

Isaiah – Chapter 25

The Banquet and the Swallowing of Death

Isaiah 25:6, 8–9. 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. ... 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. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

Context

Chapter 24 ended with a scene deliberately built from Exodus 24:9-11: elders, a mountain, the visible glory of God. On Sinai, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders "saw the God of Israel ... and they ate and drank." One element of that scene was missing from Isaiah 24:23 — the meal. Chapter 25 supplies it. "The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain" (25:6). What was granted to seventy men for one afternoon becomes the opening act of the Messianic Kingdom, and the guest list is no longer seventy elders of Israel but "all peoples."

The chapter's placement matters as much as its content. Isaiah has just described the most sweeping judgment in the book: the earth emptied, the city of chaos broken down, the host of heaven imprisoned, and the King enthroned on Zion. The natural next question is what the Kingdom looks like once the King is seated. Chapter 25 answers with three scenes: a song of praise for judgment already accomplished (1–5), a banquet at which death itself is destroyed (6–9), and a final word of judgment on one named nation, outside the mountain (10–12).

That last scene will demand careful work. Chapter 24 stripped every name away and judged "the earth"; chapter 25 suddenly restores one name: Moab. Why a named nation here, at the universal climax, is a legitimate question, and we will give it an extended treatment.

One more observation before the text. In 24:16, the prophet collapsed under the vision: "Woe to me! Woe to me! Alas for me!" Chapter 25 opens with the same prophet in the first person, but now he is singing: "O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You." The man who could not bear the vision of the earth's treachery can bear the vision of its outcome. The song comes after the judgment has been seen through to its end, not instead of it.

Structure of the Chapter

Isaiah 25 moves in three movements:

- Verses 1-5: The song of praise: the city fallen, the helpless sheltered, plans formed long ago accomplished.
- 6-9: The banquet on this mountain: the veil removed, death swallowed, tears wiped away, and the response of those who waited.

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- 10-12: The hand of the LORD on this mountain, and Moab trodden down outside it.

The phrase "on this mountain" occurs three times (vv. 6, 7, 10) and stitches the chapter together. Everything (the feast, the destruction of death, and the judgment of pride) happens with reference to one location: the Mount Zion of 24:23.

Exposition

The Song of Accomplished Plans (Verses 1-5)

"O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; for You have worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness" (v. 1). Two phrases carry the verse. "Plans formed long ago" answers the question chapter 23 raised and answered about Tyre: "Who has planned this...? The LORD of hosts has planned it" (23:8–9). The devastation of chapter 24 was not improvisation; it was counsel settled in eternity past, the same claim God will make explicitly in 46:10, "declaring the end from the beginning." And "perfect faithfulness" in Hebrew is *emunah omen*, the root of "amen" doubled. The judgments just witnessed are themselves acts of covenant fidelity. God is faithful not only when He blesses but when He performs exactly what He said He would perform.

Verse 2 sings of the city in the past tense: "You have made a city into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin, a palace of strangers is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt." This is the *qiryat tohu* of 24:10, still unnamed, now viewed from the far side of its fall. This prophecy treats the future as accomplished because the decree is as certain as the event. And the last clause deserves its full weight: "it will never be rebuilt." Babylon fell and was rebuilt; Tyre fell and traded again (23:17). The final city of man has no second chance.

Verses 3–5 give the two consequences of that fall. First, "a strong people will glorify You; cities of ruthless nations will revere You." The surviving remnant of the nations, the singers of 24:14–16, now brought to worship. Second, a retrospective: "You have been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat." Through the entire storm of the judgment (Seven Years of Tribulation), God was sheltering the poor who took refuge in Him. The similes are signaled plainly ("like a rain storm against a wall," "as heat by the shadow of a cloud") and describe a real protection: while the breath of the ruthless beat against the wall, the song of the ruthless was silenced, and the needy under the shadow survived. Isaiah has said this before — "the LORD has founded Zion, and the afflicted of His people will seek refuge in it" (14:32). Verse 4 is that promise kept. One of the things we have emphasized is the remnant of Israel, and here we see the remnant of the Earth.

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The Banquet on This Mountain (6)

"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."

Three details, each doing real work.

The Host – The LORD of hosts Himself prepares the meal. It is not Israel hosting the nations; not the Messiah's servants setting a table for Him. The God who has spent eleven chapters as Judge of the nations becomes their Host. The same title, "the LORD of hosts," that headed the armies of judgment now heads the banquet.

