

## Our God Saves: Turn

Perfect Peace During Distress

Isaiah 26-29

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*“In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.” The path of the righteous is level; you make level the way of the righteous. In the path of your judgments, O LORD, we wait for you; your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the LORD” (Isa. 26:1–10, ESV).*

According to Ray Ortlund, in his commentary on Isaiah, the year 410 A.D. is relevant to the book of Isaiah. For those of you who are students of history, you’ll know that 410 A.D. was when the sacking of Rome by the Goths occurred. It was the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire. Ortlund says, “It was the end of an era—the era of security, the beginning of uncertainty.”<sup>1</sup>

The world, it seemed, was falling apart.

Soon after the Fall of Rome, a North African pastor named Augustine preached a sermon in which he called his congregation to think carefully about what was happening. Here’s what he said:

You are surprised that the world is losing its grip, that the world is grown old? Think of a man. He is born, he grows up, he becomes old. Old age has many complaints: coughing, shaking, failing eyesight, anxious, terribly tired. A man grows old; he is full of complaints. The world is old; it is full of pressing tribulations. . . Do not hold on to the old man, the world. Do not refuse

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [\*Isaiah: God Saves Sinners\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 140–141.

to regain your youth in Christ, who says to you: “The world is passing away, the world is losing its grip, the world is short of breath. Do not fear. ‘Your youth shall be renewed as an eagle.’”<sup>2</sup>

Augustine would go on to write a seminal book called *The City of God*, which wrestles with the concept of Christians living in an earthly kingdom and while being spiritual citizens of a heavenly kingdom. You could think of it as the City of God versus the City of Man. And the main question was which city are we really living for?

Or maybe a sharper question would be better: Which city is your hope?

The theme of the book of Isaiah is “Our God Saves.” The book is three sections: turn, believe, and live. The particular section we’re in focuses on calling God’s people to turn from trusting in the wrong things and instead turn toward God. Last week, we saw the way that chapters 24-25 expanded God’s warning to the entire world with an appeal to trust in him: “in wrath remember mercy.”

This theme of judgment and mercy continues through chapters 26-29, but the order is reversed. Chapters 26-27 show us the promise of a future day where peace is promised. Chapters 28-29 are cautionary.

The central theme or idea for the sermon today is this: be careful where you look for peace.

Times of distress create an understandable and deep longing for peace. The question is: where do we look for it? These chapters detail some promises (connected to the phrase “in that day”) and some cautions (connected to the word “Ah”). Let’s explore these together.

### **Promises**

Central to the message of the gospel is a future day when Christ returns, removes all sin from the world, and creates an everlasting home of peace. Christians may disagree on the timing of Christ’s return, but you can’t be a Christian and deny that there’s a future plan of peace connected to the New Heavens and the New Earth.

The Christian life is lived *for* the future *in* the present. What is to come informs what is now.

This future place is connected to the phrase “in that day.” We find it in the following places:

- 26:1 – “in that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah”
- 27:1 – “in that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan...”
- 27:6 – “in the days to come, Jacob shall take root. . .”
- 27:12 – “In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the Lord will thresh out the grain. . .”

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [Isaiah: God Saves Sinners](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 140–141.

As the world is unraveling with the threat of Assyria, Isaiah points the people of God to a future day. Instead of using the imagery of a mountain as he did previously (25:6,10), we now see a city. But not just any city—a strong city whose walls of protection are called “salvation” (v. 1). This dwelling place is protected and guarded by the grace of God.

This city is a place of righteousness. The gates are figuratively wide open to the nations that “keep faith” (v. 2). This is a city where life is marked by obedience and faithfulness. And what follows this obedience is perfect peace or literally “peace, peace.” (v. 3). Underneath righteousness and peace is the issue of trust.

The peace *of* God and trust *in* God are linked together. Verse 3 connects the dots for us with an affirmation of having a mind that is “stayed” upon the Lord. In the future and even now, there’s an important connection between peace, trust, and the mind. For those of you who are Christians, imagine how free your mind and heart are going to be with the absence of anything to worry about or having to think about something bad that might happen. Our entire mental energy will be spent considering the powerful nature of God’s goodness.

