

Isaiah 24:1-23

¹ Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, Distorts its surface And scatters abroad its inhabitants. ² And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest; As with the servant, 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 land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, For the LORD has spoken this word.

⁴ The earth mourns *and* fades away, The world languishes *and* fades away; The haughty people of the earth languish. ⁵ The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, And few men *are* left. ⁷ The new wine fails, the vine languishes, All the merry-hearted sigh. ⁸ The mirth of the tambourine ceases, The noise of the jubilant ends, The joy of the harp ceases. ⁹ They shall not drink wine with a song; Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. ¹⁰ The city of confusion is broken down; Every house is shut up, so that none may go in. ¹¹ *There is* a cry for wine in the streets, All joy is darkened, The mirth of the land is gone. ¹² In the city desolation is left, And the gate is stricken with destruction. ¹³ When it shall be thus in the midst of the land among the people, *It shall be* like the shaking of an olive tree, Like the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done.

¹⁴ They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing; For the majesty of the LORD They shall cry aloud from the sea. ¹⁵ Therefore glorify the LORD in the dawning light, The name of the LORD God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. ¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we have heard songs: "Glory to the righteous!" But I said, "I am ruined, ruined! Woe to me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, Indeed, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

¹⁷ Fear and the pit and the snare *Are* upon you, O inhabitant of the earth. ¹⁸ And it shall be *That* he who flees from the noise of the fear Shall fall into the pit, And he who comes up from the midst of the pit Shall be caught in the snare; For the windows from on high are open, And the foundations of the earth are shaken.

¹⁹ The earth is violently broken, The earth is split open, The earth is shaken exceedingly. ²⁰ The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, And shall totter like a hut; Its transgression shall be heavy upon it, And it will fall, and not rise again. ²¹ It shall come to pass in that day *That* the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, And on the earth the kings of the earth. ²² They will be gathered together, As prisoners are gathered in the pit, And will be shut up in the prison; After many days they will be punished. ²³ Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously.

You and I live in the world of human beings. We all live in the same variety of homes, we eat the same variety of foods, we drive the same variety of cars, we have a similar variety of hobbies. And we all live on the same spinning sphere. One might get the idea that there really isn't much of a difference between people. We might think that we might make some different choices but we are all basically the same. One world view is as good as another. One religion is as good as another. One orientation is as good as another. But essentially, our job on planet earth is to make **our own** and **each other's** time here as pleasant as possible.

If that were true, then the crusaders for green energy, open borders, accepting all opinions as having equal merit, and even population control would be taking the moral high ground. This would be akin to a world religion, but logically it would have to be the highest religion. It all makes a sort of sense.

If you watch the news at all, you can see that this is what many believe, and it is becoming the core belief of more and more of our society. They truly believe they are standing for things that are in the best interest of humanity. That is often why they are so passionate about their causes and why many respond so violently to their opposition. There is a sense to this. It is what you would rationally expect. If this earth is all there is, those who attempt to make it most pleasant for most of its inhabitants for the longest period of time should be its heroes. There is some rational behind that. If man is, and there is none besides man, the heroes are those who most worship at the humanistic shrine, who do the most to improve the world and extend its useful life.

And if they are correct, we are people to be pitied. We aren't just nice people with wrong ideas. We are absolute idiots for giving up the pleasure we could have had for some lie.

But the Bible paints a picture that is very very different.

Augustine wrote a book called the City of God. In that book he builds on what the bible says about the difference in people. He uses the Biblical references to **two cities** to build his imagery.

He says that there are two cities that form all of what happens on planet earth. And those cities are formed by two loves. The earthly city is formed by the love of self, even to the contempt of God. And the heavenly city is formed by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The first seeks the glory **of** mankind and **from** mankind. The latter seeks the glory **of** God and **from** God.

The earthly city is focused on what happens on this planet. Everything is planet based, limited to this time and matter. **Here and now** is all that there is. Some of these inhabitants are very kind and generous. Some are evil and openly self serving. But at the end of the day they share the same God- humanity.

The heavenly city **exists** in time and matter, what the inhabitants of that city do on this earth **matters**, but only in light of how it reflects on eternity. They are all over the charts in terms of good and bad behavior, but at the end of the day they cannot stray too far from their worship of God.

The Bible tells us that Cain built the first city. Gen 4:17. Cain was the earthly line. He showed his true love when he killed his brother. He was solidly in the “earthly loves” camp. He didn’t really care what God wanted.

