

A MESSAGE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR HEART

24 Listen! Jehovah is going to empty the earth and devastate it; [he is going to] turn it upside down and scatter its inhabitants. 2The same fate is in store for the common people and the priest, for the servant and the master, for the maid and her mistress, for the buyer and the seller, for the lender and the borrower, for the creditor and the debtor. 3The earth will be totally emptied and utterly devastated, for Jehovah has spoken this word. 4The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted people of the earth languish. 5The earth has become defiled by its inhabitants; because they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. 6Therefore, the curse will devour the earth, and those who dwell upon it will bear their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth will be burned up, and few will be left. 7The juice of the grape dries up, the vine withers; all the merry-makers sigh. 8The mirth of the tambourines is silenced, the noise of the revelers stops, the joyful music of the harp ceases. 9No longer shall they drink wine with a song; the beer shall taste bitter to those who drink it. 10The ruined city lies desolate; every house is shut up, so that no one may enter. 11There is crying in the streets because the wine is gone, all joy turns to gloom, mirth has departed from the earth. 12The city is left in ruins; its gate is battered to pieces.

13As when an olive tree is beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest, so shall it be on the earth and among the nations. 14[Those who are left] shall raise their voice, they shall shout for joy; from the west they shall cry aloud [with praise] for the majesty of Jehovah. 15Therefore, glorify Jehovah in the east, and in the islands of the sea glorify the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel.

16From the ends of the earth we hear songs [that proclaim], Glory to the Righteous One! But I said, I pine away! I pine away! Woe to me! The treacherous have dealt treacherously! Indeed, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously! 17Terror and the pit and the snare confront you, O inhabitant of the earth! 18Whoever flees at the report of the terror will fall into the pit; and whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare; for the floodgates of the heavens have been opened and the foundations of the earth tremble. 19The earth is broken apart, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken violently. 20The earth shall stagger like a drunken man, it shall sway back and forth like a hammock; the weight of its transgression shall be so heavy upon it that it shall collapse—never to rise again. 21On that day Jehovah will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. 22They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and after many days they will be punished. 23The moon will blush and the sun will turn pale; because Jehovah of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem—and His glory shall be before his elders. (Isa. 24:1-23)

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

Dateline GREEN BAY: Strangulation caused the death of a paper mill worker found inside a pulp vat ... with a 40-pound weight tied around his neck, police say ... The victim's body was found after he was accused of being a police tipster on employee theft ... the workers confronted him for ... telling police that one of the workers planned to steal an extension cord from the plant. (*The Sheboygan Press*, 12/10/92)

Dateline BOSTON: Two top officials in the Massachusetts state government have publicly acknowledged they are a homosexual couple, and said growing support for gay rights made them speak out ... The two men said they hoped that revealing their status would ... set an example for other homosexual professionals. (*The Sheboygan Press*, 11/14/92)

Dateline HILLSBORO, OREGON: A woman took her Alzheimer's-afflicted father from a nursing home, abandoning him at a dog track 320 miles away ... The woman, a daughter from the man's second marriage, took responsibility for her father after her brother dumped him at her doorstep in November of 1990 ... Prosecutors argued that the woman stole her father's Ford Motor Company pension and some Social Security checks over an 18-month period. (*The Sheboygan Press*, 12/5/92)

Dateline ATLANTIC CITY, NJ: Melissa leans against a casino wall, looking crumpled, tired, and scared. She is 9 years old ... It is midnight on a recent Friday at the Trump Taj Mahal. Melissa is waiting for her mother to finish gambling. She has been here two hours, says a security guard nearby ... Melissa is one of scores of "casino kids," some as young as 6-months, whom workers say are left by their parents at the edge of gaming halls for hours at a time ... Vivian Robinson, employed by Resorts, said she once stopped a woman from hitting her child after the boy had her paged because he was hungry. (*The Sheboygan Press*, 11/16/92)

When we are confronted with such news items it can cause our spirit to become overwhelmed by the degenerate state of society. But Christians, may our hearts be encouraged by the knowledge that the LORD shall finally cause His righteousness to prevail. This is the theme of Isaiah 24.