The guests – "All peoples." The Hebrew is unambiguous and universal, the same scope as the judgment of chapter 24. This is the gleanings of 24:13 seated at table: the remnant "from the ends of the earth" who sang "Glory to the Righteous One" (24:16) now eat in the presence of the One they glorified. The trajectory that began in 2:2–4 with all nations streaming to the mountain of the LORD, and ran through Egypt and Assyria blessed alongside Israel (19:24–25), arrives at a set table (Matthew 8:11).

The menu – Aged wine and marrow are the food of celebration and abundance, and the wine is mentioned twice. In chapter 24, the judgment was measured in wine: "the new wine mourns, the vine decays ... they do not drink wine with song; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it" (24:7, 9). The joy of the earth was banished (24:11). At the banquet, the wine returns, aged, refined, better than what was lost. Judgment silenced the world's festivities; the Kingdom does not end the feast but purifies it and moves it to the right mountain, with the right Host.

The Veil Swallowed (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."

What is the covering? Our second working rule (let the text interpret itself) answers before speculation starts, because verse 8 opens with the same verb: "He will swallow up death for all time." The covering over all peoples is death, pictured as the mourning shroud that every nation wears. Covering the head and face was the posture of grief (2 Samuel 15:30; Jeremiah 14:3-4; Esther 6:12). Isaiah's image is of the whole human race seated at the funeral of the whole human race, every face veiled, and the Host, before serving the meal, removes the shroud from His guests.

There is a legitimate secondary echo here. Paul speaks of a veil lying over hearts and of "the god of this world" blinding minds (2 Corinthians 3:14-16; 4:3-4), and the removal of death's shroud and the removal of unbelief's blindness arrive together; those seated at this table are those who waited for Him (v. 9). But the primary referent is fixed by verse 8, and we do not trade a stated interpretation for an inferred one. The veil is death; the blindness is an echo.

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Death Swallowed (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."

This is the summit of the chapter and one of the summits of the Old Testament.

The verb is *bala*, to swallow. Scripture consistently gives that verb to the grave: the earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korah (Numbers 16:32-34); the proverb has Sheol swallowing men alive (Proverbs 1:12); and Isaiah himself, back in the vineyard judgment, pictured Sheol as having an appetite: "Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure; and Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry ... descend into it" (5:14). Death has been the swallower since Eden. Verse 8 announces the reversal: the swallower is swallowed, consumed, "for all time."

Paul, arguing for the literal, physical, bodily resurrection of believers, writes: "when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:54). It is the promise whose first installment is Isaiah 26:19 ("Your dead will live; their corpses will rise"), whose down payment is the empty tomb (1 Corinthians 15:20), and whose completion is Revelation 20:14, where death itself is thrown into the lake of fire.

Then the tenderness – "the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces." The sovereign title (*Adonai YHWH*) is attached to the gentlest act in the chapter. John quotes it twice, at the two great gatherings of the redeemed: the multitude from every nation before the throne (Revelation 7:17) and the new creation itself (Revelation 21:4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death").

And a third clause easily passed over – "He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth." Israel is not absorbed into "all peoples" and forgotten. The nation that spent the prophetic era as a byword among the nations (despised, scattered, her God mocked because of her condition) has her disgrace lifted publicly, before all the earth. The distinction between Israel and the nations survives into the Kingdom, even at the table where both are fed; the promises to the Nation are kept.

The clause that seals it is the same one that sealed the judgment – "for the LORD has spoken" (compare 24:3). The same speech that decreed the earth's emptying decrees death's destruction. Both rest on one guarantee.

The Response of Those Who Waited (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.'"

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The banquet guests identify themselves, and the identifying mark is *waiting*. The verb (*qavah*) is Isaiah's standing vocabulary for faith: "I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him" (8:17); "blessed are all those who long for Him" (30:18); "those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength" (40:31). Waiting is patient belief extended through delay, believing the promise while withstanding the difficulties and affliction of this world and the persecution of the adversary. The people at the table are not there because they were strong, moral, or wise; verse 4 already called them the helpless and the needy. They are there because they took God at His word and waited for Him to keep it, and now they say so twice: "we have waited ... we have waited."