It is interesting that God planted a garden, but Cain built a city. Cain was doomed by God to be an outsider and to be a wanderer. How did he compensate? He came up with a way to eliminate some of the sting of his curse. He remade his world to his liking. It was Cain’s way to best enjoy his life independent of God. It was something he built for his own glory. It was something he could **have** and **enjoy** here and now. It helped him even to beat the curse of fighting weeds. By working together, survival became easier and free time was allowed to exist. That is part of what the **earthly city** still shoots at.

The **eternal city’s** dwellers are shooting for something different. Hebrews tells us this about Abraham-

Hebrews 11:9-10

⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for **he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.**

The heavenly city is a city based on promises, based on faith. It is something that God makes and we enjoy forever. It shifts **all of our focus** when we really allow it to **grip all of our thinking**. What happens here and now is much less important to us than what will happen for eternity. We will sell one to get the other. We willingly and gladly make that trade because we know it to be the smartest thing we can do with our time and resources.

And while the first earthly city was built **by man for man** in maintaining his independence from God, there is a surprise in store.

Not only is God going to grant his people a restored Garden of Eden existence. There is also going to be a **holy city**, the New Jerusalem Rev 21:1-22:5 God will take the thing first used to maintain man’s rebellion and transform it into heaven. Isaiah is about to talk about the Supremacy of God displayed in these two cities. Remember how we have just come through God’s judgment on specific nations? Well this chapter talks about **the whole earth**. And instead of judgments upon cities, Isaiah reduces it down to **THE City**. This is like how the word Babylon is used in scripture. It symbolizes the whole of the world’s attitude and activity and motive. The whole earth emerges as one city on its way to ruin.

The wasted city is broken down. ([24:10](#))

Desolation is left in the city. ([24:12](#))

**You have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin. ([25:2](#))
For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. ([26:5](#))
For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness. ([27:10](#))**

This is very similar to what we are told in Revelations

Revelation 18:9-11

**⁹ "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning,
¹⁰ standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' ¹¹ And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:**

What God tells us is very disturbing to the earthly city. It doesn't matter how well they get along. It doesn't matter how well they fix the carbon emissions problem. It doesn't matter what they do with the problem of wealth redistribution. The city is headed for a brutal end. The Stephen Hawking's of the world can tell us all day long about what needs done to fix this planet, but they are trying to empty the ocean with a bucket. What God has in mind cannot and will not be stopped. Global **warming** is not nearly as big a problem as the Global **Warmer** is.

An aside- I am not trying to make a point that solutions to society's problems shouldn't be attempted. Christians in government should do what is in the best of those they serve. We should all love our neighbor as we love ourselves. So we don't needlessly do anything that would cause someone else to suffer.

The point the Bible makes, and that I am trying to make, is that while the **problem** of the earthly city is people, **people** are not the **answer** to its problem. God has a day marked on His calendar when planet earth part 1 is rolled aside and part 2 begins. But it will be free of sin.

And while all that is going on, there are people in this earth with a different hope, a different confidence, a different expectation. And they say "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks" ([Isaiah 26:1](#)).

This is a quote from a commentary-

Two cities, two destinies. And two songs can be heard rising from these cities. The city of man is a place of drunken revelry falling silent under the judgment of God ([24:7-11](#)), while the city of God will sing on forever about One who is strong for the weak and compassionate toward the needy ([26:1-21](#)). But the dominant figure throughout the landscape of these chapters is God himself, judging and saving. *God* is the reason why the city of man cannot endure and why the city of God cannot fall, and God will have the final word in both overwhelming woe and overwhelming joy. That is the vision of [Isaiah 24-27](#).

I have an outline to the section if anyone wants it. It is lengthy so I am going to skip it here.

Here is a brief outline of the text.

1. "The wasted city" will be broken, the people of God joyful ([24:1-20](#))

A¹ World desolation: decreed, justified ([24:1-6](#))

B¹ Joy reduced to frustration in "the wasted city" ([24:7-13](#))

B² Joy increased worldwide among God's people ([24:14-16a](#))

A² World desolation: mourned, described ([24:16b-20](#))

2. Then the Lord alone will be glorified ([24:21-23](#))

A¹ The divine visitation upon his rivals ([24:21](#))

B The triumph of final justice ([24:22](#))

A² The divine glory before his friends ([24:23](#))

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

Probably the key verse in chapter 24 is verse 10

Isaiah 24:10

¹⁰ The city of confusion is broken down; Every house is shut up, so that none may go in.

