waiting in 25:9. The song speaks for a people whose hope is the LORD's promised intervention.
 - **"The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee"** expresses attachment to God's revealed character and recognition of Him. His people desire that He be remembered and acknowledged.
- **Verse 9 - Personal longing accompanies confidence that God's judgments teach righteousness.** The corporate voice becomes a personal confession.
 - **"With my soul"** and **"with my spirit within me"** describe inward desire. Seeking in the night and seeking early portray sustained dependence, extending beyond a public profession of trust.
- **"When thy judgments are in the earth"** reaches beyond Judah to the world's inhabitants. God's intervention exposes the true character of evil and demonstrates His righteous rule.
- **"Will learn righteousness"** must be read with verses 10-11. Judgment makes righteousness known, but Isaiah also describes people who persist in wickedness and refuse to see. The statement does not establish universal conversion.
- **Verse 10 - Favor alone does not reform the determined wicked person.** The prayer exposes rebellion even under favorable conditions.
 - **"Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness"** contrasts opportunity with response. Kind treatment does not guarantee a righteous heart.
 - **"In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly"** shows that a righteous environment does not compel righteous conduct. **"Will not behold the majesty of the LORD"** identifies the refusal beneath the injustice.
 - In the wider prophetic setting, this is consistent with rebellion remaining possible under righteous rule. Revelation 20:7-9 later describes rebellion after the thousand years. Isaiah's verse supplies the moral principle, while Revelation supplies that particular event and timetable.
- **Verse 11 - Those who refuse to see God's hand will face undeniable judgment.** The contrast between refusal and recognition intensifies.

- **“When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see”** depicts resistance to His displayed power. The problem is refusal to acknowledge Him.
- **“But they shall see”** announces that their refusal cannot prevent His action. The KJV connects their shame with **“their envy at the people.”** Their hostility

toward God’s people becomes a cause of humiliation.

- **“The fire of thine enemies shall devour them”** speaks of destructive judgment upon the enemies. Forced recognition of God’s action does not itself mean repentance or salvation.

C. Peace, former masters, and the increased nation (vv.12-15)

- **Verse 12 - The people confess that their peace and achievements depend upon the LORD.** The prayer returns to confidence in His work.
 - **“Thou wilt ordain peace for us”** brings the peace of verse 3 into the corporate prayer. The people expect the LORD to establish what they cannot produce for themselves.
 - **“Thou also hast wrought all our works in us”** acknowledges His agency in what they have accomplished. In this national song, deliverance and restoration provide the governing context. The confession is not an excuse for inactivity; it assigns the glory to God.
- **Verse 13 - Former rulers are remembered, but allegiance belongs to the LORD.** The nation’s prayer names its experience of subjection.
 - **“Other lords beside thee have had dominion over us”** naturally recalls foreign masters who ruled over Israel. The verse does not name them. The language can carry the broader sorrow of misplaced allegiance, but political subjection is plainly suited to the nation’s experience.
 - **“By thee only will we make mention of thy name”** confesses dependence upon the LORD and commitment to acknowledging Him. Their former masters have no rightful claim to the devotion expressed in this song.
- **Verse 14 - The destroyed masters will**

not recover their former dominion. The pronoun points back to the other lords of verse 13.

- **“They are dead, they shall not live”** and **“they shall not rise”** announce the finality of their overthrow. The LORD has visited and destroyed them, removing their memory and their claim to mastery.
- The declaration should not be expanded into a denial that the wicked will ever be raised for judgment. Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28-29 explicitly include resurrection to judgment. In this song, the former rulers will not rise to resume their rule over God’s people.
- Verse 19 will contrast their downfall with life promised to the dead belonging to God. The contrast concerns the destinies announced within the song, not a complete classification of every resurrection.
- **Verse 15 - The LORD increases the nation and receives the glory.** Former masters perish while His people have a future.
 - **“Thou hast increased the nation”** is repeated, placing the action emphatically with the LORD. **“Thou art glorified”** identifies the proper response to that increase.
 - The KJV closes, **“thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth.”** Its wording recalls the nation’s far-reaching removal or scattering. Read in that form, the prayer holds national increase alongside the remembered experience of

dispersion.

- Other translations understand the final clause as enlargement of the nation's borders. Both readings concern the LORD's dealings with the nation. The

KJV wording should be acknowledged directly rather than quietly replaced; the secure teaching point is His increase of Israel and His resulting glory.

