

ISAIAH

Chapter 24

Judgment on the Whole Earth

Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. 2 And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. 3 The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the LORD has spoken this word. 4 The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. 5 The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. 6 Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left. 7 The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. 8 The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. 9 No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. 10 The wasted city is broken down; every house is shut up so that none can enter. 11 There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has grown dark; the gladness of the earth is banished. 12 Desolation is left in the city; the gates are battered into ruins. 13 For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done. 14 They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west. 15 Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; in the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. 16 From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, "I waste away, I waste away. Woe is me! For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal the traitors have betrayed." 17 Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! 18 He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. 19 The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken. 20 The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. 21 On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. 22 They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. 23 Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.

Chs 24–27 A unit in the larger structure of Is. The Lord now addresses the whole earth instead of individual nations. (TLSB)

24:1–27:13† Chs. 24–27 deal with judgment and blessing in the day of the Lord, the time of God's final victory over the forces of evil and the consummation of history. These chapters form a conclusion to chs. 13–23 just as chs. 34–35 form a conclusion to chs. 28–33. (CSB)

24:1 *behold* – Which always introduces new or important material (e.g. 7:14; 25:9; 26:21). (TLSB)

make it desolate. Continues the language from the beginning of the previous section (13:9). (TLSB)

That is, He will destroy it, He will demolish its hedges. Just as a vineyard entirely stripped of posts and hedges lies open to all wild beasts for destruction, so he speaks of it as denuded² of hedges, that is, of apostles and teachers. It will be deprived of good counselors and excellent men, and He will reduce it to total destruction. (Luther)

twist its surface – Every tower and building is called the surface of the land. Princes, magnates, aristocrats, and whatever has an appearance in the world is called the surface. And so God will humiliate this surface and twist it and distort its whole aspect and appearance. (Luther)

scatter its inhabitants. See Ge 11:9. (Tower of Babel) (CSB)

As at the tower of Babel (Gn 11:9). Once more, the Lord will scatter the peoples of the earth in judgment. (TLSB)

24:2–3 Judgment will spare no one and will be without partiality or favoritism (Rm 2:11). (TLSB)

24:2 Social distinctions will provide no escape from the judgment (cf. 3:1–3). (CSB)

It is as if he were saying: “While the land of Judea stands, it is the best state, it has the best government and the best men. There will be the greatest distinction of persons, because the priest is other than the people, and the master is other than the slave. But with the destruction of the land everything will perish without order. There will be no distinction of persons, all will be equally despoiled and scattered, and they will perish. This will take place in such a way that you will see all the good things of the cities, perish in disharmony and confusion.” (Luther)

24:3 *earth shall be utterly empty* – Nothing will be safe in the land. It will be exposed to all for damage. (Luther)

the Lord has spoken – The historians write that Jerusalem was captured by a special divine command of God.³ So the prophet here says that this will take place because the Lord has spoken this Word. For if a united Jerusalem had set itself against the Romans, it could not have been laid waste. Thus also Titus was amazed that he had taken so great a city, so well fortified, and he ascribed it not to his own army but to the divine will. (Luther)

24:4 *earth.* Personified here with descriptions of mourning and languishing. Paul echoes this idea in Rm 8:21–22. (TLSB)

dries up and withers. Words applied to Moab in 15:6; 16:8. Cf. 34:4. (CSB)

These are Hebrew modes of speech, to say that the earth mourns and the vineyard mourns when there is nothing fertile and pleasant in them. In German: It is miserable and deplorable, just as the best and pleasant fields are called gay and pretty. *Falling off*, that is, pining away, withering. The leaves are said to fall off when the sap and native fluid in the tree ceases, when there is no hope of sprouting again. *Languishing*, that is, diseased; when its strength is removed, it has no reserve left to be rekindled. It is completely worn out, so that it cannot recuperate. As we say of something quite hopeless, it is altogether spoiled. (Luther)

24:5 *earth lies defiled* – To profane is to play the hypocrite, because they have profaned the earth by their ungodly hypocrisy and impiety. For the earth cannot be more polluted than by hypocrisy and profanation, counterfeit justice and hypocritical holiness, and therefore long hardened hypocrites submit to no correction but act insolently toward all. (Luther)

Sin affects all creation. Gn 3:17 explains that one of the results of the fall is a cursing of the earth. (TLSB)

under its inhabitants – That is, the earth groans under the weight of these hypocrites, because burning with an evil zeal they consigned God’s apostles to death. (Luther)

transgressed the laws – All hypocrites refuse to obey the law and words of God, as the Garden Brothers do. The fanatics and ungodly instigators of sects transgress the law of God and change it in the interest of their own wanton desire and luxury. (Luther)

broken the everlasting covenant. Reference is probably to the covenant of Ge 9:8–17. Although everlasting from the divine viewpoint, God’s covenants can be broken by sinful mankind. (CSB)