This verse is very interesting. The city of confusion, the earthly city, is broken down. The word for confusion here is very revealing. Remember how in Genesis 1:2 the earth was said to be without form. That is the same word that is used here. Now the city is without form.

The earth was a lump of clay without meaning until the potter worked it.

The city is likewise a social construct designed by human beings without any meaning more than getting up the next morning and doing the same thing again. It has no meaning greater than that. Neither the earth nor man's city are **anything of value** apart from God. Both have great potential in God's hands, but no value apart from them.

The end result of the earthly city is that it will be broken down. Now what is this city. **The city of man is where we live when we refuse the divine order for our lives and jury-rig our own values and definitions and boundaries.**

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

I told Carla as I was studying this that it might just be better if I were to read Mr. Ortland's whole study word for word. It was so good on this point. Here is more. **The Bible speaks of "the fleeting pleasures of sin" ([Hebrews 11:25](#)) as opposed to "pleasures forevermore" at God's right hand ([Psalm 16:11](#)). Which pleasures are you living for, and which pleasures are you letting go of? That tells you which city you're living in. The rollicking good times in the city of man will someday be replaced by an ominous silence the world over ([Isaiah 24:7-9](#)).**

Instead of the streets full of partying people going from house to house for more drinks, like the Mardi Gras, the second line of [verse 10](#) says that every house will be shut up. People will be terrified as society breaks down, and they will shut each other out. Why? The mythology of human pride always leads to the reality of human desolation.

How could it be otherwise? After all, what is God driving at in all of history? The open display of his glory before wholehearted worshipers. That is salvation. That is Heaven. Think about it. What will Heaven and Hell have in common? What they'll have in common is that everyone in Heaven and everyone in Hell will be honoring God. The people in Heaven will be a tribute to his grace, and the people in Hell will bear witness to his justice. But everyone will bring honor to God. What then is the difference between Heaven and Hell? The difference is that people in Heaven will be delighting in God's glory, and people in Hell will be raging in shrieking hatred at God's glory. The way we will experience God forever will come out of our own hearts. This is why the most urgent business before us every day is not amassing pleasures in this world but satisfying our hearts with pleasures in the glory of God. That is what this life is for.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

Chapter 24 is telling us God's intention for our world. Again, I don't know how to impress this on our minds enough. It is either true, and all opponents will one day need to do business with it. Or it is false and we will be seen to be the absolute fools of the universe. There is no middle ground. There is no way to reconcile this view with its opposite.

I watched a link on facebook this week with clips taken before the election of 2016 with liberally minded people proclaiming with absolute certainty that Donald Trump would never be the next president of United States. My point is not to say that is a good thing or a bad thing. It is only to say that **believing** something to be true, and confidently **proclaiming** something to be true, doesn't **make it** true. These people believed a lie and believing it didn't make it true. The same is true of what God says. Lots of people proclaim with great certainty and confidence that the Bible is untrue. And they have lots of followers. But their certainty has nothing to do with the **final outcome**. It is either true or it is not. It's truth does not rely upon the beliefs of people, or its popularity at the time.

Now people who live as if the Bible is true will draw attention to themselves. How could they not? They are either crazy people or they are right and everyone else is wrong. This cannot help but bring ideological conflict with those who live for this life only.

The bible says our earth is headed for destruction. The earthly city is headed for destruction, not at their **own hands** as so many of our honored humanistic prophets are proclaiming, but at the hands of a very true and very angry God. We can try to sugar coat this. We can try to beat around the bush. We can try to focus on the positive. But this is the truth. And it cannot be changed. The earthly city is doomed. And those who love it are destined to the same destruction.

Isaiah 24:1

¹ Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, Distorts its surface And scatters abroad its inhabitants.

God is going to do this one day.

Verse 2 tells us that status will make no difference. It will happen to all its inhabitants.

Isaiah 24:4-6

⁴ The earth mourns *and* fades away, The world languishes *and* fades away; The haughty people of the earth languish. ⁵ The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, And few men *are* left.

Why does this fate fall upon these people?

Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant.

This is so simple. God has spoken. He has verbalized what He expects. And we have all proven with our lives that we prefer something else. We have all gone astray. We have all followed our hearts instead of God's word. We have all missed the mark. There is none of us here who haven't done so. That line describes every human.

So all of us deserve the fate of the earthly city inhabitants.

So what is the difference? What is the difference between those who are rewarded and those who are destroyed?

We don't see much evidence in this passage, but we see it in all of scripture. The difference between those that are rewarded and those who are punished is not primarily about their track record of behavior. It is about what they trust to save them. The earthly city trusts in itself for its own solutions. It trusts in its own goodness, it's own cleverness, it's own hard work. It thinks to **earn** its salvation somehow.