Some of us might want to take a lesson from that right now. Let me ask you a few questions: What are you occupying your mind with right now? What are you thinking about? What are you researching? How much news and social media are you consuming? Do you know what’s worse than not being informed? Never having peace. For some of us, FOMO is replacing faith. We place more confidence in our ability to figure things out than we do in God’s power (see vv. 5-6).

We lack peace because we are looking for it in the wrong places.

Isaiah calls the people of God to look for peace in God and in the future. Even while life is hard. He offers this promise to people who are struggling. We get a clear sense of this with a short lament in verses 7-18.

I find this to be helpful because it shows us that seeking peace doesn’t mean that there isn’t a real struggle. We might know something to be spiritually true, but it’s hard to live in a world that doesn’t look like this. That’s why we find the following statements:

- (vv. 7-9) – Turns to God as he expresses the value of obedience as they wait for him
- (vv. 10-11a) – Complains that the unrighteous do not see God’s goodness
- (vv. 11b) – Asks for God for victory
- (vv. 12-15) – Trusts in God’s power and ability
- (vv. 16-18) – Complains again – “we have accomplished no deliverance in the earth” (v. 18b).
- (vv. 19-21) – Trust again is featured but this time it’s God who answers them

Now, this chapter is about promises. Why is there a lament here? Gary Smith in his commentary offers this insightful thought:

This lament serves as a good example to all believers, for it contains a healthy acceptance of present pain, a firm faith that God is teaching people the ways of righteousness through it, a

recognition that God is the only source of real peace, and a strong yearning to have deliverance from this severe trial.<sup>3</sup>

Christians lament precisely because they believe in God's promises. The more they believe in God's promises, the more they long for him to return and the more they see the brokenness of the world. People who know God's promises practice lament as they wait.

But there are more promises here. In chapter 27:1, we read that God will slay the fleeing serpent that is in the sea. This is a metaphor for the evil that is in the world. And the hope here is that one day; all evil, every wicked desire, and every wrong motivation will be wiped from the face of the earth. Sinful rebellion will no longer be among us.

God calls his people a pleasant vineyard that is kept by the Lord himself (v. 2). He nourishes it, keeps it, and protects it. There are no thorns or briars, and God has no wrath (v. 4). God's people, especially the nation of Israel, have fulfilled their mission—extending fruitfulness to the whole world (v. 6).

The people will be righteous. God will atone for their sins even as they are disciplined (v. 9a). They will be changed with no more idolatry (v. 9b). And the world will face judgment (vv. 10-11) even as God calls for his people from the lands of exile (vv. 12-13).

What a series of promises! They were meant to give God's people hope. But they only knew part of the story. As we walked through the text, you may have heard themes from the book of Revelation. But we also need to be reminded that Jesus is a foretaste of what is yet to come.

The promises of God not only relate to the future, but they also relate in some way to us now. For example:

- Jesus will defeat the devil once and for all, but even now he disarmed spiritual rulers and authorities (Col. 2:15)
- Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, but even now we confess that our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20)
- We long for the new Jerusalem, but even now we endure hardship because here we have no lasting city (Heb. 13:14-18)
- We can hardly wait for the day when we will see Jesus face to face, but even now we are reminded that he's the vine, we're the branches, and apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:1)
- We long for the promises of God to be fulfilled, but even now we know that all the promises of God are "Yes" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20)

The promises about the future help us know how to live right now. They invite us to find our peace in the right place. They call us to discover peace in the right person—the prince of peace.

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<sup>3</sup> Gary V. Smith, [Isaiah 1–39](#), ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 444.

Where are you looking for peace? In whom or what are you placing your hope? What city are you living for? What are you doing to push your heart and mind toward mediating, considering, and thinking about the promises of God?

Be careful where you look for peace.

### **Cautions**

As is so common in Isaiah, these passages move quickly from hope toward warning. Isaiah bounces back and forth between hopeful encouragement and heartfelt caution. We need to be reminded where to look for peace, but we also need regular caution about looking in the wrong places.

