

The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

Catholic Scripture Study

Memory Verse: *Isaiah 24:1, 3*

Behold, the LORD will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.

The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled.

Apocalypse of Isaiah - The End of the World (Isaiah Chapter 24)

I. OVERVIEW (ISAIAH 24-27)

Chapters 24-27 have often been called the **Apocalypse of Isaiah** because their focus is upon the end of the world and the worldwide triumph of God. These chapters can be divided into two sections, chapters 24-25 and chapters 26-27.

- In the first section the major focus is on the city of this world, its overthrow (24) and the response to its overthrow (25).
- This second section centers upon God's efforts on behalf of his people.

In these chapters the prophet sees beyond the rise and fall of individual nations, even beyond death itself, to a new world where death will be swallowed up forever (25:8) and the people of God will be summoned by a great trumpet "to come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem" (27:13).

These chapters stand out from the rest of the book as quite distinctive in both style and content. They have many similarities to the books of Daniel and Revelation.

They contain apocalyptic (visions; signs; end of the world) and eschatological (death; judgment; heaven; hell) material, and, as such, are concerned with:

- the end of the world,
- the last judgment and
- the resurrection of the dead,

They come at the end of the prophecies against the foreign nations recorded in chapters 13-23 and form a close connection with them.

A. Overview – Chapter 24

Isaiah announces the destruction of the earth and the hope of salvation for the remnant of the faithful.

The oracles in chapters 13-23 revealed God's judgment against **each** nation; now, chapter 24 announces a chastisement that will affect the whole world.

- This latter judgment is not local but **universal**. It will cover the entire earth, and include Judah. It points ultimately to the end of this world.

In chapter 24, Isaiah speaks of the Lord making the earth a wasteland, scattering all the inhabitants.

The earth is under a curse because its people have broken God's laws and the "everlasting covenant" (v. 5). This latter probably refers to God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8-17).

Everyone will experience devastation. They will be punished for their sins against the ancient covenant. No one, from the highest to lowest, will escape. In the end only a remnant will remain.

II. THE END OF THE WORLD

Read: Isaiah 24:1-6

[1] Behold, the LORD will lay waste 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 laid waste and utterly despoiled;
for the LORD has spoken this word.***

***[4] The earth mourns and withers,
the world languishes and withers;
the heavens languish together with the earth.***

***[5] The earth lies polluted
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.***

B. Prophecy of Universal Destruction (24:1-3)

The focus of chapter 24 is the destruction of the “earth.” Verses 1-3 underline the universal nature of this judgment.

Everyone will be subject to it, and no one will be exempt. This is made clear in verse two with the use of complementary pairs, such

as “**priest**” and “**people**” or “**mistress**” and “**maid.**” All class distinctions will be wiped out.

Neither gender, nor rank, nor function will permit any to escape what God is bringing on the earth.

This prophecy is certain **for the LORD has spoken this word.** But we cannot tell from the words when the prophecy will occur.

C. Why the Destruction of the Earth? (22:4-6)

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

The earth is under a **curse** because its people have broken God's laws and His covenant (see Romans 8:19ff). Although the **inhabitants** have sinned, the **earth** too will experience the results.

One of the features of covenants was the custom of the parties calling down curses on themselves for failure to keep the covenant. This is what has happened to earth's inhabitants: they are under a “curse” and bear “guilt” for what they have done (24:6).

In mighty convulsions similar to the Flood, the face of the earth will be devastated and changed, the population so reduced that the world will seem empty.

References to “**laws,**” “**statues,**” and “**covenant**” may sound much like language applicable to Israel, but this is not Israel that the prophet is talking about, it is the world!

Why then speak about laws, statues, and covenant? How can the inhabitants of the earth be held accountable for what was exclusively revealed to the Israelites?

In fact, like Paul in Romans 1, Isaiah insists that there are laws that God the Creator has written on every human heart or conscience.

- Thus, one cannot use ignorance as justification for sin.

Implicit here is the understanding that humans know enough to behave better than they do. There are common standards of human behavior; if we violate them, we do so to our own destruction.

These standards have been passed down through the ages as our common human heritage.

D. Application

It is not easy to know how literally these words of judgment will be fulfilled, but in these days of threatened ecological and nuclear catastrophe, it is not difficult to imagine a very literal fulfillment, and one which will indeed be the result of human greed, hatred, and bloodshed.

Also, as in the past, idolatry, pride and arrogance will also play a part in ushering in the judgment.

E. The Everlasting Covenant (24:5)

God's covenant here recalls the covenant he made with **Noah** and all the people of the earth after the great Flood. *"I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh"* (Gen. 9:15).

Unlike the Mosaic covenant, which was between God and the Jewish people alone, the covenant with Noah is an everlasting covenant between God and all flesh.

- It is an **unconditional** covenant.

All people on the earth are recipients of God's promise.

III. THE END OF REVELRY (24:7-13)

Read: Isaiah 24:7-13

***[7] The wine mourns,
the vine languishes,
all the merry-hearted sigh.***

***[8] The mirth of the timbrels 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 city of chaos 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 reached its eventide;
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 vintage is done.***

A. No Wine, No Music, No Joy (24:7-9)

When judgment comes upon the world all the sources of joy and gladness are destroyed. All wine drinking and singing will end. The vine and the wine (grapes) and all nature share in the sorrow of the land.