The salvation of the heavenly city comes from faith in God. These people don't think they are morally superior to the earthly city inhabitants. They know in many cases they are not. They don't trust that their record of behavior is better than

their counterparts. It very well may not be. They may not be kinder or gentler or more caring. No. What they understand is that there is **no way that they can win God's favor**. They have nothing to commend themselves with. They come to Christ with only their need. And they count only upon what Christ did to save them. They understand they are forgiven **only because Christ experienced the wrath of God in their place**. The sin they could not pay for Christ paid for. And now these people have become addicted to the grace of God. They **see its value** and **understand it is worth** giving up everything just to remain in it. And they know that even as they live, they will never do God justice. They will fail. They will fall, and get up and fall again. But they will never again count on anything they can produce **to save themselves**. They know that their salvation is all of God.

If you are here and this kind of forgiveness and acceptance appeals to you, simply call out to God. Bring him your need. That is all **you have** to bring. And trust in what Christ has done to save you. That is pure Christianity 101.

As we read through our passage we notice things that we often see in this life.

Isaiah 24:7-8

⁷ The new wine fails, the vine languishes, All the merry-hearted sigh. ⁸ The mirth of the tambourine ceases, The noise of the jubilant ends, The joy of the harp ceases.

This often happens, even in this life. All is going well and then a diagnosis of cancer comes, or a relationship we depend upon fails, or we lose someone we love. The earthly city is never very good at delivering mirth consistently. But what Isaiah describes will be the end of mirth for the earthly city forever.

Isaiah 24:14-16

¹⁴ They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing; For the majesty of the LORD They shall cry aloud from the sea. ¹⁵ Therefore glorify the LORD in the dawning light, The name of the LORD God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. ¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we have heard songs: "Glory to the righteous!"

Look at this. What we see being done to the earth is horrible. But there are always those who see things from a higher perspective. They believe **what God says** and they are aware of **who He is**. They know that He is worthy of obedience by His creation. He is tired of the dishonor of His creation in rebellion. So the inhabitants of the heavenly city understand that **this had to happen**. The rebellion had to end. And it is a wonderful day to them when the last of the rebels is silenced. God deserves to be glorified. He deserves to be honored properly. And so He shall be.

Isaiah 24:19-22

¹⁹ The earth is violently broken, The earth is split open, The earth is shaken exceedingly. ²⁰ The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, And shall totter

like a hut; Its transgression shall be heavy upon it, And it will fall, and not rise again. ²¹ It shall come to pass in that day *That* the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, And on the earth the kings of the earth. ²² They will be gathered together, As prisoners are gathered in the pit, And will be shut up in the prison; After many days they will be punished.

Remember the question, if God is good, how can He allow so much evil? Well here we see the end of it. This is how good God is. He will wipe out every source of atrocity. He will wipe out all corruption in government. He will end every source of suffering. But with it will go every person who is not invested in His city, every person who has rejected His offer of salvation.

There is a degree to which Christians see global climate change as something that is irrelevant. Why? Why work hard to change something that will make no difference? It doesn't matter how many efforts we make. This end described in Isaiah is going to happen. And **we won't be the cause**. Our **irresponsibility** will not be the cause. Our **sin** will be the cause. Our rebellion against God will be the cause. The problem isn't fossil fuel emissions. It is soul emissions. This is God actively judging the inhabitants of the earth. They are not victims of coincidental natural disasters. They are being punished by the active action of a living God. And what is the end of all this? What is God's end game?

Isaiah 24:23

²³ **Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously.**

Here is the end game. God will have all His children with Him in His city. All the threats to His people and His city will be ended for eternity. Those who do not **like God** or **the things that God does** will be removed. Those who think the options of sin should be left open will be finished. Only those who have learned to trust God will remain.

All suffering will end since there are no longer any people left who would welcome sin into the city. All of these people with God for eternity will have been inoculated with the sin disease in such a way that they will no longer be susceptible to the disease. They will hate sin, especially their own sin, and anything that goes with it.

And here Christ will reign in all His glory. His brightness will be so great that the sun and the moon will be embarrassed. His light will so outshine theirs that, if they were people, they would be ashamed.

And the Lord of hosts will reign. He will have absolute and total dictatorship-type authority. And all of His people will be so very glad for it. They will welcome it. They will worship Him. And they will reap the wonderful result that comes from His loving intentions toward His children.