



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 36

Zion, the Strong City (26:1-21)

• A 'strong city' – a city of salvation

Isaiah 24–27 moves from the scene of a devastated city¹ to what God will do through his divine King². The success of God's kingdom – says Isaiah – will be like a banquet where people dance and rejoice³. In chapter 24 we had talk of a 'city of emptiness'. Now instead of a city of emptiness we have talk of a 'strong city' created by God himself, a city of salvation.

1 24:1-20
2 24:21-23
3 25:1-12

*¹In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
God makes salvation
its walls and encircling protection.*

• God offers us a new citizenship

God is offering us a new citizenship. The cities of the world fail. Old Jerusalem failed. But God is creating an alternative society, a 'new Jerusalem'.

1. It is a city that is always open to God's people

1. It is a city that is always open to God's people. Isaiah sees a people approaching this city. What makes the city secure is that it has walls of indestructible salvation. The people approaching the city belong to it. They are its citizens. The prophet calls upon the gate-keepers of the city: 'Open the gates!' The city is available to anyone who wishes to enter it, but those who come must fulfil certain conditions. They must be right with God. They are not perfect (note verses 16 and 18, where we see their weaknesses) but God has acted in their lives to bring them into a right relationship with him.

• They must be right with God

*²Open the gates
that the righteous nation may enter,
the nation that keeps faith.
³You will keep in perfect peace
him whose mind is steadfast,
because he trusts in you.
⁴Trust in Yahweh for ever,
for Yahweh, Yahweh, is the Rock eternal.*

• They are faithful and committed

The citizens are faithful, full of faith, full of commitment.

2. It is a city where there is total safety

2. It is a city where there is total safety. Worldly cities may be attacked. God himself arranges for their destruction.

*⁵For he humbles those who dwell on high,
he lays the lofty city low;
he levels it to the ground
and casts it down to the dust.
⁶Feet trample it down –
the feet of the oppressed,
the footsteps of the poor.*

• This city is beyond the reach of the world's opposition

But this city of God is beyond the reach of the world's opposition, for God himself is determined to overthrow those opposed to it.

3. It is a city where there is fellowship with the King

3. It is a city where there is fellowship with the King. In the vision, the people are walking into the city. The gates are opened for them. God makes the pathway of the righteous to be straight.

*⁷The path of the righteous is altogether right!
O upright One, you make the way of the righteous
straightforward.
⁸Yes indeed, Yahweh, walking in the way of your laws,
we wait for you;*

•The people are walking into the city – a straight pathway for the righteous

• The people long to have fellowship with the King

• The wicked are spiritually blind

Your name and the remembrance of you are our deepest desire.

⁹My soul yearns for you in the night; yes, in the morning my spirit longs for you. For when your judgements come upon the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

The people marching into the city long to have fellowship with the King. Even in the night-time hours they are thinking of him. They are ready to learn from him. On the other hand they know that the inhabitants of the city of destruction, the world, do not learn. The wicked are spiritually blind.

¹⁰Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing what is wrong, and regard not the majesty of Yahweh.

¹¹O Yahweh, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. But they will see your zeal for your people and be put to shame. Yes, the fire reserved for your enemies will consume them.

4. It is a city where there is a purpose and a future

4. It is a city where there is a purpose and a future. These people, in the city of God, have a sense of security.

¹²Yahweh, you put us in a position of peace; for all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

•Security

They were not always like this.

•They were not always like this

¹³O Yahweh, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us.

•We need to change our citizenship

We have to change the citizenship we were born with. You and I were born in the 'city of destruction'. We were not always loyal to God's King. Other lords have ruled over us. It is only by the working of God's grace in our lives that we are any different.

Only by you do we keep your name in remembrance.

•Other rulers conquered

In Isaiah's vision the 'other rulers' have been totally conquered.

¹⁴They are now dead, they live no more; those shadowy ones do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them.

•God's people – large and victorious

In Isaiah's vision God's people are destined to be a large and victorious people.

¹⁵You have enlarged the nation, O Yahweh; you have enlarged the nation. You have gained glory for yourself; you have extended all the borders of the land.

•There will be a day of victory for the 'city of God'

The day is coming soon when God's people will be a multitude that no one can number. It is a prediction that is to be found all over the Bible. A day of victory for the 'city of God' is coming despite great weakness in God's people themselves. The people of God will be raised up out of humiliation and distress.

*¹⁶Yahweh, in trouble they sought you;
barely could they whisper a prayer.*

• Not deserving –
received God's
discipline

God's people did not get to this secure city because they were deserving. There were many times when God had to work discipline into their lives.

*¹⁸We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we
gave birth to wind.*

Your chastening was upon them.

*¹⁷As a pregnant woman who is about to give birth
writhes and cries out in her pain,
because of you, O Yahweh, we have been the same.*

• No power within
themselves

God's people have not found power within themselves to bring anyone else into this city. God promised 'for all peoples . . . a feast of rich food' in Zion²¹, but when will the nations come to it?

25:6

*We have not brought salvation of any kind to the earth;
the inhabitants of the world have not come to new life.*

• People outside
the city raised
to life and brought
within

Verses 19-21 are difficult to interpret but probably they refer to people outside of the city being raised to life and brought within it.

*¹⁹But the dead you are concerned about will live;
those who are corpses, with whom I am concerned, will rise.*

You who dwell in the dust,

wake up and shout for joy.

Your dew is like the dew of the morning;

the earth will give birth to its shadowy ones.

• New life within
the city of God

• Raised from the
dead

Isaiah sees a day when those outside the city, in blindness and death, will come to newness of life and be found within the city of God. They will be raised from the dead both spiritually and (as 25:7-8 requires us to believe) in physical resurrection. It will not happen just yet! Isaiah knows there is a lot of history ahead of him!

• Not yet

*²⁰Go, my people, enter your rooms
and shut the doors behind you;
hide yourselves for a little while
until his wrath has passed by.*

• Gates of
invitation open

The gates of invitation are ever open. The doors of protection are ever closed. God's people are safe. When God's days of judgement come upon the earth, his judgement will pass over them (we remember the Passover was kept behind closed doors).

• Doors of
protection closed

*²¹For Yahweh is coming out of his dwelling
to punish the people of the earth for their sins.
The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her;
she will no longer conceal those who were killed upon her.*

• Earth will come
under the
righteous
judgement of God

The blood of those wrongfully slaughtered cries out from the earth. The entire planet will continue to be a city of destruction. It will come under the righteous judgement of God both within history and at the end of history. Only the residents of the 'city of God' will be kept safe. When God's judgement has come with purifying fire, those who have done the will of God will endure for ever, and the new Jerusalem will take over planet earth.