

**World-Wide Judgment**  
Isaiah 24  
Pastor Jason Van Bommel

<sup>1</sup> Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate,  
and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered;  
for the LORD has spoken this word.

<sup>4</sup> The earth mourns and withers;  
the world languishes and withers;  
the highest people of the earth languish.

<sup>5</sup> The earth lies defiled  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed the laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> The wine mourns,  
the vine languishes,  
all the merry-hearted sigh.

<sup>8</sup> The mirth of the tambourines is stilled,  
the noise of the jubilant has ceased,  
the mirth of the lyre is stilled.

<sup>9</sup> No more do they drink wine with singing;  
strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.

<sup>10</sup> The wasted city is broken down;  
every house is shut up so that none can enter.

<sup>11</sup> There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine;  
all joy has grown dark;  
the gladness of the earth is banished.

<sup>12</sup> Desolation is left in the city;  
the gates are battered into ruins.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> They lift up their voices, they sing for joy;  
 over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west.  
<sup>15</sup> 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.  
<sup>16</sup> 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."

<sup>17</sup> Terror and the pit and the snare  
 are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!  
<sup>18</sup> 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.  
<sup>19</sup> The earth is utterly broken,  
 the earth is split apart,  
 the earth is violently shaken.  
<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> On that day the LORD will punish  
 the host of heaven, in heaven,  
 and the kings of the earth, on the earth.  
<sup>22</sup> 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.  
<sup>23</sup> 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.

- Isaiah 24, ESV

## **Justice . . .**

Did you ever notice how almost no one likes judgmentalism but everyone longs for true justice? The very same people who will defend their own actions by quickly saying, "Hey, don't judge!" will then

turn around and be outraged by something they perceive to be wrong and will demand justice. It is right that we seek and long for justice. It is part of being made in God's image. It's right that we grieve and are distressed by the presence and prevalence of real evil in the world. Children are sold into slavery by their parents. Girls are kidnapped from their schools and made child brides. Innocent life is snuffed out before it can be born. The grossest immorality and most depraved material is just seconds away on the Internet. Powerful men start wars that lead to the deaths of millions of powerless people all in their pursuit of more power.

And yet, despite the reality of the world we live in and the longing we have for justice for the oppressed, so many people will say they're uncomfortable with the God of the Old Testament because He's a God of wrath and judgment. In fact, many people are just really uncomfortable with the whole idea of the wrath of God.

In 2016, a LifeWay Research survey found that 57 percent of Americans believed it would be fair for God to "show his wrath against sin," but a larger majority of Americans — 74 percent — thought it was wrong for God to punish people for smaller sins. 65 percent of Americans said that every person sins a little, but that people are essentially good in nature.

The "big sin" is done by "the bad people" – not me or my family or friends – but "those other people." We think if we're weighed on the scales of justice, we'll come out alright in the end, more good than bad, basically decent and definitely fit for heaven. But when it comes to such important ideas such as good and evil and eternal judgment, we shouldn't rely on polling data for our understanding of the truth. We only need one opinion – God's – because God alone is the eternal judge.

And when it comes to judgment, we need to take seriously the fact that Jesus Himself spoke more about hell than He did about heaven, and He spoke more about hell than any other person in the Bible.

In Isaiah 24, we come to the climax of a series of chapters proclaiming God's judgment on the nations. From chapter 13 to chapter 23, God singles out nation after nation – Assyrians, Babylonians, Philistines, Syrians, Edomites – for judgment, almost always at the hands of other nations who will conquer them. But the nations that do the conquering as the instruments of God's judgment themselves deserve His judgment for what they have done. And so, when we come to the conclusion of this long section of judgments against nations, we find that, in the end, the whole world deserves and will receive the judgment of God:

### **I. The Scope of the Judgment of God, vv. 1-4**

<sup>1</sup> *Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate,  
and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.*

<sup>2</sup> *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.*  
<sup>3</sup> *The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered;  
 for the LORD has spoken this word.*

<sup>4</sup> *The earth mourns and withers;  
 the world languishes and withers;  
 the highest people of the earth languish.*

Now, I do need to clarify something that should be clear but isn't to everyone. Sometimes Bible scholars can be helpful at clarifying things that are confusing in Scripture, and I'm thankful for their work. But at other times, some Bible scholars can be guilty of making unclear and confusing passages that are clear enough on their own. In that vein, some Bible scholars have speculated that Isaiah 24 is describing a limited temporal judgment day within history – like the Fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC or the Fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD. They interpret “the earth” to mean “the land,” as in “the land of Israel,” and they see this as God coming back home to Judah and Jerusalem and prophesying their destruction.