Made with Noah and, by extension, with everyone and everything (Gn 9:9–17). (TLSB)

That is, they have invalidated God’s promises concerning Christ in that they did not accept them by faith. Thus you see here that the greatest sins threaten the teachers and rulers, not the common people, who do not break God’s commands and promises, but the leaders are addicted to this sin. Just so at this time we see the pope addicted to this sin, and we dare in no wise agree with him, though otherwise we might wish to approve his gross sins, if only he would not attack the Word. (Luther)

24:6 *curse.* † Because of the evil in the world, God’s devastating curse will burn up the earth’s inhabitants (cf. Ge 8:21–22; cf. also the covenant of Ge 9:8–17). (CSB)

A devouring and scorching fire burning through a field, an image seen throughout Is (e.g., 5:24; 10:16–17; 29:6). (TLSB)

This is the reason why this land will be so wretchedly laid waste, alluding to Deut. 28:15 ff., concerning the curse upon the disobedient. *Devours*, that is, destroys it utterly. “And its inhabitants are irreconcilable,” that is, they transgress and remain in guilt and are damnable and irreconcilable. Just so the pope with all his righteousness does nothing more than transgress and remain in his guilt. (Luther)

few men are left – That is, the apostles and godly believers. These alone have been preserved by God from this devastation. (Luther)

24:7 *vine mourns.* The devastation and desolation of all animate and inanimate creatures follows upon the destruction of men. (Luther)

merry-hearted sigh – Reapers, who otherwise are joyful, will be sad. (Luther)

24:8 *mirth ... is stilled.* Cf. 22:2, 13; 23:7. (CSB)

That is, bridegroom and bride and all the happy people become sad. (Luther)

24:9 *wine with singing*. Characteristic of Judah in 5:11–13. (CSB)

That is, the joyful do not drink together in the taverns. (Luther)

strong drink is bitter – Not that the wine itself is bitter, but because of sadness and grief it does not taste sweet to them, however sweet it was. (Luther)

Beer or other fermented beverages, main ingredients for festivals and joyous times. Because of the Lord’s judgment, all merrymaking ceases. (TLSB)

24:10–12 *city*. Though any city may be meant because these effects are global, Isaiah likely refers to Babylon. (TLSB)

24:10 *wasted city*.† The same idea appears in 25:2; 26:5; 27:10 (cf. 17:1; 19:18). Every city, once an organized community, will be a heap of ruins. (CSB)

Chaos denotes lack of cultivation, ravage, and ruin. Just so it is with Jerusalem today. Scarcely traces of it are found. (Luther)

See Gen 1:2, “without form and void.” Isaiah uses the word first here and then frequently throughout the rest of Isaiah (40:17; 41:29; 45:18) to describe the Lord’s reversal of creation. (TLSB)

shut up – This is the usual condition of ruined cities. They are altogether bereft of use by men, and there are no inhabitants there. (Luther)

24:11 *outcry...lack of wine*. That is lamentation, in the streets *for lack of wine*. There is the lamentation of those who complain in public, as if to say, “O God, how well off we were formerly in this street and in this house!” (Luther)

24:12 *gates are battered into ruins* – That is, the meeting places of the senate and the larger buildings of the courts are referred to. That is to say, there is no court to dispense justice. (Luther)

Reminiscent of exile, echoing 5:9. (TLSB)

24:13 Only a few olives and grapes will be left (see v. 6; 17:6, 11). (CSB)

Repeats 17:5–6. There, the idea was that a remnant would be left among the people of Israel. Here, it refers to a remnant of the nations. (TLSB)

Following prophetic custom, he compares the devastation of the earth to a vineyard whose grape gatherers are enemies, whose grapes and fruits are the best men of the city, as if to say: “The city is so thoroughly laid waste that hardly a few remnants remain, or as if the enemies out of oversight had unwillingly left these items behind.” (Luther)

gleaning. The very last fruit is sought out in these desperate conditions. (TLSB)

24:14–16 *lift up their voices*. The remnant, left over after the gleaning of the previous verse. These people rejoice in song that they have been spared the judgment. *the west ... ends of the earth*. People from everywhere join in this song (cf Rv 7:9). (TLSB)

24:14 *They*.† The godly survive the judgment. (CSB)

lift up their voices – This text dearly speaks of the apostles proclaiming the Gospel and openly praising the mercy of Christ. *They will neigh*, that is, boast of the majesty and victory of the Lord; they will glow over Christ’s victory, whereby He conquered Satan, the flesh, and the world. St. Paul very beautifully depicts this exultation and triumph when he writes in Col. 2:13 ff. So the prophet writes: *over the majesty of the Lord*, and he describes Christ’s total power and especially His resurrection, whereby He has justified us and in which all the godly must trust above all. (Luther)

