

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 24

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 24

Theme: "The LORD shall reign in
mount Zion and in Jerusalem!"

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 24:1 (KJV) "Behold, the LORD
maketh the earth empty, and maketh it
waste, and turneth it upside down, and
scattereth abroad the inhabitants
thereof."

INTRODUCTION

From individual nations, the LORD turned His attention back to the nation of Israel. How do we know that it is Israel that the LORD was referring to and not the earth as a whole i.e. the world? The Hebrew word is "eretz." It is true to say that this word can be translated as earth (Genesis 1:1). However, the same word can also be translated as "land" to refer to the Promised Land (see Genesis 15:18). The immediate context determines the meaning of the word.

It makes no sense for the LORD to suddenly refer to the earth i.e. the world when He has been referring to Gentile nations that will come and conquer Israel and Judah.

Furthermore, the next three chapters of Isaiah focus on Judah. It is best to understand the word "eretz" to refer to "Judah" or the Promised Land. The KJV chose the word "earth" here probably because of the theme of the passage. The word "earth" here could very well refer to the literal earth and to "soil" (see Lev. 26:19). It is based upon this understanding that the word "earth" will be used through this lesson.

The Promised Land has never experienced exile before since the day Joshua conquered the Land with the help of God. This was in 15th century B.C. Nearly 1,000 years have passed and Judah was about to be desolated. For the LORD to do this to Judah was equivalent to switching off the only spiritual light in the world and plunging the world into spiritual darkness without a national light.

The NT parallel is the death of all the local churches. Whenever the LORD has to remove a witness, it means that the witness has failed to reflect the biblical attributes of God. The world could not see the manifestation of God's grace and mercies through Jesus Christ via the testimony of the local church or the nation of Judah. This is a very sad and serious offence on the part of professing believers. What we read in Isaiah 24 is a sad account of Judah's failure leaving the LORD with no choice but to destroy Judah once and for all in order to stop her from sinning further by her misrepresentation of the image of God to the world.

However there is a transition from Judah to the rest of the world from verse 16 onwards. What happens to Judah with her destruction and return will not happen to the world. The world will be thoroughly destroyed by the LORD who punishes Judah. No one will get away with sin. The judgement will begin at home i.e. with Judah but it will end with the rest of the world as Isaiah 24 reveals.

OUTLINE

1. Emptying the Earth!(vv.1-5);
2. Devouring the Earth! (vv. 6-12);
3. Glorifying the LORD! (vv. 13-15);
4. The End of Earth is the beginning of God's reign on earth (vv.16-23).

COMMENTARY

Emptying the Earth!

It is not just any God but the LORD who will empty the earth i.e. the Promised Land! The word for "empty" literally means, "make void" or "depopulate." Human beings will be removed from the Promised Land! It is as if God is telling His people that it is their fault that the earth is in such a state of condemnation before Him. It is not the fault of the trees or seas or oceans or the birds or the animals or the fish but the Jews! The Land was still flowing with milk and honey. But man alone is the cause of all the earth's calamities. Now God will punish His people for they do not

deserve to live on this earth as His witness!

The LORD will also lay the earth to waste. This means to destroy it totally so that it becomes uninhabitable. The earth will become a wasteland. It will not be good for planting or for growing food. When the earth was first given to Israel, it was flowing with milk and honey. They did not have a lift a finger to work the land or build their cities and houses and yet they could move in and live in them all these hundreds of years! Now the LORD will make it into a wasteland. When a witness is false, the witness has to be stopped. To allow such a witness to continue is to allow sin to breed and encourage it to breed more.

He turns the earth upside down. This means that no one will be left unpunished. The turning upside down is like one who cleans out a bowl and then turns it upside down to make sure that it is completely empty. Every sinner and evil person would be punished by God in Judah. There will be no exception. He scatters abroad the inhabitants thereof literally means that they will be scattered like one who smashes a pot onto the ground and the tiny broken pieces fly all over the place. This occurred in the days of Nebuchadnezzar when the LORD suffered Judah to endure three captivities where Daniel, Ezekiel and many others were taken into captivity and lived out their years in exile.