Those who enjoy the wine of the vines also groan (***all the merry-hearted sigh***), they are now mourners and groaners. The life which they must now face without the fruit of the vine is one that causes only sighs and anguish.

B. The City of Chaos (24:10-13)

The city of chaos is broken down (v.10). This city is not necessarily an historical city, although it may allude to Babylon. This city is the city of the world, and represents the world that has sinned and felt God's judgment.

The city is a symbol of human society, and chaos is a graphical way to describe the end of civilization: every house boarded up, people wailing in the streets, no pleasure, no laughter, the scene of desolation and neglect, the city gates (the most important part of the city) lying in pieces.

The sun has set over the joy of the city; darkness has come. Indeed, the rejoicing of the whole earth has been carried into captivity.

Such is the fate of sinful humanity, but from such chaos will emerge a new city with walls of salvation and gates open for a righteous nation to enter in (26:1-2).

C. God Will Shake the Earth (24:13)

Isaiah uses an image from an earlier prophecy to conclude the first part of this eschatological prophecy.

Just as at harvest time olive trees are shaken to collect the ripe olives from the tree, with only a few unripe fruit remaining on the trees. So it will be with the judgment. God will shake the world. After the shaking, a remnant will still be left.

Only a very few will be left alive, like the few grapes left on the vines after the grape harvest.

IV. PRAISE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING (24:14-16)

After the shaking comes the song of thanksgiving (vv. 14-16) to be sung by the faithful remnant all over the world. These are the few olives left clinging to the tree after the beating and the shaking have stopped (v. 13).

The remnant - those who are saved - will sing for joy and praise the Lord from all ends of the earth, crying out, “**glory to the Righteous One!**” (24:16).

Read: Isaiah 24:14-16

***[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, 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 said, "I waste away, I waste away!

Woe to me!

The treacherous betray!

With treachery the treacherous betray!"

A. Glory to the Righteous One (24:16a)

***They lift of up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty
of the LORD . . . From the ends of the earth we hear songs of
praise, of glory, to the Righteous One*** (Isaiah 24:14-16).

The phrase translated “**of glory to the Righteous One**” alludes to the glorious reign of God which is to follow the terrifying upheavals in heaven and earth described in verses 3ff.

That these upheavals are planned and controlled by God is emphasized by the choice of the term **the Righteous One** to

describe him. “True glory belongs to God” is thus the statement of faith concluding the first hymn of thanksgiving (vv. 14-16).

B. Praise for God's Deliverance

The remnant praises God because it is preserved alive and has escaped the ravages and destroying power of the judgment. Despite the desolation and destruction all around them, the people of God lift their voices to praise God.

C. Application

In suffering and hardship, it takes the same amount of energy to be mad as to be glad, so invest energy in praising God, rather than grumbling and complaining. God has a plan. God is in control.

V. THE LAST JUDGMENT (ISAIAH 24:14-23)

A. Overview

The scene now changes.

Isaiah sees devastation all around him with the earth shaken apart because of the rebellion and transgression of the people – a vivid description of the last judgment.

Those who fall into a pit will climb out only to be caught in a trap. In other words, there is no escape.

Read: Isaiah 24:17-20

***[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 rent asunder,
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.**

B. Cosmic Upheavals (24:17-20)

The windows of heaven and the **foundations of the earth** remind us that we're dealing with cosmic events comparable to primeval history.

When the windows of heaven were opened in Genesis 7:11, the waters of the great deep, symbol of the powers of chaos, burst forth and destroyed the world.

That is what the last judgment is going to be like.

"Earth," (vv. 19-20), will be **broken** and **shaken**, reeling to and fro, and swaying like a hut whose foundations have been undermined. Weighed down by her sin she falls to the ground and cannot get up again.

C. The End of History (24:21-23)

This last section (vv. 21-23), beginning with the phrase **"on that day,"** describes the defeat and imprisonment of **"the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth,"** and the inauguration of the kingdom of God on Mount Zion.

**[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 will reign
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
and before his elders he will manifest his glory.**

The Lord will punish the hosts of heaven a reference to the stars (that the pagans revered as gods), and rebellious angels who constitute the spiritual powers at war with God and with His people.

It was believed that the nations of the world are guided by angels like Michael and the prince of the kingdom of Persia (Dan. 10:13), for example, or by “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan (Rev. 20:2-3).

“On that day,” when all the nations of the world are punished the host of heaven will be punished too. They will be shut up in a dungeon where they will be judged and found guilty, and cast into an abyss, full of fire and flame.

D. God Reigns in Glory

Then the Lord will reign in glory on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. When the Lord's full glory is seen, the brightest things the world knows – the sun and the moon – will hang their heads in shame. Nothing can stand beside God in his regal splendor, no natural object and no combination of human concepts. God alone is king.

In the last days the elders of Judah and Jerusalem will no longer be the objects of God's wrath. Now they will take part in his coronation.

Finally, the ancient dream will have come true: God alone will be Israel's king.

Preparation for Isaiah Week 18

The Eschatological Banquet (Isaiah 25)

1. Read Isaiah, Chapter 25
2. Read Chapter 6, pgs 51-52, in *Come and See Catholic Bible Study – Isaiah*.
3. Answer questions 9-10 in *Come and See* (pg. 57-58).
4. Read the following paragraphs from the CCC:

Article 3 – Sacred Scripture

Section III – The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Sacred Scripture –

Paragraphs – 124-127: The Canon of Scripture – The New Testament