That's clearly not what is being described in this chapter. This is worldwide and final judgment. While the Hebrew word translated “the earth” here can mean “the land,” it often does mean the whole earth, and the word translated as “the world” in verse 4 is a universal word referring to the whole world. More importantly, the meaning of words is best determined by their context, and the context of Isaiah 24 is clearly depicting universal judgment. The real problem with interpreting this chapter in a narrow way is that this method of interpretation tends to spread to other clear passages of universal judgment, which then also get interpreted away to refer to some lesser judgment that takes place within history. Before long, the Bible's strong and clear emphasis on a coming day of judgment for the whole world at the Second Coming of Jesus gets reduced and removed from most of the Bible.

So, let's be clear: This is a prophecy of the final, universal day of judgment. Not only is the judgment world-wide in scope, but it also is universal in that every person of every class and category is caught in the judgment of God. This is not the only place where the Bible tells us that absolutely everyone will be subject to God's judgment. Here's Romans 3:10-19 –

*“None is righteous, no, not one;  
<sup>11</sup> no one understands;  
 no one seeks for God.  
<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
 no one does good,  
 not even one.”*  
<sup>13</sup> *“Their throat is an open grave;  
 they use their tongues to deceive.”*

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”  
<sup>14</sup> “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”  
<sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
<sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery,  
<sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known.”  
<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (ESV)

Also, consider Revelation 20:11-15 –

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (ESV)

There's no way for a rich person to buy their way out of this judgment or for a powerful person to peddle their influence to avoid this judgment. Every single person will be judged, including those who have died who will be raised from the dead to be judged.

## 2. The Cause of the Judgment of God, vv. 4-6

Why? Well, in fact, Romans 3 already told us: No one is righteous, not even one. And Revelation 20 also tells us “they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.”

Here's what Isaiah 24 has to say about the cause for this universal judgment:

<sup>4</sup> The earth mourns and withers;  
the world languishes and withers;  
the highest people of the earth languish.  
<sup>5</sup> The earth lies defiled  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed the laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.  
<sup>6</sup> 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.

Here's how you know you've found the cause of something in Scripture: There's a "FOR" before the cause or a "THEREFORE" after the cause. In this case, we get both. Here's the summary of the argument –

1. God is going to judge absolutely everyone.
2. The whole world is mourning, withering, and languishing as it lies defiled under the inhabitants of the world – that is, people.
3. And why? Why is God going to judge? Why is the world mourning and languishing?
4. BECAUSE or FOR *“they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.”*
5. 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.*

We'll get to the "few men are left" in a little bit. But the root cause is made doubly clear by the FOR and the THEREFORE – People have broken God's law; they have violated God's commandments or statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. The Bible scholars who think Isaiah 24 is only about a future destruction of Judah and Jerusalem claim that covenant language only applies to God's people, but the everlasting covenant is one made with all people which all people have broken, for we are all made in God's image and under obligation to Him.

God created all people in His image and He calls us all to imitate Him, to reflect His righteous character in our thoughts, words, and actions. Those of us who have the Bible have the Law of God written down in plain and clear words –

1. We are forbidden from worshiping any other god but the one true God.
2. We are forbidden from worshiping God in ways we create with our hands and not ways laid out in His word.
3. We are forbidden from taking God's name in vain.
4. We are commanded to keep the Sabbath day holy as a day of worship and rest in the Lord, and we are commanded to work hard the other six days of the week.
5. We are commanded to honor our fathers and mothers and, by extension, all those in authority over us. We are promised blessing if we honor our parents and those in authority.
6. We are forbidden from unlawfully taking the life of those made in God's image, which Jesus told us we do in our hearts whenever we hate someone or curse them.
7. We are forbidden from breaking our marriage vows and other sacred relational vows, which Jesus tells us we do if we look lustfully on someone else – in other words, we can commit adultery in our hearts and minds and not just with our bodies.

8. We are forbidden from unlawfully taking that which does not belong to us, which can include someone else's property or someone else's time or reputation or creations.
9. We are forbidden from lying, especially lying about other people in a way that harms their reputation or good name by bearing false witness against them, which we can do through gossip or slander.
10. We are forbidden from desiring anything which God has not given to us.

Jesus summarized this Law with two great commandments, telling us that if we will only love God with all that we are and love our neighbors as much as we already love ourselves, we won't break any of these commandments, because we'll be too busy loving God and others to sin.