Just as this happened to the people, it will also happen to the priests. The priests were the teachers of God's holy Word. They do not need to do any physical work but to spend

all their time in spiritual work such as studying God's Word and offering the sacrifices of the people. This makes them the most spiritual of all the people in Judah and the whole world. Yet they too would be punished by the LORD together with the people. The servants will also be punished with their masters. Justice is blind to the LORD. It does not matter to the LORD what the status of man is on earth when it comes to the punishment for sin. The maid will be punished together with her mistress. The buyer will be punished together with the seller just as the lender will also be and the taker of usury with the giver of usury. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. However, the message from the LORD is very clear. Everyone who is in Israel regardless of their status in society, whether they are rich or poor, it matters not to the LORD when judgement falls.

The land shall be utterly emptied by the LORD. Literally the clause means "to empty, the land shall be emptied." The word for empty is placed first in the sentence for emphasis. The emphasis is that of emptying the land when it was once full of God's people and His glory! Judah has been disqualified by the LORD to witness for Him. Judah will be utterly spoiled by the LORD. Literally it means, "to spoil, it shall spoil." The land will be severely plundered by its enemies until it becomes barren. The LORD has spoken this word. There will be no revoking this judgement of God against Judah.

The earth mourns and fades away. Judah will cry and disappear from the face of the earth when she loses her sovereignty. This will last till 1948 A.D. Israel received her nationhood in 1948, 3 years after the Second World War. The world languishes i.e. became weak and sickly. How can the world become weak and sickly? It is not about military or economic power. It has everything to do with Judah's spiritual strength. When Judah dies, the world has no more light so she languishes. To languish is to be weak and feeble. The world is without strength and will fade into oblivion. The haughty people of the earth do languish. The response of the Jews was correct. They cried for their sins.

The earth is also defiled by the inhabitants. The culprits are human beings and not animals or birds! What a sad and terrible thing to be told by God that the primary causes of the wickedness and sin in Judah was due to the inhabitants of the land. They lived there and they destroyed them all. The reason for the defilement of the earth is that they have transgressed the law. The law here would refer to the moral law and all the laws given to Israel. They have also changed the ordinances. This is a serious charge as the ordinances refer to customs instituted by the LORD for Israel to observe, such as the many feasts. Judah has also broken the everlasting covenant. This is not a reference to the Messianic covenant where the coming of the Messiah is a suzerainty covenant that depends entirely upon the LORD's faithfulness

and not man's. This is the blessings that come with the covenant when obedience is the basis for the blessing. When sins abound, then the gathering is not going to be joyous but very painful. Judah has transgressed the laws (note the plural) and broken the covenant. The covenant dictates that punishment would ensue when Israel sins. (See Deut. 28)

Devouring the Earth!

The conclusion of the matter is that the curse has devoured the earth. The deliberate use of the perfect tense i.e. past tense to describe the devouring of the earth must have sent shock waves to Isaiah who received the word from the LORD and the Jews who received the prophecy from Isaiah! From the LORD's perspective, the Land of Promise was already eaten up by God's curse! The ones who lived in this land will be destroyed with it. The tense for desolate is the same as devoured. The message is the same. Both the people and the land will definitely be destroyed by the LORD. The inhabitants will be burned and few men would be left.

The new wine will mourn and the vine will languish. New wine refers to wine that has just been squeezed and fermentation has not yet occurred. This is the time where the Jews would rejoice most. It is the happiest time of the harvesting season. However there is only mourning i.e. wailing. The vine languishes means that there is no one to look after the vineyard and it is left unattended even though there is nothing wrong with the vines. They are just simply left to rot and spoil. If only

there were men who could tend to the vine! There were none. This picture illustrates the sad state of affairs in Judah. The blame is not that the Land was not flowing with milk and honey rather there was no one to dress it and eat the fruit from it.