24:15 *coastlands*. It is as if he were saying: “The word of the apostles will not be empty, but by it the name of the Lord will be glorified, not only on the mountains but also in the valleys and in the lowest places, and by men everywhere His name will be glorified,” that is, the “voice” of the apostles “has gone out to all the earth” (Rom. 10:18) to the glory of the Lord. (Luther)

24:16 *ends of the earth*. The prophet imagines himself to be a participant in the devastation of Judea and saying: “Hitherto the praise of God was sung only in temples and other places and by few people. Now, however, it is published in all parts of the earth.” Therefore he speaks of the pleasantness and the glory of the righteous Lord, namely, Christ, which we have heard everywhere *from the ends of the earth*. Even so after Christ’s death all things done by Christ are very fully rehearsed, that is, the most joyful righteousness of Christ, the Righteous One, will be taught, whereby He justified and sanctified all His righteous ones. (Luther)

Righteous One. God, who has been faithful and gracious. (TLSB)

I.† Probably collective for the godly who waste away because of the villainy of the treacherous nations that seek to crush the people of God. (CSB)

Isaiah himself has a very different reaction to being spared. His response to this destruction is similar to his response in 22:4. He can only mourn at the sight, crying out the same words as at his commissioning in 6:5. (TLSB)

I waste away ... betray! In the Hebrew text these last four lines of the verse (*Razi li, razi li! 'Oy li! Bogedim bagadu! Ubeged bogedim bagadu!*) contain a powerful example of alliteration and assonance. (CSB)

None is without guilt. (TLSB)

That is, meagerness. The prophet laments that he is impoverished by the fall of the Jews, who have not accepted this loveliness of the Gospel; while the Gentiles run to it from all directions, the hardened Jews do not savor it. He shows that this evil torments him and his body, so that he repeats these words, *I pine away, I pine away*. “O how emaciated I have become for your sakes because of the damage that has been done! Paul, too, has this intense concern, as expressed in Rom. 9:2 and 10:1. Whence comes this leanness to me? (Luther)

The traitors. The enemies of God’s people. (CSB)

Those are the liars and despisers who rely on their own ungodliness to such an extent that they are not softened by any admonitions, even though they do not have any just cause. Our papists are like that now. (Luther)

24:17–18 Cf. Am 5:19. (CSB)

24:17 *Terror and pit and snare.* † Another example (see note on v. 16) of alliteration and assonance (see Jer 48:43). The Hebrew words are *paḥad*, *paḥat* and *paḥ*. (CSB)

That is, those despisers will be given up to a reprobate mind (Rom. 1:28), they will fall into various dangers of doctrine and disaster, so that the blind will lead the blind into a pit, and their ungodly doctrines accomplish nothing else than that they are terrified and remain in their errors and snares, forever captive and in subjection. These things follow the despisers of the Word. (Luther)

24:18 *He who flees ... in the snare.* The reason for Isaiah's reaction to the destruction is now understood. No one will escape! Whether one falls into a pit or is caught in a snare, everyone will be captured (cf Am 9:1–4). (TLSB)

sound of terror – That is, if someone escapes one snare, he will fall into the pit; if he has escaped the pit, he will fall into the raging streams, that is, the clear punishment of God coming from heaven and from the sky like a flood. These are things which the punishment of God's total wrath brings on, and those who have escaped some drops of punishments will fall into the deluge of divine wrath and rage. (Luther)

windows of heaven. An echo of Noah's flood (Ge 7:11; 8:2). (CSB)

Allusion to the destruction by the great flood. (TLSB)

foundations...tremble. Earthquakes and thunder (see note on 13:13; cf. Joel 3:16). (CSB)

The nobles and princes, who are the foundations of the earth and leaders of the people; they themselves stray about on uncertain standards and doctrines and are wavering foundations, retreating from here and from there. As it happened to the Jews, so it will also happen to our papists, God willing, because they cannot sustain themselves by their ephemeral jokes unless protected by the secular arm. (Luther)

24:19–20 Earthquakes are frequently associated with the presence of the Lord (e.g., Jgs 5:4; 2Sm 22:8–16; Jer 10:10; Jl 2:10). In the NT, earthquakes may be a sign of salvation (e.g., Mt 27:51–52; Ac 16:26). (TLSB)

24:19 *earth is utterly broken* – It is the prophet's nature to grieve over the punishment of the ungodly as much as he rejoices over the proclamation of the Gospel. (Luther)

violently shaken – It will be torn apart like the branches of a tree. (Luther)