"That He might save us," the salvation waited for has just been narrated: shelter through the storm, a seat at the table, the shroud removed, death swallowed, tears wiped away. And the response commanded of them is the response the whole book has been driving toward: "let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." Chapter 12 gave the remnant of Israel this song ("Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid"); chapter 25 puts it in the mouth of a redeemed multitude on the mountain.

Moab Outside the Mountain (10-12)

"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. 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. The unassailable fortifications of your walls He will bring down, lay low and cast to the ground, even to the dust."

The contrast is built into the grammar of verse 10: the hand of the LORD rests (the verb of settled blessing, as the Spirit "will rest" on the Branch in 11:2) on this mountain, and under that same hand, in his own place, Moab is trodden down. One hand; two locations; two outcomes.

The imagery is deliberately degrading. Straw trodden into a *madmenah* (a dung pit) carries a bitter wordplay: Madmen was a town of Moab (Jeremiah 48:2). The swimmer image extends it: a man flailing in the mire, spreading his hands with all the technique of a swimmer and finding nothing to swim in, while the Lord lays low "his pride together with the trickery of his hands." Verse 12 closes with the city motif one last time: unassailable fortifications brought down "to the ground, even to the dust" — the identical fate, in identical language, that 26:5 will assign to "the unassailable city."

Excursus: Why a Named Nation Here?

Chapters 24–27 achieved their universal scope by removing names: the city of chaos is every city, and judgment falls on "the earth," "all peoples," "all nations." Then 25:10 names Moab.

Some treat this as a representative reading; this makes Moab a symbol: the named exemplar of pride standing for all who refuse God. The moral fit is real, but the reading proves too

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much. If Moab dissolves into symbol, there is no principled reason Mount Zion — named three times in the same breath (25:6–10) — keeps its geography. This is the same test the reign "on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem" posed in 24:23, and the same rule applies: keep the method consistent.

The literal reading, which our method requires, is that Moab means Moab: the territory east of the Dead Sea and whoever inhabits it at the time of fulfillment. The objection that no nation of Moab exists today confuses a political entity with a place and its people. The land (the plateau of central Jordan) is still on the map and still inhabited, just as "Mount Zion and Jerusalem" attaches to the real city standing in that day, not to the Jebusite settlement of Abraham's time. Scripture treats the old territorial names as live geography in end-time prophecy: Daniel, writing when Moab was already extinct as a kingdom, still names "Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon" in the final crisis (Daniel 11:41); Jeremiah promises "I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days" (Jeremiah 48:47), which requires a Moab in the latter days; Zephaniah 2:9-10 judges Moab for pride "against the people of the LORD of hosts."

Why Moab, then, and not Edom or Egypt or Assyria? Because Isaiah has already given Moab a history with this mountain. In chapter 16, Moab's fugitives were told to send the tribute lamb "to the mountain of the daughter of Zion" and offered shelter under the Davidic throne: "a judge will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David" (16:1, 5). The recorded response: "We have heard of the pride of Moab, an excessive pride" (16:6; cf. Jeremiah 48:29). Moab heard the offer and refused it, and pride was the stated reason. So "the Lord will lay low his pride" (25:11) answers 16:6 directly — Isaiah is completing a file already open. The literal judgment carries its own lesson without being dissolved into one: the banquet is for all peoples, yet exclusion is possible — not for lack of an invitation, but for refusing the one that was given. Verse 9's guests waited for Him; Moab would not shelter with Him. Both receive what they chose.

Synthesis with All of Scripture

The Prophets. Hosea carries the same promise in the same violent imagery: "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death. O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting?" (Hosea 13:14). The second text Paul weaves into 1 Corinthians 15:54–55 alongside Isaiah 25:8; the two prophets were already in agreement before the apostle joined them. Jeremiah 48 and Zephaniah 2:8-11 confirm both Moab's judgment and its ground (pride and taunting arrogance against the LORD's people) while Jeremiah 48:47 keeps a "latter days" Moab on the map for the fulfillment. Daniel 11:41 confirms that Edom, Moab, and Ammon function as literal end-time geography.

Jesus. The Lord speaks of the Kingdom as this banquet without ever needing to argue the point: "many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11; compare Luke 13:29, where they come

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"from east and west and from north and south" the compass points of Isaiah 24:14-16). At the last Passover He tied His own anticipation to it: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29) — the Lord's Supper is, among other things, a standing reservation at Isaiah's table. And His banquet parable in Luke 14:16-24 turns on precisely the dynamic of this chapter: a great dinner prepared, invitations issued, and the judgment falling not on the uninvited but on the invited who "all alike began to make excuses."