The mirth of tabrets i.e. timbrel has stopped. The noise that the Jews once played to express their joy and gladness has ceased completely. The joy of the harp has also ceased. These were instruments that were used often for joyous occasions. Now they lay silent for there was nothing to be happy about. There will be no drinking of wine i.e. grape juice or must (grape juice just before or during fermentation) to celebrate with a song. For the must to ferment, time is required. They would have to store the must for some time to turn it into strong drink. This luxury is gone. Even the strong drink that could bring about a dulling of the senses and provide a false sense of peace and joy is not able to provide such false pleasure. This demonstrates the depth of the Jews' sorrow that even strong drink tastes bitter to them. This verse must not be used to support drinking of alcohol (see Isaiah 5:11). Strong drink is used here to illustrate the depths of the Jew's sorrow.

The city of confusion is broken down. This is definitely a reference to the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is indeed destined to become a city of confusion. The reason is that it has the Temple of Solomon, which represents the presence of the LORD. Yet it also housed many temples for the worship

of idols. The people had the priesthood, which was appointed by God to be mediators of men. Yet they become priests of idols. Truth was thoroughly mixed with errors such that confusion is a very apt word to describe Jerusalem of that day before destruction falls. How could such a great city like Jerusalem be broken down? It is the city of God! Who has the power and strength to break down such a powerful city? It is not man but the LORD who cursed and broke down His own city! What a tragedy to befall a city, which started with such promises and the glory of God. Yet it all disappeared and is now broken down by God. Every house is shut up reveals the extent of the breaking down. The city lies deserted and in ruins. The people have left her like many Americans left the slums of many major cities of America. No man is allowed to come in. They are all boarded up like what we find in many desolate parts of American cities. The picture is very bleak to say the least. The vibrant life of the city of Jerusalem that the Jews enjoyed during the days of King David and Solomon were a thing of the past. There was spiritual life and great joy and vibrancy. The people were full of life because they were close to the LORD. Now Jerusalem was just a shell without a soul.

There was crying for wine in the streets perhaps to celebrate or to drown their sorrows. But none came. All joy is darkened. The mirth of the Land is gone. What was left inside Jerusalem was only desolation. Life has literally been sucked out of

Jerusalem. The people deserted her like one would flee from a devouring forest fire. The gate is smitten with destruction. This means that the city is left unprotected from enemies including wild animals. How could such a thing happen to this great city!

Glorifying the LORD!

When these things occur in the Land then suddenly there shall be a shaking of an olive tree. The fruits of the olive tree will fall or be plucked during harvesting time except for some that remain on top of the tree. This illustrates that few Jews will be left like the few olives that the labourer would come and shake the tree for them to fall. The next illustration of the gleaning grapes after the vintage is done has the same meaning as the illustration of the olive tree. The repetition of a similar illustration is for emphasis. The Jews will be reduced to a small number because of the judgement of God against her many sins.

The remnant that remained in the land of Promise will praise the LORD for delivering them. This describes the time of their return from 70 years of captivity in Babylon. They will lift up their voice in praise and song most likely. They shall sing for the majesty of the LORD. They sing not "of" but "for" the majesty of the LORD. This means that on account of the majesty of the LORD the remnant will praise Him. To return to the Promised Land is to restart their duty as a witness to the world of God's grace and mercy. The majesty refers to the pomp and pride of the LORD.

They shall cry aloud from the sea refers to the fact that the rejoicing will come from across the sea i.e. distant land. Not all Jews will return to the Promised Land but they will rejoice with the Jews who returned. They will cry aloud from across the seas.

All these Jews will glorify the LORD in the fires, which is a reference to the trials that they face. Even in the midst of the persecution and adversities, the Jews were able to see the hand of God and thus glorify Him. The Name of the LORD God of Israel will be the focus of their glorifying. The phrase “in the isles of the sea” simply means “the remotest part of the earth.” The Jews’ return to their Land of Promise was a miraculous work of God that shows forth His majesty and the Jews’ declaration to the world of God’s glory even in the uttermost parts of the earth.