24:20 *like a drunken man.* Cf. 19:14. (CSB)

That is, it will be constantly in turmoil, as we see in the synagogue of the Jews. Because the Jews devised altogether invalid and futile counsels, nothing will help them, although they have sought many remedies. Not only will their counsels come to naught, but these plans will be conceived

also to their own destruction. They will make a bad thing worse. First he says the earth is shaken; second, it is vexed by their counsels; third, by a breakdown; fourth, by a swaying and trembling, just as drunks usually stagger and are carried along. It will stagger and fall down, and they will have no happiness, strength, counsel, or help, but nothing except fear remains for them. In the manner of Cain they will be fugitives and vagabonds, like the gypsies and Jews in our time. (Luther)

like a hut. As the shepherds' huts and night shelters are moved from day to day. (Luther)

transgression lies heavy upon it – He gives the reason why that land wanders so much, namely, because the promises and covenants of God have been violated. This transgression is a burden and a hardening for them, so that they are compelled to fall, as Christ says (Luke 19:44): “You did not know the time of your visitation.”

24:21 *In that day.* The day of the Lord. (CSB)

He is here speaking of the kingdom of the Jewish people, which had been lifted up even to heaven and had the most excellent princes, who did everything in the Lord's name, and they boasted that it was God who did everything they accomplished. For that reason they were called princes of this star of heaven and heavenly princes and people of heaven, because they gloried in the Word of God. He ridicules these people, who with unbelievable pride and pretense gloried in themselves, listening to no prophet, at all events relying on their own outward boasting and sham, and refused to be either rebuked or accused by them. (Luther)

host of heaven. Satan and the fallen angels (see Eph 6:11–12). (CSB)

Fallen angels will be judged along with humans on Judgment Day. (TLSB)

24:22 *they will be gathered together* – When they have sinned for a long time and filled up the measure of their fathers and slain all the prophets and apostles and Christ, then God will settle their account all at once, as Christ threatens them in the Gospel. (Luther)

shut up in prison. Cf. Rev 20:2. (CSB)

This prison finds its way into the NT by means of 1Pt 3:19–20; 2Pt 2:4; Jude 6; Rv 9:1–3, 11; 20:1–3. Prison bars are the background to the words of Jesus in Mt 16:18: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against [the Church].” (TLSB)

Of one judgment and condemnation. The dead as well as the living will be prepared, and the living will be shut up in prisons; and thus the Lord will punish all the past and present sins of the fathers and the children. (Luther)

punished after many days. See NIV text note; cf. Rev 20:7–10. (CSB)

The destruction of Jerusalem. (Luther)

24:23 *moon ... abashed, the sun ashamed.* The sun and moon do not shine during judgment (see note on 13:10) or when the Lord is the “everlasting light” (60:19–20; cf. Rev 21:23; 22:5). (CSB)

Jerusalem will no longer need the sun or moon for light; instead, the Lord Himself will be its light. This promise is fulfilled in the new Jerusalem (cf Rv 21:23). (TLSB)

The ruined and still living Jews will not see the brightness of the sun and the moon when Christ, the Lord of hosts, will reign spiritually on the mountain in full view. (Luther)

reigns on Mount Zion. See 2:2–4 and note. (CSB)

elders – His apostles and bishops. Even though they have the outward brightness of the sun like other living beings, yet since they have much sadness because of their sinful transgression and the threatening punishment, even the sun and the moon will not seem to shine for them, because they have an empty heart. For all things are as we are in spirit; so the sun, moon, bells, drums, and songs sound and shine sad to the sad, but are joyful to the happy and rejoicing. The sad and gloomy at heart see and hear nothing but sad and gloomy things, as we learn by experience. As a result, those who have hitherto wickedly boasted of the name of the Lord are now unable genuinely to enjoy all creatures, however delightful. Just so our papists boastfully claim the name of church for themselves but cannot honestly use its smallest benefit. God will punish also those ungodly crowds of papists with such a disaster that they will not be able to boast of themselves in any way. This prophecy expresses the disastrous destruction of the Jews. (Luther)

God will be revealed to His people (cf Ex 24:9–10). (TLSB)

Ch 24 No one, and not even the earth itself, is spared the coming devastation. Along with all of earth's other inhabitants, we stand before God as poor, miserable sinners. In thought, word, and deed, we have transgressed, violated, and broken His covenant. Although we deserve to suffer for our guilt, we can sing for joy that the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, has suffered in our place. "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities" (53:5). • Gracious Lord, we praise and glorify You for the salvation You have accomplished for us through Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. Amen. (TLSB)