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A Curse Consumes the Earth

24: 1-13

A curse consumes the earth DIG: What is the scope of the judgment in 24:1-6? Who gets hit? Who is left? What is the reason for this total devastation that is to come? From God's point of view, what everlasting covenant did the people break? What subsequent curse have the people brought on themselves? How has this been illustrated by some of the specific judgments (see 14:12-14, 16:6, 17:10, 22:11)? In 24:7-13, what will be the impact of this future judgment on the rural and urban sector? What images does this bring to you? If you have ever walked through a "ghost town" like this, how did you feel?

REFLECT: How does this prospect of universal judgment strike you: (a) An archaic view of a Messianic Jew? (b) Vindictive action on God's part? (c) Source of hope and joy conveyed by God's control? (d) A day to be feared by all, regardless of social or religious distinction? How would your view of that day change if you were a powerful, corrupt king? If you were a victim of his oppressive rule?

See, in the far eschatological future, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; He will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants (24:1). The word **see**, or **behold**, used with the active participle indicates the *future, with a sense of expectancy*. The source of this worldwide judgment is clearly **God Himself**. The results are devastating. **Isaiah** tells us that the judgment of **the earth** (mentioned sixteen times in this chapter) is going to be universal. It will obliterate all class distinction. This is one of the central themes of **Isaiah**: human pride and **ADONAI** cannot coexist. **He** mentions six pairs (the number six for mankind) of opposites. The first three represent the social classes; the last three represent the economic classes. None will fare any better or any worse in the earth's dying breath than will those who have nothing. **It will be the same for the priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor (24:2).**

The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered (Revelation Chapters 6, 8-9, 15-16). The effects on **the earth** will be shocking. The Hebrew tends to be much stronger because of repetition of the main noun. If I were to give a more literal translation,

it would be: *There will be an emptying, **the earth** will be emptied; spoiling, **the earth** will be spoiled.* And because **God Himself** has spoken the word, judgment is certain. Although this is a frequent phrase in **Isaiah**, its importance cannot be overemphasized. **He** believed that **the LORD** had communicated **His** truth and **His** will clearly. Therefore, the prophet could make completely dogmatic statements that rested on the sole support that **ADONAI has spoken this word (24:3).**

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish (24:4). The word for **world** here means *the inhabited earth*. There are two Hebrew words for world. One means the world in general and the other means the inhabited world. It is the inhabited world that is affected because the judgment is against humanity. Even the so-called important people suffer. No one will be spared from this judgment in **the far eschatological future.**

The reason such devastation will come is that the **people**, up over **their** heads in sin, will have **defiled the earth; they have disobeyed God's commandments, and violated the statutes (24:5a).** In creating the world, **ADONAI** said it was **very good (Genesis 1:31).** But because of their sin, **people** had **defiled the good earth**, by disobeying **God's** commandments **and** violating **His statutes.** Hatred pollutes, as does dishonesty. Both of these, just as too many phosphates or too much sewage, make it impossible for us to live. This is because there are spiritual truths that are just as unwavering as the physical ones. And like the physical laws if violated: we do not break them, they break us. As a result, **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)** are not merely nice little goals for us to get along in this life, they are necessities if humanity is going to continue on living.

By thus polluting, **they** broke **His everlasting covenant.** What is this **everlasting covenant**? The three most important aspects of biblical interpretation are context, context, and context. In the context here is **Isaiah 24:18b**, which says: **The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the world shake. Genesis 7:11** says: **the floodgates of the heavens were opened.** And **Genesis 8:2** says: **Now the springs of the deep and floodgates of the heavens had been closed.** So, we should take this covenant to be **the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:11)**, because there are illusions to **the Noahic** judgment. Through all four of these chapters there is a tremendous amount of the use of alliteration in the Hebrew text, because **Isaiah** is a master of Hebrew (**God** works through the human instrument, yet communicating everything **He** wants communicated).

