

Isaiah – An Apocalyptic Conclusion

Isaiah 25:8-9. 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. And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us."

Review

Four lessons ago the last indictment of the covenant lawsuit came down. The lawsuit that opened in Isaiah 1:2, with the heavens and the earth summoned as witnesses, had widened ring by ring: Judah indicted in chapters 1-6, the house of David tested in the Book of Immanuel (7-12), every named nation on the compass brought to account in chapters 13-23. Chapter 24 removed the walls. The defendant was no longer Babylon or Tyre or Moab but the earth itself, and the docket reached past the kings of the earth to the host of heaven on high. Chapters 24-27, the Little Apocalypse, are the climax of the greater section that began in chapter 13, and they are the first place in the book where the local drama of Judah and her neighbors is shown for what it always was, a preview of a global and cosmic Day of the LORD.

The four chapters do not run in a straight line. They alternate judgment and song: the earth emptied (24), the banquet spread and death swallowed (25), the redeemed singing of the strong city and their own raised dead (26), the serpent slain and the vineyard restored (27). Read straight through, the unit is one compressed panorama. A handful of "in that day" frames, *bayom hahu*, gather a sequence that later revelation will spread across years, from the wrath of the Tribulation to the abolition of death in the eternal state. That compression is the whole reason for this review. Laid out in order, the panorama is not a poem about spiritual struggle; it is a map of real, future, historical events.

This lesson does four things. It draws the panorama out in order along the timeline of the Day of the LORD. It sets each peak beside the New Testament passage that answers it, since these chapters are best read alongside the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation. It distinguishes this whole program, the program of Israel and the world, from the separate program of the Church. And it looks ahead to the next chapters 28-35.

The Prophetic History in Review

The events of chapters 24-27 fall into five stages of one program, the program of the Day of the LORD for Israel and the world. Let's lay them out in order and set each one against the fuller timetable the New Testament supplies.

Jacob's Trouble.

The panorama opens in wrath. Four verbs govern the first verse of chapter 24: the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface, and scatters its inhabitants. Every social rank is named and then flattened (24:2), because the ground of the judgment is

universal: humanity has "transgressed laws, violated statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (24:5). The everlasting covenant, *berit olam*, is reiterated in the Noahic covenant of Genesis 9, the one covenant made with all flesh, and so the whole earth is judged not for failing to be Israel but for violating the moral obligation resting on every human being since the ark (idolatry, immorality, and violence). The curse devours the earth (24:6), the city of man collapses into one unnamed (24:10), the windows of heaven open again in the language of the Flood (24:18), and the earth reels like a drunkard (24:20). Chapter 26 closes with the shelter set against that storm: "enter into your rooms and close your doors behind you; hide for a little while until indignation runs its course" (26:20). The indignation, *za'am*, is the fixed term for the poured-out wrath of the Day of the LORD, and its "little while" is the Seven Years of Jacob's Trouble.

This is the stage Revelation unrolls at length. What Isaiah compresses into a single reeling of the earth becomes the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Vials (Revelation 6-16), the steadily escalating judgments of God upon unbelieving Israel and the rest of the world. The command of 26:20 is the Lord's own instruction in the Olivet Discourse: "when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet... then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16). The remnant hidden behind shut doors in Isaiah is the Remnant preserved through the wrath in Revelation, the woman kept safe in the wilderness while the *za'am* runs its course (Revelation 12:6, 14). And the two tiers of chapter 24:21, the kings of the earth and the host of heaven on high, are the two tiers of the Tribulation itself: the Man of Lawlessness and false messianic kingdom below, the influence of the powers standing behind them above. Verse 22 holds them for a sequence, "gathered together like prisoners... and after many days they will be punished," which Revelation 20 lays out as confinement, an interval, and only then the lake of fire.

The Return of the King.

The wrath does not resolve itself; it is ended by an arrival. "In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent... and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea" (27:1). The identity of the serpent is not left to guesswork; the last book of the Bible closes the file with the same images, "the great dragon... the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan" (Revelation 12:9; 20:2). The sword that falls on the serpent is the sword of the returning King (Revelation 19:11-21), and the enthronement Isaiah announces, "the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders" (24:23), is that same Second Coming seen from the other side.

