

Isaiah 25:2-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-25/isaiah-252-5/>

Isaiah prophesies about the future doom of “the city” by means of the prophetic past tense. This proud city who opposed God and oppressed His people will be defeated. The strong kingdoms of the world will gape in reverent awe at what the LORD of Hosts has done to it. The weak will rejoice in the LORD’s liberation of them.

The future wonders that Isaiah promised to praise God for planning and executing “with perfect faithfulness” (Isaiah 25:1) concern the LORD’s perfect and terrifying judgment of the earth for her wickedness (Isaiah 24). In this section Isaiah is describing the astonishing aftermath of the awesome and terrible event.

The dominant image Isaiah uses to depict this is the aftermath of *a fortified city’s* total military defeat,

For You have made a city into a heap,

A fortified city into a ruin

The *You* throughout this passage refers to the LORD God. But Isaiah does not explicitly identify the *city*. It is likely the same *city* mentioned during the time of judgment Isaiah mentioned in Chapter 24,

“Desolation is left in the city
And the gate is battered to ruins.”
(Isaiah 24:12)

There are two likely possibilities for which city this might be, or what it represents.

First, the *city* Isaiah was speaking of could be one of the cities of Moab. Isaiah already prophesied against Moab (Isaiah 15-16). Within those chapters Isaiah predicts that Moab will be devastated fairly soon: “...within three years as a hired man could count them” (Isaiah 16:14). It is possible that Assyria conquered and subjugated Moab at this time. Later in this chapter, Isaiah will predict “Moab will be trodden down in his place as straw is trodden down in the water of a manure pile” (Isaiah 25:10).

Moab was a kingdom that sprang from the incestuous relationship of Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:30-37). The kingdom of Moab was located on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. Moab was a frequent enemy of Israel. When the Israelites passed through it on the way to the Promised Land, the king of Moab, Balak, hired the prophet Balaam to treacherously prophesy against them (Numbers 22-25). And in the time of the Judges, the king of Moab, Eglon, oppressed Israel for eighteen years until the left-handed judge Ehud ran him through with a

sword (Judges 3:14-30). Interestingly, Israel's greatest king, David, was one sixteenth Moabite. (David's great grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabite).

A second possible identity for the *city* in Isaiah's prophecy is that it represents the kingdoms of this world who are opposed to God. In a sense, the *city* Isaiah is referring to is any and all cities or peoples who are against the Lord. The *city's* symbolism is similar to how Revelation depicts the blaspheming *city* of Babylon as the metaphorical capital of the rebellious world (Revelation 17-18),

“And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”
(Revelation 18:9-10).

It is possible that Isaiah could have both references concerning the *city* in mind.

Isaiah prophesies that God will completely devastate this *city*. It will be a total victory for the LORD and a complete and total defeat for the *city* that futilely *fortified* against Him. This could be a similar image to that of the vision interpreted by Daniel, where a rock representing *God's* kingdom completely demolishes the kingdoms of men (Daniel 2:44-45).

There is nothing that can stand against the LORD Almighty (2 Chronicles 20:6). There is no *city*, however strong, that can defend itself whatsoever against His wrath (Nahum 1:2-6). God will completely crush all who make themselves and remain His enemies. From Isaiah's prophetic perspective he observes and remarks upon the aftermath of God's future victory. The LORD's utter dominance over this *city* was an impressionable sight to behold.

The first thing Isaiah remarks upon is how *You have made this city into a heap*.

A *heap* is a gigantic pile. This means that the stones and materials that formerly comprised the structure of the *city's* walls, buildings, palaces, and monuments, have now been demolished into a *heap* of rubble.

Isaiah's second observation about this *city* is how the LORD turned *A fortified city into a ruin*.

A fortified city is one that has many defenses such as strong, high walls, a well-equipped military, and sufficient stores of provisions to protect it during a siege. But these defenses were no match for the Lord. He has turned it *into a ruin*.

Isaiah's third comment about this *city* is *A palace of strangers is a city no more*.

A palace is residence of the king and (his often large) family. *A palace* also functions as the seat of government. Everyone who lived or worked in the palace would have been at least somewhat familiar with one another. But now after the fall of this *fortified city*, all these people who once lived and worked together in the *palace* are gone. That is why it has become a *palace of*

strangers. *Strangers* is a euphemism for foreign invaders. And when *strangers* plunder, walk, or inhabit the residence of the king and the seat of government, that *city is a city no more*.

Isaiah then says: *Therefore a strong people will glorify You*.

