

Session 22

Isaiah 24:1-23 | The Earth Shaken and the LORD Reigning

Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White

Isaiah 24–27 widens the view from the individual nations and cities addressed in chapters 13–23 to the earth, its inhabitants, and the LORD’s reign in Zion. These chapters move through judgment announcements, songs of praise, prayers, and promises of gathering. Their unity does not require treating every paragraph as the next event in a continuous timeline. Changes in speaker, address, and subject mark the passage’s divisions.

The segment is predominantly future prophecy. Its horizon includes the punishment of earthly kings and the host on high (24:21–23), death swallowed up (25:8), the dead rising (26:19), and Israel gathered to worship at Jerusalem (27:12–13). Historical judgments provide a familiar setting for the language, but these promises reach beyond one ancient invasion. Chapter 24 opens with the earth emptied and closes with the LORD reigning. Between those scenes, Isaiah places a striking contrast: ordinary rejoicing ceases, yet voices arise to glorify the LORD.

A. The earth emptied, its rejoicing ended, and few remaining (vv.1–13)

- **Verse 1 — The LORD empties the earth and scatters its inhabitants.** The opening announcement identifies both the agent of judgment and its extensive effects.
 - **“Behold, the LORD”** directs attention first to the One acting. The devastation that follows is presented as His intervention. Isaiah does not begin by naming an invading king, as in an oracle against a particular nation.
 - **“Turneth it upside down”** pictures the LORD overturning settled order, not physically flipping the globe. **“Empty”** describes severe depopulation, since **“few men”** remain in verse 6. Verse 1 ends with the scattering of inhabitants.
 - The chapter uses both **“earth”** and **“land.”** Read those expressions within the chapter’s widening frame: **“the world”** in verse 4, **“the uttermost part of the earth”** in verse 16, and **“the kings of the earth”** in verse 21. The announcement reaches beyond the troubles of one city.
- **Verses 2–3 — People of every station share the announced desolation.** Isaiah

names paired positions throughout religious, domestic, and economic life.

- **“As with the people, so with the priest”** removes religious position as a shelter from this judgment. The servant and master, maid and mistress, buyer and seller, lender and borrower, and receiver and payer of interest stand within its reach.
- These pairs emphasize shared exposure, without claiming that every person has held the same responsibility or committed identical sins. Social position cannot secure exemption when the LORD empties the land.
- **“Utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled”** reinforces the completeness of the announced devastation. Its certainty rests on the closing explanation: **“for the LORD hath spoken this word.”** The prophet’s authority lies in the divine announcement.
- **Verses 4–6 — The earth mourns under its inhabitants’ transgression and the resulting curse.** The text now gives the moral reason for the devastation.
 - **“The earth mourneth”** and **“the world languisheth”** picture creation sharing the effects of human wrongdoing. Even **“the haughty people of the earth”** languish. Those accustomed to standing above others cannot rise above this visitation.
 - Verse 5 names three offenses: **“transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.”** The inhabitants have violated an established divine order. Their conduct defiles the earth beneath them; the judgment is morally explained rather than portrayed as a meaningless catastrophe.
- Isaiah does not name the covenant here. Genesis 9:16 calls God’s covenant with all flesh **“everlasting,”** fitting the worldwide setting. Yet Isaiah 54:9 presents God’s promise never again to flood the earth as a sworn, abiding commitment, making it difficult to identify that covenant with one said to be broken in Isaiah 24:5. Some propose a covenant with humanity at creation, but Scripture does not explicitly identify one there. Others propose one of Israel’s covenants, though the worldwide context makes a narrow identification difficult. We cannot pinpoint this covenant with confidence. The clear charge is that the inhabitants violated God’s binding requirements.
- **“Therefore”** appears twice in verse 6, tying the consequences to the offenses. The curse devours, the inhabitants are burned, and **“few men”** remain. The language describes devastating loss while expressly allowing survivors; that prepares for the harvest comparison in verse 13.
- **A possible land-centered reading (vv. 4–6).** The Hebrew word rendered **“earth”** can also mean **“land,”** as the KJV itself renders it in verses 3, 11, and 13. On this reading, the land and its inhabitants in verses 4–6 are Israel and its land; Israel has broken its covenant, and the curse falls on the land (compare Deuteronomy 29:22–28). The separate word **“world”** in verse 4 could indicate that the effects extend beyond Israel. However, verse 4 does not say that the world languishes *because* Israel’s land mourns; its paired lines can also be read as poetic descriptions of the same widespread judgment. This reading is possible, but the proposed cause-and-effect relationship is not explicit in the text.