This is the point where two timelines converge. The program of the Church and the program of Israel and the world run parallel until here, and here they meet, because the saints of every era return with Him. "The Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones" (Jude 14); the armies of heaven follow Him on white horses (Revelation 19:14). Old Testament saints,

saints of the present age, and saints of the Tribulation arrive together with the King who slays the serpent and takes His seat on Zion.

The Judgments of the Messiah.

The seating of the King brings judgment before it brings peace. Chapter 24 stripped every name away; chapter 25 restores one, Moab, trodden down in his place while the hand of the LORD rests on the mountain (25:10-12). Moab means Moab, the land east of the Dead Sea and whoever inhabits it at the time of fulfillment, and his fall is the judgment of the surviving nations, the wicked separated from the mountain even as the banquet is spread on it. Chapter 26 gives the principle beneath that judgment: "when the earth experiences Your judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (26:9). The righteousness learned here is behavioral, the conduct judgment can school into a man, not the positional righteousness that is right standing before God; that comes to each survivor only by faith. The wicked who is shown favor rather than judgment "does not learn righteousness" at all (26:10), which is why the Kingdom will be governed with a rod and why a final rebellion still gathers at its end.

Chapter 27 names the deepest of these judgments, the refining of Jacob. God did not strike Israel as He struck her oppressors (27:7); He contended with her "in measure" (27:8), and the purpose of the measured discipline is stated plainly: "through this Jacob's iniquity will be forgiven" when the idols are ground to chalk (27:9). The discipline is God's corporate instrument for bringing the nation to the salvation He promised her; it is never a payment that earns her standing. Each survivor is justified by faith when the nation looks on the One they pierced (Zechariah 12:10), and the taking-away of the nation's sin is the New Covenant kept (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This is the fire of Zechariah 13:8-9, the third brought through and refined as silver, and it is the promise Paul carries forward: "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB... WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS" (Romans 11:26-27).

The Kingdom Established.

Then the panorama opens onto the Kingdom, and it is the destination the whole apocalypse has been driving toward. The LORD of hosts reigns on Zion (24:23), and on that same mountain He spreads "a lavish banquet for all peoples" (25:6), removes the shroud of death that every nation wears (25:7), and hears the confession of those who waited, "this is our God for whom we have waited" (25:9). The redeemed sing of the city whose wall is not stone but salvation, kept in "perfect peace," *shalom shalom*, because its builder is God (26:1-4). Jerusalem, perpetually a battleground, is never again in jeopardy. The vineyard that yielded only wild grapes in chapter 5 is watered every moment and guarded night and day, and Jacob and Israel "fill the whole world with fruit" (27:6); the people producing that fruit are the Remnant of Israel, brought through the Tribulation and settled in their place. The great trumpet sounds, *shofar gadol*, and the scattered are threshed out from the Euphrates to the

brook of Egypt, the full span pledged to Abraham (Genesis 15:18), and gathered one by one to worship at Jerusalem (27:12-13).

The New Testament sequences what Isaiah gathers into one frame. The resurrection of 26:19, "your dead will live; their corpses will rise," is the first resurrection, the raising of the blessed and holy who "came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6), and the voice that calls the sleepers is the King's own (John 5:28-29). The banquet of 25:6 is the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). The trumpet of 27:13 is the trumpet of Matthew 24:31, the elect gathered from the four winds, the second regathering already promised in 11:11-12. And the shape of the Kingdom is exactly what these chapters describe: a restored Israel with Jerusalem as its capital, the nations subservient and bringing their glory to the mountain year by year, human life maximized under a reign of absolute justice. It is not yet the sinless state; sin and death remain in the Kingdom, and at the close of the thousand years a last rebellion gathers before it is put down.

The Age of Ages.