The word, *therefore*, indicates that because the LORD has laid waste this *city*, other *strong people will glorify* Him. The description, *strong people*, refers to those who are militarily or politically *strong*. But their strength is no match for the LORD almighty. Isaiah says these *strong peoples will glorify* God because He has wrecked this *city*. It does not seem that these strong people are glorifying God with praise, but out of fear and trembling. The Hebrew word translated as glorify is כָּבַד ("kāḇaḏ"). It can also mean "heavy" or "weighted down." In this context it implies that *the strong people* have been sobered into recognizing the awesome and overwhelming power of God and their powerlessness before Him.

Isaiah continues: *Cities of ruthless nations will revere You*. This thought repeats the prior thought, that *a strong people will glorify You*. The term, *ruthless nations*, means oppressive *nations* that exploit other peoples through their military conquest and subjugation. Because God has conquered this *city*, the *ruthless nations* tremble before Him.

Next, Isaiah shifts perspective from the fear of God that will be instilled in the oppressor to the relief of the defenseless:

*For You have been a defense for the helpless,
A defense for the needy in his distress,*

The prophet praises the LORD *for* how He has *been a defense* for both *the helpless* and *the needy in his distress*. *The helpless* refers to those who are weak and do not have the means to resist the oppression of *strong people*. *The needy* represents the poor who are unable to fully provide for themselves, either in terms of provision or defense.

God commands His people to defend the *helpless* and to be generous toward the *needy*,

"Vindicate the weak and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.
Rescue the weak and needy;
Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked."
(Psalm 82:3-4)

"If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks."
(Deuteronomy 15:7)

In the first chapter of Isaiah's prophecy the LORD warns the people of Israel to,

“Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the ruthless,
Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow.”
(Isaiah 1:17)

In crushing the *fortified city* and putting the oppressive peoples and *ruthless nations* on notice, God has protected *the helpless*. He has defeated and intimidated their would-be-oppressors. God protects them. He is their *defense*. And He has come to their aid in their time of *distress*.

God’s plan for humanity is for them to engage with one another in a loving manner, to serve and lift up one another. God desires for the *strong* to serve the weak, even as Jesus served. Satan’s plan is for humans to exploit one another. Satan is the exploiter-in-chief. God is long-suffering, allowing ample time for *people* to repent (2 Peter 3:9). But eventually He will execute justice upon the earth.

God will prove for the helpless and the needy to be *a refuge from the storm* of oppression and *a shade from the heat* of oppression. *The storm* could be a metaphor for oppressive violence. *Heat* could be a metaphor for the stifling nature of oppression that dehydrates the soul. God *defends* the helpless and *the needy* from both types of oppression.

Isaiah then compares *the breath of the ruthless* to be *like a rain storm against a wall*.

The phrase *the breath of the ruthless* could mean their hot threats that intimidate and compel the defenseless and needy to give them what they demand. It also could refer to their violent and tyrannical spirit. The Hebrew word, translated as *breath* is רוּחַ (pronounced “rûah”). It can also be translated as “spirit.”

The fact that it is like a *rain storm against a wall* could mean several things. But in light of the surrounding context, where God is smashing all opposition, it probably means that the threats of *the ruthless* are like rain on a rooftop. It makes noise but serves no threat. A *wall* can easily withstand a *rain storm*. The *ruthless* will endeavor to resist God, but they will bounce off Him like a *rain drop*. And all those who have sought refuge under God’s wings will be safe, because God is their *wall*.

After comparing *the breath of the ruthless* to the *rain against a wall*, Isaiah makes two additional comparisons.

The first comparison is *Like heat in drought, You subdue the uproar of aliens*. God subdues those who would invade, *aliens* or foreigners, *like heat in a drought*.

Heat in a drought evaporates all the moisture so that all vegetation withers. *The uproar of aliens* likely means the pompous threats of foreign powers. As heat inevitably and irresistibly evaporates moisture, so does God evaporate *the uproar of aliens*.

The second comparison is *Like heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is silenced.*

Beneath *the shadow of a cloud*, *heat* subsides and cools. In this analogy, *heat* is the exploitation by *the ruthless* and *strong*, and *the shadow of a cloud* is the presence and protection of God. When God's presence is felt, the boastful *song of the ruthless is silenced*.

Biblical Text

**2 For 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.**

**3 Therefore a strong people will glorify You;
Cities of ruthless nations will revere You.**

**4 For 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;
For the breath of the ruthless
Is like a rain storm against a wall.**

**5 Like heat in drought, You subdue the uproar of aliens;
Like heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is silenced.**