Of course, not everyone has the Law of God, do they? Actually, God tells us in Romans 2 that everyone does:

*For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts - Romans 2:12-15, ESV*

Here's the truth we all need to face: Every one of us breaks the Law of God that we know to be true and good over and over again. We are continually lying to others and ourselves, disregarding other, resenting and rebelling against authority, coveting, lusting, failing to honor God as He is due with our worship, our words, and our time. We may excuse ourselves as guilty only of "little sins" and may think it would be cruel to be judged for a little, white lie or a little bit of "harmless" coveting, but the truth of our condition is much worse, and we know it. We are habitual, daily, regular lawbreakers – career, lifelong, cosmic criminals.

We know we should love God with all we are, for He has given us life and gives us every good thing. We know we should love others as much as we love ourselves, because everyone is of equal worth. But truthfully, we basically just do whatever we want without giving much thought about the will of God or the good of others. We are selfish and thoughtless. That's our natural state, what we are apart from the transforming work of God's grace.

### **3. The Effect of the Judgment of God, vv. 7-16**

And so, God is going to judge the whole world justly for repeated and willful violations of His law. The effect of the coming judgment of God will be two-fold: For most of the world, the judgment of God will bring unspeakable devastation:

- <sup>7</sup> *The wine mourns,  
the vine languishes,  
all the merry-hearted sigh.*
- <sup>8</sup> *The mirth of the tambourines is stilled,  
the noise of the jubilant has ceased,  
the mirth of the lyre is stilled.*
- <sup>9</sup> *No more do they drink wine with singing;  
strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.*
- <sup>10</sup> *The wasted city is broken down;  
every house is shut up so that none can enter.*
- <sup>11</sup> *There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine;  
all joy has grown dark;  
the gladness of the earth is banished.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Desolation is left in the city;  
the gates are battered into ruins.*
- <sup>13</sup> *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. - vv. 7-13, ESV*

The picture painted here poetically is that the judgment of God will bring the end to all joy and gladness for most people on earth. Whatever people found joy in before the coming judgment of God, once Judgment Day, the good times are over forever. It's been said that, for unbelievers, life in this world is all the heaven they will ever experience. Because they have been taking benefits and blessings from God and not giving Him thanks or believing in Him but instead have been breaking His law willfully and repeatedly, God will take away the blessings and benefits. All joy and pleasure, laughter and gladness come from God as precious and undeserved gifts, and the Lord who has given these things for years to people who deny and disregard Him will one day take them all away.

But this will not be the case for everyone. Verses 14-16 tell us of a very different effect of the judgment of God –

- <sup>14</sup> *They lift up their voices, they sing for joy;  
over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west.*
- <sup>15</sup> *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.*
- <sup>16</sup> *From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise,  
of glory to the Righteous One.*

If the judgment that is coming is truly universal, and if everyone on earth is guilty of breaking God's law willfully and repeatedly and thus deserves condemnation, how is it that some people can sing for joy at the coming day of judgment?



It is because they are singing songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. There is one who was and is truly righteous, who never violated God's law in anything he ever thought or said or did. His life was one of complete and perfect love for God and for others. 1 John 2:1 calls him Jesus Christ the Righteous One.

The ones who sing for joy at the coming day of judgment are the ones who have sought refuge in the Righteous One. They have trusted in Jesus Christ and have been clothed in his righteousness and cleansed by his blood. While we are not in ourselves any more righteous than anyone else, we have true and perfect righteousness in our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has paid for all of our sins with his precious blood and He has given us his perfect righteousness as an eternal covering which will shield us from the wrath of God and bring us safely into eternal glory.

We will explore the good news of Jesus Christ in more depth next week as we turn to Isaiah 25. For today, we need to know that there is only one way for us to be assured of eternal joy on the coming day of judgment - by belonging to the Righteous One as his dearly loved and redeemed people.

#### **4. The Warning of the Judgment of God, vv. 17-23**

For today, God's word is calling us to take seriously the reality of this coming day of judgment –

*<sup>21</sup> On that day the LORD will punish  
the host of heaven, in heaven,  
and the kings of the earth, on the earth.  
<sup>22</sup> 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.  
<sup>23</sup> 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.*

There are only two destinies that await people on that day: everlasting punishment in the eternal pit and basking in the glory of the Lord with his gathered people on Mount Zion. The day is coming! Where will you be on that day?

#### **What can we do?**

If you want to be assured of everlasting joy, you need to be found righteous before God by belonging to the one and only righteous Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Call upon Him for salvation, and he will receive you to Himself.