- **Verses 7–9 — Wine, music, and gladness cease.** Isaiah moves from the breadth of judgment to the sounds and pleasures of ordinary life.
 - **“The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth”** joins the ruined harvest to the sorrow of those who once enjoyed it. **“All the merryhearted do sigh”** reverses the expected response to wine and celebration.
 - The repeated verbs in verse 8 — **“ceaseth,” “endeth,” “ceaseth”** — bring the music to a stop. Tabrets and harps no longer accompany the sound of rejoicing. The passage lets the reader hear the silence left by judgment.
 - Wine is no longer drunk **“with a song,”** and strong drink becomes bitter. The point within this paragraph is the disappearance of festivity. Things associated with gladness can no longer give the drinkers their former pleasure.
- **Verses 10–12 — The city is broken, its houses shut, and its gate destroyed.** The scene narrows to streets, homes, and a city’s entrance.
 - **“The city of confusion”** is unnamed. It may be a representative “anytown” depicting urban life collapsing under judgment, or a particular city, such as a Moabite city, Babylon, or Jerusalem.
 - **Jerusalem** seems the strongest specific candidate because the chapter closes with the LORD reigning there (v.23); verse 10, however, leaves the city unnamed.
 - **“Every house is shut up, that no man may come in”** presents the loss of normal access and habitation. Streets that once carried daily life now carry **“a crying for wine.”** Isaiah continues the theme of vanished rejoicing: **“all joy is darkened.”**
 - **“The gate is smitten with destruction”** brings the scene to the city’s public entrance and place of civic activity. Neither private houses nor public spaces preserve the community’s former life. Desolation occupies the city.
- **Verse 13 — Those remaining are compared to olives after shaking and grapes after vintage.** A familiar harvest picture explains the small number left.
 - The image is what remains after the principal gathering is over: a few olives after the tree is shaken and gleaning grapes after the vintage. The emphasis falls on scarcity, agreeing with **“few men left”** in verse 6.
 - Isaiah 17:4–6 uses the same olive-shaking and grape-gleaning imagery for Jacob’s diminished population; Jeremiah 11:16–17 calls Israel and Judah an olive tree. The few remaining here may therefore represent a remnant of Israel, though verse 13 does not identify them explicitly.
 - The survivors provide the natural connection to **“They shall lift up their voice”** in verse 14. The earth’s silence is about to be interrupted by a different kind of song.

B. Voices raised in praise from the sea and the ends of the earth (vv.14–16a)

- **Verse 14 — Voices rise from the sea in praise of the LORD’s majesty.** The change from sighing to singing is deliberate and sudden.
 - **“They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing”** follows the description of those

remaining. Isaiah has not said that every inhabitant perishes. Here the surviving voices give expression to recognition of the LORD.

- They sing **“for the majesty of the LORD.”** Unlike the vanished drinking songs of verses 7–9, this praise names Him as its reason. The chapter distinguishes the end of ordinary merriment from the recognition of God’s greatness.
- **“From the sea”** begins a geographical widening of the praise. The following verses mention the isles and the ends of the earth. The voices are not confined to the ruined city’s streets.
- **Verse 15 — A call goes out to glorify the LORD God of Israel.** The report of singing becomes an exhortation to praise.
 - **“Wherefore glorify ye the LORD”** calls the hearers to respond to His majesty. The name is then expanded to **“the LORD God of Israel.”** Worldwide praise does not erase His stated relationship to Israel.
 - The KJV reads **“in the fires,”** while the ESV and NIV read **“in the east”** and the NKJV **“in the dawning light.”** Alongside **“the isles of the sea,”** the geographical reading depicts praise across
- distant regions. The verse does not describe a rescue from literal flames.
- The progression from the sea to the isles and then to the earth’s extremities makes the range of the praise increasingly evident. The same chapter that announces widespread desolation also records praise from distant places.
- **Verse 16a — Songs of glory to the righteous are heard from the ends of the earth.** The opening of verse 16 completes the report of praise.
 - **“From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs”** brings distant voices within the speaker’s hearing. The phrasing emphasizes how far the testimony reaches.
 - **“Even glory to the righteous”** gives the content of the songs in compressed form. The immediate context celebrates the LORD’s majesty and calls for His glorification. The expression also places righteousness in sharp contrast with the treachery named in the rest of the verse.
 - The song closes this division. **“But I said”** introduces a clear change in voice and mood within verse 16 itself, marking a transition inside the verse.

C. **“But I said”: lament over treachery and the earth’s collapse (vv.16b–20)**

- **Verse 16b — The speaker laments his condition and the treachery of the treacherous.** Praise from afar does not remove the distress voiced here.
 - **“But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me!”** changes the tone from celebration to personal anguish. The repeated **“my leanness”** depicts a speaker wasting away under the burden of what he sees.
 - **Who is “I”?** Isaiah himself is the most natural reading. Isaiah 21:2–3 likewise joins treachery to the prophet’s personal anguish. The speaker might also be a survivor voicing the distress of the faithful remnant. Verse 16 does not identify him explicitly.
 - The repeated forms of **“treacherous”** and **“treacherously”** intensify the accusation. Betrayal fills the sentence. Isaiah leaves the treacherous dealers unnamed; the repeated accusation, rather than their

identity, carries the emphasis.