One peak stands beyond the Kingdom. The banquet chapter promised that God "will swallow up death for all time" and "will wipe tears away from all faces" (25:8), and that promise is not discharged at the Kingdom's dawn but at its far edge, in the Age of Ages. Death is thrown into the lake of fire only after the last rebellion (Revelation 20:14), and only over the new creation is it said, "there will no longer be any death... He will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4). The confinement of the host of heaven that began with "after many days" in 24:22 lands here, the serpent cast into the fire (Revelation 20:10). This is the verb *bala*, to swallow, given at last its full object: the Swallower is swallowed, consumed for all time.

Paul fixes the reference. Arguing for the literal, bodily resurrection of believers, he writes that when the mortal has put on immortality, "then will come about the saying that is written, 'DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY'" (1 Corinthians 15:54), quoting 25:8. The resurrection has more than one installment. The raising of the Church at the Rapture is part one; the raising of the righteous dead at Messiah's coming is 26:19; the final abolition of death itself is 25:8, the consummation. The full victory Isaiah names is the last of these, not the first.

One Program and the Church's Own

The five stages just traced are one program, the Day of the LORD for Israel and the world. Chapters 24-27 describe it, the Olivet Discourse describes it, and Revelation 4 through 19:10 describes it. None of the three is teaching the Church's own eschatology, the program that runs from the ascension through the Rapture and the judgment seat of Christ. Two things must be held together here, and they are not in competition.

First, the Church age is a valley the prophet could not see. This is Prophetic Foreshortening, the principle established we have seen since the beginning: distinct future events appear in one prophetic frame, two peaks seen as a single range, with a valley between them the prophet's eye cannot cross. Standing on the timeline of Israel and the world, chapters 24-27 leap from the Messianic time to the wrath of Jacob's Trouble and to the reign on Zion without a word about the present age, because the present age lay in the valley, hidden from view. The prophets did not have it; it is the mystery disclosed only later, and the New Testament is what supplies the valleys these chapters compress.

Second, that valley is not empty. Examined on its own terms, it is the Church's own program running on a parallel track: this present age, the Rapture, the judgment seat where believers are evaluated for reward and not for condemnation, the return with Christ. The two tracks are distinct, and they meet at exactly one point, the return of the King and the inauguration of the Kingdom, where the saints of the present age arrive with Him and Israel's long-promised restoration and the Church's rule and reign converge. Everything before that point runs on two lines; from that point forward there is one.

These two statements describe the same reality from two vantages. The valley is the gap in the prophet's line of sight; the parallel track is what fills the gap. And the practical force of holding both is a guardrail in both directions. These chapters must not be read as a description of the present age, which is the amillennial collapse that dissolves a literal future Kingdom into the Church now; the reign on Zion, the regathered nation, the raised bodies, and the abolished death are still ahead. And the Church's own program must not be read back into these chapters as though these chapters were charting the Rapture; they are not. Even the one theme that seems to touch the Church, the resurrection, points past the Rapture when it is followed to its end. The Rapture is part one of a greater whole; the swallowing of death for all time is the whole. No peak of chapters 24-27 is accomplished in the Church age.

Hermeneutic Checkpoints

The four working rules committed to at the opening of this section have carried the whole way through, and the review is the place to see them tested across four chapters at once.

Start literal. The earth means the earth, Zion means Zion, Moab means Moab, the boundaries mean the boundaries, the raised corpses mean raised corpses. At no point in these chapters is the burden of proof for a figurative reading carried; the reach into the angelic realm in 24:21 and the mappable geography of 24:23 and 27:12 make the local, symbol-only readings impossible.

Let the text interpret itself. The hardest points are defined on the page or in later Scripture, not by private decoding. The veil of 25:7 is named death by the verb that governs 25:8. The *rephaim* who "will not rise" in 26:14 and the *rephaim* whom the earth gives back in 26:19 interpret each other, the dead tyrants held in the grave against the raised dead of God.

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Leviathan is named "the devil and Satan" in Revelation 20:2. The vineyard is named Jacob and Israel in 27:6. The everlasting covenant is the one covenant Genesis 9:16 calls everlasting. A stated referent is never traded for an inferred echo.