The End of the Earth is the Beginning of God’s Reign on Earth

From the uttermost part of the earth the songs of praise to the LORD could be heard. Those who have heard of the return of God’s people to the Land of Promise give glory to the Righteous. Some say that the righteous refers to the people of God whereas others argue that it ought to refer to God as the Righteous One. That believers are called righteous is not wrong but it is a righteousness that is imputed to them by God. However, the righteousness of God is righteousness personified in Himself for He is the Righteous One. The reference here is to the LORD as the One who should receive the glory for

the work that He has done in the lives of the people of God by bringing them back after 70 years of captivity in accordance with His prophecy.

Yet the second part of verse 16 seems to contradict the joy and singing and the glory attributed to God because Isaiah himself gave a perspective of the return from exile as one of leanness. In what way was it leanness? Note that Isaiah attributed this leanness to himself as he declared his leanness rather than the leanness of Israel. This is compounded by the use of the phrase “woe unto me!” The reason is probably due to the fact as the prophet witnessed the world’s impending destruction even as the world witnesses the return of Israel. The evil and sin that remains in the world evoked leanness and pain in the heart of Isaiah as the rest of his prophecy speaks of a world that will be destroyed by its Creator because of its sins. The word earth used in the rest of the chapter refers to “world” rather than the Land of Israel even though it is the same Hebrew word “eretz”.

The treacherous dealers (note plural) have dealt treacherously. The key word here is of course “treacherous.” This is a very apt description of the world as a whole. The actions of the world are extremely treacherous even though they might be rejoicing over the return of Israel and other nations in the time of the Persian Empire. Their rejoicing does not mitigate nor diminish God’s view of the treachery committed by the world. “Treachery” is a word that includes deeds of plundering and pillaging.

When world wars are fought and empires expand, hundreds of thousands if not millions die. The atrocities committed are unimaginable. The treacherous dealers have indeed acted very treacherously in the sight of God.

The warning from Isaiah was that they ought be afraid for the pit (the hole) and the snare (a thin sheet laid over the hole to snare) have been prepared for the inhabitants of the earth. The impending doom will soon come upon this earth. There will be no escape. The use of the singular for "inhabitant" points to every single human being on earth. When the judgement begins, many will flee. The one who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit. The one who escapes from the pit will be taken by the snare. There is no escape. The windows from on high are open and the foundations of the earth do shake. This means that the judgement of the LORD will come from heaven as well as from the earth. The calamities will fall from heaven such as hailstones, lightning, tornadoes and storms, and come up from the earth such as earthquakes, tsunamis and tidal waves.

The earth is utterly, totally and completely destroyed as described by the seven trumpets and seven vials judgement of the Book of Revelation. The earth is clean dissolved - violated and broken up and moved exceedingly. The entire topography of the earth will be changed forever. Mountains and valleys will be altered and all manmade structures will no

longer stand as they will topple over like little matchsticks crushed under the foot of a giant! The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard. The earth shall be removed like a cottage. These are devastating descriptions of the doom that will come upon this earth. What pride and what glory man gave to himself when he builds his empire and cities with skyscrapers. This prophecy of Isaiah reduces man to his real self which is the reality that he is no bigger than an ant or better than a dust mite or stronger than a helpless baby in the sight of the Almighty God.

In that day the LORD will punish the host of the high ones that are counted high and the kings of the earth upon the earth. These leaders of the world such as kings and presidents and prime ministers are singled out for mention for they are deemed the most powerful amongst all men. The LORD will personally target them and humble them for their pride and arrogance. They will be reduced to nothing. The LORD will gather them together as prisoners are gathered in the pit. The Lord will shut them in prison and after many days they shall be visited. This is probably an allusion to Hell and then ultimately released at the end of the millennium and sent to the Lake of Fire.

Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his ancients i.e. God's people gloriously i.e. in a state of glorification. If the interpretation of verse 22 is right i.e. verse 23 comes after the

millennium then the Jerusalem mentioned in verse 23 has to refer to the New Jerusalem of Rev 21:2 rather than the New Jerusalem of the millennium. Then the confounding of the moon and the sun would have to be the destruction of the earth and the heaven at the end of the millennium (cf. Rev 20:11) rather than the Second Coming of Christ that takes place before the millennium. The LORD will reign for eternity is the happy ending of this chapter of Isaiah.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Judgement Begins At Home

To more is given, more is expected. This has always been the perspective of God when He deals with His people. The people who bear the Name of God on earth have to live a life that reflects the biblical attributes of God. Otherwise He will punish them just as He punished Judah for her failure to bear a godly witness. The LORD has every right to expect this standard of holiness of His people as He has given them the privilege to bear His Name. He has also equipped them with the Word of God, the only place of worship, and the priests to teach them the Word of God so that they would be without excuse if they ever failed the LORD.

The LORD equipped His people with all that they needed to succeed. They had no basis to fail unless they deliberately chose to do so and sin against Him. This was exactly what Judah did. They were sent into exile. The NT saints are in the same situation as the Jews. They too have

been equipped by God with all that they need in Holy Scriptures not to fail but to succeed. However churches are falling like ten pins in these last days. They have come under the assault of the evil one and have succumbed to his wiles and seducing ways. Churches today are no longer reflecting Christ by the way they conduct themselves. They are pictures of the world rather than pictures of God. The world sees their mirror image when they look at the faces of the churches of today when they are supposed to see Christ.

Restoration Comes After Judgement

In the judgement of God against His people, there is always restoration. His mercies will prevail in the end, always. The reason is that He always has His remnant on the earth no matter how numerous and evil God's people have become. This remnant means that the LORD will always have His witness on earth no matter how dark the earth becomes. The remnant carries out the will and work of God on the earth. This remnant will justify the restoration as God's work is not done yet.

This is God's way of tempering justice with mercy. When His people fail Him in their witness on earth He punishes them as a loving father punishes his rebellious children. However, the remnant on earth will always be obedient to Him and His holy and perfect Word. These are the ones that He is pleased with. Noah and his family were the remnant in their time. Daniel and his three friends

and Ezekiel and others were faithful even unto death to God in exile. For the LORD's name and work sake He restored Judah.

The End Of World Is Certain!

There is no avoiding this revelation. This world in her sins and wickedness will never escape God's wrath. Every human being on this earth is divided into two groups. Either he is on God's side or on the side of Satan. If he is on the said of Satan, he faces the sure judgement of God for eternity. If he is on the side of God, then he faces the wrath of Satan on earth. Satan is able to destroy only the body but not the soul. God is able to destroy both the body and the soul. Therefore fear God and not the Devil.

The end of the world is coming. It has already begun the way events are shaping up. The Antichrist will rise as prophesied by God and then world will end as described here in Isaiah 24. The sin and treachery of mankind is the cause of his own doom. He has no one to blame but himself. God gave to man a perfect earth to live in. Man ruined it and stained it irrevocably with his sin. The LORD had to intervene to save man and His earth. He did by sending Jesus Christ His only begotten Son to die for man. He did this out of His grace and mercy. But the world always rejected God's love through Christ. For this rejection and her many sins the earth will be destroyed by God forever. Christ will rule forever in the new heaven and new earth. AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 24:1-12

TUESDAY: Isaiah 24:13-23

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 24:1-23

THURSDAY: Isaiah 24:1-23

FRIDAY: Isaiah 24:1-23

Discussion Questions

- 1. What must a local church do to keep itself from the judgement of the LORD the way He cursed and devastated Judah? Please explain your answer.

- 2. If there is a city of confusion, do you think we have churches of confusion in our day? Can you name some? Is Calvary Pandan a church of confusion?

3. Do you think it is right when God punishes His people that there is restoration? But when He punishes the earth, there is only condemnation without restoration? Please explain your answer.

4. Do you really believe that this world is bound for destruction by your God? Can you share how you have demonstrated this belief in practical ways in your life? Please share and explain your answer.

5. What is your world view as Christian today? Do you think that every son and daughter must be university trained to be considered successful in life?

6. If the world were to come to an end tomorrow morning and this is your last Lord's Day worship how would you worship the LORD differently? Please explain your answer.

7. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