Revelation. The correspondences continue in sequence: the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9) answering the banquet of 25:6; the tears wiped away at the throne (7:17) and in the new creation (21:4) quoting 25:8; death and Hades thrown into the lake of fire (20:14) as the final act of the swallowing; and "the reproach of His people" removed as the New Jerusalem bears the names of the twelve tribes on her gates (21:12).

The Apostolic Letters. 1 Corinthians 15 is the divinely inspired commentary on this chapter. Death is "the last enemy that will be abolished" (15:26); the abolition occurs at the resurrection of the body (15:52-54); and the moment it occurs, Paul says, Isaiah 25:8 "will come about." Note the direction of Paul's argument: he does not spiritualize Isaiah to fit a doctrine; he grounds the doctrine of bodily resurrection on the plain sense of Isaiah. The apostles read the prophets by the method we are defending.

Hermeneutic Checkpoints

Start literal. "This mountain" is the Mount Zion of 24:23, named and mappable; the banquet is a banquet; Moab is Moab. Daniel 11:41 removes any doubt that extinct political names still designate real territory and real people in end-time prophecy. The burden of proof sits on the figurative reading at every point, and at no point in this chapter is it carried.

Let the text interpret itself. The veil of verse 7 is identified by verse 8: the same verb, "swallow up," governs both, and its object in verse 8 is death. We are not left to decode the shroud; the next line names it.

Symbol still equals substance. The similes are flagged by the text itself: refuge "like" a shelter from the storm, Moab trodden "as" straw, flailing "as" a swimmer spreads his hands. Recognizing the figures costs nothing, because each one points at a concrete referent: real protection, real judgment, real humiliation in a real place.

Keep the method consistent. This chapter binds blessing and judgment to the same mountain in consecutive verses. Whoever literalizes Moab's trampling must literalize the banquet for all peoples; whoever spiritualizes the banquet has no ground for a literal judgment three verses later. The text does not permit literal curses and symbolic blessings, the error runs in both directions, and verse 10 forbids both.

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A foreshortening checkpoint. Isaiah places the banquet and the swallowing of death together "on this mountain," in a single frame. Revelation, given the fuller timetable, sequences them: the Kingdom comes and the supper is celebrated (Revelation 19-20), and death is thrown into the lake of fire after the thousand years (20:14), with "no longer any death" pronounced over the new creation (21:4). This is Prophetic Foreshortening, exactly as established in Pre-Isaiah Lesson 3: two peaks (the banquet at the Kingdom's dawn, death's final abolition at its far edge) seen from Isaiah's vantage as one mountain range, with the valley between them invisible to the prophet. Both peaks are equally literal. As with the "many days" of 24:22, we hold the sequence firmly and the timetable loosely, and we let Revelation supply what Isaiah compresses.

Tying the Threads Together

The Messianic Hope. The Hope has been 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), and a King enthroned on Zion (24:23). Chapter 25 adds two offices no earlier chapter dared: Host and Conqueror of death. The throne Moab refused in chapter 16 is the throne that now presides over the table, and the One seated on it does what no king of the earth has ever done for his subjects — He destroys their last enemy and dries their faces with His own hand. Every prior promise pointed at a Person; this chapter seats us at His table.

The Motif of the City. The contest of cities reaches its coda. The city of man, still unnamed, is "a city no more; it will never be rebuilt" (25:2). Moab's "unassailable fortifications" go to the dust (25:12), man's last walls falling in the chapter's last verse. And over against every ruin stands not a rival fortress but a mountain with a table on it. Chapter 26 will open with the resolution: "We have a strong city; He sets up walls and ramparts for salvation," the only city left standing is the one whose walls God Himself builds.

The Holy One of Israel. His holiness and His faithfulness, held together through every judgment, are both on display at the banquet. The plans "formed long ago with perfect faithfulness" (25:1) included both the emptying of the earth and the spreading of the table; the mouth that "has spoken" the devastation of 24:3 "has spoken" the death of death in 25:8. And He has not traded Israel for the nations: at the table where all peoples eat, He removes "the reproach of His people from all the earth." The Holy One of Israel feeds the nations without ceasing to be the Holy One of Israel. Chapter 26 gives the redeemed their song about that strong city; Chapter 27 will return to His vineyard, no longer trampled but watered every moment by His own hand.