Symbol still equals substance. The reeling drunkard, the harvest shack, the birth pangs, the swimmer in the mire are flagged similes, and recognizing the figure costs nothing, because each one points at a concrete reality: a real shaking, a real failed labor, a real judgment in a real place.

Keep the method consistent. Whoever literalizes the curses of chapter 24 must literalize the blessings of chapter 25; whoever takes the serpent's fall in 27:1 as a real future event must take the vineyard's restoration in 27:6 as one too. The method cannot go literal at the judgment and figurative at the Kingdom.

One refinement belongs to this review. The foreshortening that compresses Jacob's Trouble, the Second Advent, the Kingdom, and the Age of Ages into single frames operates within the one track, the program of Israel and the world; the sequence is held firmly and the timetable loosely, and Revelation supplies the intervals. The Church age is a different matter. It is not one of the compressed peaks on that track but the valley beside it and a parallel track of its own, and it is named by the New Testament rather than by Isaiah.

Tying the Threads Together

Messianic Hope. Across the whole book the Hope has grown without ever shrinking into a symbol: a Child born (9:6), a Branch ruling (11:1), a throne established in lovingkindness in the tent of David (16:5), a Savior sent to Egypt (19:20), a King enthroned on Zion (24:23), a Host and Conqueror of death (25:6-8). In these four chapters the Hope is the whole reign displayed at once. He is the One who slays the serpent (27:1), raises the righteous dead by His own voice (26:19; John 5:28), keeps the vineyard He once gave over to briars (27:3), and at the last swallows death itself (25:8). Every earlier promise pointed to a Person; this section seats us, raised, in His city.

The Motif of the City. The contest of cities reaches its verdict. From the *qiryat tohu* of 24:10, through the ruin that will never be rebuilt (25:2), to the lofty city trodden into the dust by the feet of the helpless it once towered over (26:5-6), the city of man has been coming down; in chapter 27 it ends as a forsaken pasture where a calf grazes and women gather sticks for kindling (27:10-11). Over against every ruin stands one city whose wall is salvation and whose builder is God (26:1), the mountain where the gathered nation finally bows (27:13). The city of man is grazed bare, and Zion is full.

The Holy One of Israel. His holiness and His faithfulness have stood together through every judgment of the Apocalypse and stand together still. His holiness proved wide enough to indict the whole earth and deep enough to reach the host of heaven; His faithfulness proved durable enough to shelter a Remnant through the storm, to keep every promise made to the

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nation, and to remove the reproach of His people from all the earth even at the table where the nations are fed. The same hand that comes out to punish the earth shuts the doors of His people first (26:20-21). Holiness that burns and faithfulness that shelters are one nature, and the whole Apocalypse sings both to their end.

Looking Ahead: Chapters 28-35

From the cosmic panorama the book turns back to Judah's own leaders and the crisis at the door. Chapters 28-35 are built on a series of woe oracles, *hoy*, addressed one after another to the people who trusted the wrong things: the drunkards of Ephraim and the scoffers of Jerusalem (28), Ariel, the city where David camped (29), the rebellious children who go down to Egypt for help instead of to the Holy One of Israel (30 and 31), and the destroyer who will himself be destroyed (33). Running underneath the woes is the Assyrian crisis, the historical emergency of Hezekiah's day, and the recurring temptation to buy security from Egypt rather than rest in the LORD. As before, the near horizon and the far are held together: the woes on Judah's folly give way to promises of a King who will reign in righteousness (32) and, in chapters 34 and 35, to a brief apocalypse of their own, the vengeance on Edom set against the Highway of Holiness on which the ransomed return to Zion with everlasting joy. That material sets up the Hezekiah narrative of chapters 36-39 and the great turn to comfort at chapter 40.

The Day of the LORD: Two Programs, One Destination

A parallel prophetic timeline visualization of the Church and Israel converging at the Messianic Kingdom and the final Age of Ages.

DIVERGENT PATHS: THE HIDDEN VALLEY & JACOB'S TROUBLE

THE KINGDOM AND THE AGE OF AGES