D. Fruitless labor and the promise of resurrection (vv.16-19)

- **Verse 16 - Trouble and chastening drive the people to prayer.** The song recalls the distress behind their longing for deliverance.
 - **“In trouble have they visited thee”** means they sought the LORD. Earlier He visited the oppressors in judgment (v.14); here the afflicted people turn to Him.
 - **“They poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them”** recognizes His disciplinary hand in their experience. Isaiah 10:20-21 likewise describes a remnant returning to the mighty God after misplaced dependence.
- **Verse 17 - The people's distress is pictured as a woman's labor pains.** The image expresses both suffering and expectation.
 - The woman approaches delivery, cries out, and endures her pangs. **“So have we been in thy sight, O LORD”** places the nation's anguish before Him.
 - Labor normally ends in birth. Isaiah uses that expectation to sharpen the disappointment of the next verse. Pain alone has not accomplished the deliverance they need.
- **Verse 18 - Their labor produces no saving result.** The nation confesses its inability to deliver the earth.
 - **“We have as it were brought forth wind”** overturns the expected birth. The suffering is real, but the anticipated result has failed to appear.
 - **“We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth”** directly contrasts with God's work in verse 12. Their anguish and effort cannot produce the salvation that must come from Him.
- **“Neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen”** leaves the hostile world standing in the KJV's wording. The nation's distress has not brought down those who oppose it. Other renderings connect the clause to birth imagery; the governing point remains the failure to achieve the expected deliverance.
- **Verse 19 - The dead will live by God's promised intervention.** Human inability gives way to a hope that reaches beyond death.
 - **“Thy dead men shall live”** identifies the dead in relation to God. In this national setting, the promise naturally concerns His people Israel. Compare Daniel 12:1-2, where the deliverance of Daniel's people is joined to sleepers in the dust awakening.
 - **“Together with my dead body shall they arise”** is the KJV's wording. The song's personal voice can identify itself with those awaiting resurrection. The verse does not name the Messiah as this speaker, so the phrase should not be treated as an explicit prediction of others rising simultaneously with Christ.
 - **“Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust”** addresses those in the condition of death. The promise follows death swallowed up in 25:8. Actual resurrection is the strongest reading of that connection, though it also secures the nation's restoration; reducing the verse to political recovery leaves its language of the dead and dust inadequately explained.
 - **“Thy dew is as the dew of herbs”**

supplies an image of refreshing, life-giving provision. **“The earth shall cast out the dead”** completes the reversal: the earth that received them yields them up.

- The verse promises resurrection without specifying every stage of its fulfillment. It does not describe the catching away of the Body of Christ or identify Judah with that Body. Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 for the catching away, and Revelation

20:4-6 for resurrection and kingdom reign, allowing each passage to supply its own details.

- Verse 20 changes to **“Come, my people”** and instructions to hide until indignation passes. That new address provides a natural starting point for session 25. The sequence of poetic units alone should not be made into a complete chronological timetable.

The Psalms and Isaiah 26

- **Psalm 46 - God as refuge, a secure city, and humbled nations.** The city's security in verses 4-5, the nations' turmoil in verse 6, and the LORD as refuge in verses 7 and 11 complement Isaiah 26:1-6. Psalm 46:10 also anticipates His exaltation among the nations.
- **Psalm 118:19-21 - Open gates and entrance for the righteous.** This is the closest verbal and thematic companion to Isaiah 26:2. Both passages join gates, righteousness, and salvation. Psalm 118:14 also identifies the LORD as strength and salvation.
- **Psalm 63:1, 5-8 - Desire for God and meditation through the night.** These verses fit Isaiah 26:8-9: personal longing, early seeking, and remembrance of God during the night. They illuminate the devotion expressed within the corporate song.
- **Psalm 49:14-15 - Death's dominion**

and God's redemption from the grave.

The contrast between those under death's power and the speaker's confidence in God's redemption supplies a fitting companion to Isaiah 26:14, 19. The psalm does not supply Isaiah's national setting or a detailed resurrection timetable.

The session's movement is from a city secured by salvation to a people unable to produce deliverance, ending with the LORD's promise of life from the dead. The repeated ground of confidence is His work: He protects, humbles, establishes peace, increases the nation, and raises His dead.

Scripture wording follows the King James Version, Isaiah 26. Compare Isaiah 60:18; Philippians 4:6-7; Daniel 12:1-2; John 5:28-29, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:4-9, and Psalms 46; 118:14-21; 63:1-8; 49:14-15.

Hebrew wording: Isaiah 12:2 and Isaiah 26:4.