- This interruption cautions against reading the praise as proof that the whole scene of judgment has already ended. The speaker can hear songs honoring the LORD while still lamenting the evil and devastation before him.
- **Verses 17–18a — Fear, pit, and snare leave the earth’s inhabitant no escape.** The announcement now directly addresses the person exposed to judgment.
 - **“Upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth”** makes the warning personal. The sequence is concrete: someone flees the frightening sound, falls into a pit, escapes the pit, and is caught in a snare.
 - The piling up of dangers removes any confidence that avoiding one threat secures safety. Each apparent escape brings the fugitive into another peril. Human resourcefulness supplies no dependable refuge from the announced visitation.
 - Jeremiah 48:43–44 uses the same sequence of fear, pit, and snare in an announcement against Moab. The comparison clarifies the prophetic picture of inescapable judgment; Isaiah’s own address determines the scope here.
- **Verse 18b — The windows above open and the earth’s foundations shake.** The scene expands from the fugitive’s dangers to upheaval above and below.
 - **“For”** connects the absence of escape with the larger collapse. The threatened inhabitant cannot find a secure place because the very surroundings are destabilized.
 - **“The windows from on high are open”** recalls the flood language of Genesis 7:11, where the windows of heaven

were opened. The verbal resemblance conveys the seriousness of divine judgment. Isaiah does not thereby announce another worldwide flood by water.

- **“The foundations of the earth do shake”** removes the image of stable ground beneath the inhabitant’s feet. The next two verses develop this upheaval through repeated descriptions of the earth itself.
- **Verses 19–20 — The earth breaks, reels, and falls under the weight of its transgression.** The repeated subject keeps attention on the scale of the collapse.
 - Verse 19 gives three escalating descriptions: **“utterly broken down,” “clean dissolved,”** and **“moved exceedingly.”** Together they portray an earth coming apart under judgment.
 - The earth reels **“like a drunkard”** and is removed **“like a cottage.”** These comparisons emphasize instability: what seemed settled can no longer maintain its place. They are prophetic images, not measurements of the physical mechanism involved.
 - **“The transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it”** returns to the explanation in verses 5–6. Sin is pictured as a crushing weight. The chapter repeatedly joins the earth’s ruin to the wrongdoing of its inhabitants.
 - **“It shall fall, and not rise again”** gives the collapse its decisive character. This declaration stands beside the chapter’s survivors and the LORD’s ensuing reign in Jerusalem. The passage announces the overthrow of the world under judgment while still speaking of people and places in the scene that follows.

D. “In that day”: the host on high and earthly kings punished; the LORD reigns in Zion (vv.21–23)

- **Verse 21 — The LORD punishes the host on high and the kings on earth.** A new time expression introduces the chapter’s concluding scene.
 - **“And it shall come to pass in that day”** signals the movement from the earth’s collapse to the punishment of powers. The LORD remains the acting subject, just as He was in the opening verse.
 - **“The host of the high ones that are on high”** stands in deliberate parallel with **“the kings of the earth upon the earth.”** The contrast points to a heavenly sphere as well as an earthly one. Human rulers are not the full extent of the powers brought under judgment.
 - The host may refer to fallen angels (compare 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) or to the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, and stars (compare v. 23). Isaiah does not identify the host more closely.
- **Verse 22 — They are gathered as prisoners, confined, and visited after many days.** Those exercising power are pictured under restraint.
 - **“They shall be gathered together”** refers naturally to the powers just named. Their gathering is compared to prisoners collected **“in the pit.”** The controlling image is confinement, followed by being shut up in prison.
 - **“After many days”** introduces an interval without giving its numerical length. Other prophetic passages may invite comparison, but Isaiah does not specify the interval here.
- **“Shall they be visited”** describes a later divine dealing with those confined. In this setting, the visitation belongs to the announced judgment; the English word by itself does not promise their release or restoration.
- **Verse 23 — The moon and sun are put to shame as the LORD reigns gloriously in Zion.** The chapter ends with the positive center of the whole scene.
 - **“Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed”** personifies the great lights as unable to retain their former distinction before the LORD’s glory. The verse emphasizes their humiliation in relation to His reign without specifying an astronomical timetable.
 - **“The LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem”** names the place of His reign. The chapter moves from judgment across the earth to His reign in Zion and Jerusalem.
 - **“Before his ancients gloriously”** adds a company before whom He manifests His glory. Isaiah does not identify these elders individually here. The sentence’s emphasis falls on the glorious reign of the LORD of hosts.
 - The opening **“Behold, the LORD”** and the closing **“the LORD of hosts shall reign”** frame the chapter. He scatters the inhabitants, brings human rejoicing to an end, receives praise from distant voices, judges the powers above and below, and reigns in Zion. Chapter 25 fittingly opens with a personal response: **“O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee.”**