At this moment in Israel and Judah's history, there was a very practical application of the concept of peace. Assyria had already conquered Israel, and the forces were making their way into the land of Judah. And the temptation was to trust in political alliance with Egypt. We'll see this caution again in the future:

*"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!" (Isa. 31:1)*

Chapters 28-29 are the first of a number of "woe" oracles. They are mournful warnings set in the context of cautionary lament. These funeral songs are identified with the word "ah." Or in your texting language: "ugggh."

In 28:1-6, there's a caution to the people of Samaria (Ephraim) about finding their peace in their success. Self-sufficient pride is in view here. They are described as a fading flower and as drunks (v. 1) while the coming judgment of God is going to be like a violent storm (v. 2). They will be "picked off" like the first fruit on a tree (v. 4). And yet God is going to be gracious to them (vv. 5-6).

Aren't you thankful that God is gracious to proud people who don't even realize how proud they really are? Sometimes we don't know how self-sufficient or addicted our own success we are until that success is removed. And yet God is gracious to us.

In 28:7-22, Isaiah turns his focus on Jerusalem. The people are warned about self-indulgence. Verses 7-8 picture a society that is morally unraveling, including its spiritual leaders. The people mock Isaiah's warnings. They accuse him of simplistic and elementary teaching (vv. 9-10). And yet the Lord is going to speak to his people through "foreign tongues"—a hint at what's to come in the Pentecost. (v. 11). God's word will not be heeded. They are unwilling to listen (v. 13).

Putting your hope for peace in something other than God can create a deep level of cynicism and scoffing (v. 14). They've put their trust in man-made covenants which Isaiah sees as a covenant with death (v. 15).

Yet God still offers grace by setting a cornerstone that can be trusted and believed (v. 16). And God will bring about true justice bringing about deliverance from earthly confidence (vv. 17-19). God's people are being warned that their hope is in the wrong place (vv. 20-22).

All of this is part of God's plan. In the same way that a plower and a thresher act with intention for a greater purpose, Isaiah says that God is using hardship to get his people to return back to him: "he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom" (v. 29).

Chapter 29 narrows the focus of caution to the city of Jerusalem and the coming siege. In verses 1-8, we learn about the coming deliverance of God that is going to come at the last minute. They will be surrounded, but the Lord will help them.

The hearts of the people are far from God (v. 10-13), and yet God intends to intervene in grace (v. 14). Even though they think their deeds are hidden from the Lord (vv. 15-16), there is a spiritual renewal that is coming:

*"Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel."* (Isaiah 29:17–19, ESV)

God has not forgotten his promise! Even in hardship and hardness of heart, there's hope in God's ability to bring spiritual change:

*"Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction"" (Isa. 29:22–24).*

What's incredible about this section of Scripture is that we see Isaiah provide caution after caution with the end goal of helping us to see that our only hope is the mercy and grace of God. When life falls apart, our only hope for true and lasting peace is the prince of peace.

### **Applications**

These chapters are full of rich content regarding where we find our peace. They offer promises and cautions. What should we do with these chapters?

1. **Be careful about where you look for peace.** There are many ways in which we can try to regain control, achieve power for protection, self-medicate an inconsolable soul, or assert our own success. Every person longs for peace. The question is where are we seeking it.
2. **Rejoice that every hardship, including discipline, is part of God's kindness.** Isaiah is making it very clear that the difficulties that are coming from God are part of his plan to soften the hearts

of his people and to get their attention. They don't even realize how far they've strayed. God is trying to win them back. God may be trying to win some of you back.

3. **Marvel at God's intervention despite our rebellion.** These chapters show us that despite our constant resistance, God sees fit to woo us to himself. He rescues us not only from our sin. He rescues us from the path of self-destruction. Where would you be today, Christian, without the intervention of God? Through Christ, he saved you from you!

Peace is what every human being longs for. Peace is what we desperately need when we're in distress. And peace is what God promises us through Christ and in our eternal future. Peace is what we forfeit when we fail to heed the cautions of the Bible.

Let the Prince of Peace be your peace. Let the city of God, not the city of man be your heart's delight. Embrace these hopeful words:

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord for the Lord our God is an everlasting rock" (Isa. 26:3-4).

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