Because **people** will have **defiled the earth** by **their** sins, judgment will come. **Therefore,**

a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear the consequences of **their guilt**. **Therefore, earth's inhabitants** will be **burned up** like a desert. Here we see a judgment of fire (**Second Peter 3:10-12**). The result of this fiery judgment is that **very few** will be **left (24:6)**. Once the restraining effect of the Church is gone after the Rapture (**to see link click [Eu - The Rapture and the Great Tribulation](#)**), rampant sin will pollute the environment to the point that it cannot maintain, but begins to destroy life (**13:11-12**).

The next seven verses should be seen as a unit because of the recurring theme of **wine** and **the harvest (24:7-13)**. Normally, **the grape harvest** was a time of joy and laughter. When **the grapes** were in, the last of the hard summer work was finished, spirits were high and the **wine** flowed. If **the harvest** was poor, however, the mood was somber at best. During the first half of the Great Tribulation, there will be great jubilation because those pesky believers will not be around anymore. There will be no restraints. But because people will have **defiled the earth** by their sins, the verdict will come in the form of seal, trumpet and bowl judgments (see my commentary on the book of **Revelation**).

All sources of joy and gladness will be cut off. First, their **wine** is taken away. **The new wine** will **dry up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers** will **groan**. There will be no **wine** from these **grapes**. Instead of vulgar jokes and rowdy laughter, there will only be groans and sighs. Secondly, **their** music is taken away. **The gaiety of the tambourines** will be **stilled, the noise of the revelers** will have **stopped, and the joyful harp** will be **silent**. When the judgments of **ADONAI** come upon the earth all artificial partying will melt away. Those who depended upon their own sources of joy will have none. And thirdly, only bitterness remains. **No longer do they drink wine with a song; the beer** will be **bitter to its drinkers (24:7-9)**. What **drinking** is there without gladness? Its only purpose is to forget the present, and the experience is a bitter one.



Then **Isaiah** offers an example of a **ruined city**, where **sadness and desolation prevail everywhere**. **He** uses the definite article, meaning that there is a specific **city** involved. The Little Apocalypse of **Isaiah** is really a tale of two cities - the New Jerusalem and **Babylon**, which will be the political/economic capital of the antichrist during the Great Tribulation. **Isaiah** looks into **the far eschatological future** and sees that **Babylon, the ruined city, lies desolate and the entrance to every house is barred (24:10)**. Instead of a jubilant **city**, alive with music, its streets full of laughing crowds going from **house to house**, all will be empty with their doors locked tight so that no one could enter. **The word desolate is used in Genesis 1:2 means chaos**. The context points to this **city** being **Babylon** but **the rabbis teach that this city is Jerusalem**.

Isaiah describes **Babylon** as being a **city** where **the streets cry out for wine**. The **city** that was used to rivers of **wine** will only experience thirst. When **the LORD** pours out **His** wrath on an unbelieving world in the Great Tribulation, **all joy will turn to darkness and all gaiety will be banished from the earth (24:11)**. As a result, **the city will be left in ruins (13:20-22), and its gate is battered to pieces (24:12)**. **Babylon** will lay desolate.

God's prophet declares that what is true of this one **city**, will be true of the entire **earth**. Little will be left, as after **the harvesting of olives or grapes**. The phrase, "**So will it be**" signals a concluding statement to this part of the poem. Up until this point prophetic perfects have been used to indicate the certainty of the judgment to come. But now imperfect tenses appear to emphasize the fact that these events still lie in the future.

The world will look like an **olive** orchard or a vineyard after **the harvest**. **So, will it be in the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest (24:13)**. When **the olives** are gathered in the East, a practice that is still around today, the branches are beaten with sticks. It was mercifully ordered that **the Israelites** should give the trees but one beating, leaving for the poor gleaners all the fruit that did not by this means drop off.⁸³ **The Hebrews** were directed not to pick their **grapes** closely, but to leave a few for the poor. Gideon refers to this merciful provision when he says: **Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? (Judges 8:2)**.⁸⁴ As only a few clusters of **grapes** or a hand full of **olives**, so will it be for the world. Despite the worldwide judgment during the Great Tribulation, a small believing remnant of believers will be left. Suddenly, in the midst of this massive judgment, they glorify **God's** name.