I. Let Your Heart be Strengthened, ...by the Knowledge that the LORD shall Administer His Justice (Isa. 24:1-13,21-22)

By His wisdom and power the LORD created the world, and, as verse one indicates, by His righteousness He shall judge the world: *"Listen! Jehovah is going to empty the earth and devastate it; [he is going to] turn it upside down and scatter its inhabitants."*

Contrast the work of God described here with His initial work of creation as described in Genesis 1:1-2a, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the*

earth. ²And the earth was formless and empty; and darkness was over the surface of the deep." As in other passages of Scripture that describe the judgment of God, so here, too, what is described is a work that is something of a reversal of the original work of creation—compare Psalm 46:2-3, which describes God's act of judgment, with Genesis 1:9-10, which describes God's initial act of creation:

... we will not fear, even though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³even though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. (Psl. 46:2-3)

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear;" and it was so. ¹⁰And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathered waters he called Seas; and God saw that it was good. (Gen. 1:9-10)

Verses 2-3a speak of the thoroughness of the LORD's judgment; it shall encompass all of mankind, every rank of society without exception: *The same fate is in store for the common people and the priest, for the servant and the master, for the maid and her mistress, for the buyer and the seller, for the lender and the borrower, for the creditor and the debtor. ³The earth will be totally emptied and utterly devastated.* The judgment is a divinely ordained event that cannot be annulled by man or by any other creature, *"because Jehovah has spoken this word."*

Verses 5-6 declare that the reason for the judgment is the fact that the world has become spiritually polluted: *"The earth has become defiled by its inhabitants, because they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶Therefore, the curse will devour the earth, and those who dwell upon it will bear their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth will be burned up, and few will be left". (Isa. 24:5-6)*

Originally the world was created by a holy God, declared by Him to be good, and deemed worthy of His presence, as we learn from Genesis 3:8, *"they [Adam and Eve] heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."* But now the world has become polluted—morally, spiritually, physically—by its inhabitants who are guilty of transgressing God's law and thereby breaking *"the everlasting covenant."* *"The everlasting covenant"* indicates the covenant of God that continues to be in effect for blessing or for curse. From the beginning, Adam (and his descendants whom he represented) was in a covenant relationship with God: the enjoyment of the fellowship and blessing of God was conditioned upon obedience, but disobedience would incur the judgment of God.

Therefore, because of the violation of the covenant requirement to obey the commandments of the LORD our God, *"the curse will devour the earth."* The word first spoken to Adam following his disobedience was the sentence of condemnation for his disobedience, *"And to Adam he said, 'Because you have*

listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, [the one] of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it; cursed is the ground on account of you; by toil shall you eat [the produce] of it all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:17.) That divine sentence shall finally be carried out in full and universal measure:

And by that same word the present heavens and earth are being preserved for fire, reserved for the day of the judgment and destruction of ungodly mankind ...¹⁰... the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will disappear with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed by being burned up, and the earth together with the works that are in it will be exposed. (2 Pet.3:7,10)

As verses 7-9 indicate, the good gifts of God—graciously provided for man's benefit and enjoyment—are withdrawn and replaced with bitterness: *"The juice of the grape dries up, the vine withers; all the merry-makers sigh. ⁸The mirth of the tambourines is silenced, the noise of the revelers stops, the joyful music of the harp ceases. ⁹No longer shall they drink wine with a song; the beer shall taste bitter to those who drink it."*

In verses 10-12 the final judgment is portrayed in terms of a rebellious city being conquered by its rightful king: *"The ruined city lies desolate; every house is shut up, so that no one may enter. ¹¹There is crying in the streets because the wine is gone, all joy turns to gloom, mirth has departed from the earth. ¹²The city is left in ruins; its gate is battered to pieces."* It is reported that *"all joy turns to gloom."* This point is emphasized because sinful man is so prone to define his chief purpose in life as the uninhibited pursuit of his own happiness with a total disregard for his God and his obligation to his God. The gate of the city *"is battered to pieces"* (i.e.; it is battered down.) Although man may seek to bar the gate against God—to shut Him out and ward off His judgment—the LORD Almighty will smash down every barrier and finally bring all mankind before His judgment seat.

According to verses 21-22, the LORD's judgment shall not be limited to the earth alone, *"On that day Jehovah will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. ²²They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and after many days they will be punished."* Both the spiritual powers in the heavenly places—the devil himself and all the host of wickedness—as well as the rulers of the earth, shall succumb to the judgment of the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The powers, both spiritual and temporal, are portrayed as being shut up in prison, and after many days visited with punishment. Here is a figurative way of depicting both the guilt and the humiliation of those who once occupied such high and lofty positions but, having been found guilty by Almighty God Himself, are now subjected to His righteous indignation and judgment.

As a Christian, do you ever look at the state of the world and cry out for God's justice? Do you ever find yourself questioning God's commitment to justice? "How can the LORD allow such atrocities to take place and not do anything about it?" Do you ever find yourself silently uttering the sentiments recorded in Malachi 3:14-15, *"You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before Jehovah of hosts? ¹⁵But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape'"?*

Christian, let your heart be strengthened, by the knowledge that the LORD shall finally administer His justice, as the Apostle Paul informs the Athenians, *"God ... commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹because he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead"* (Acts 17:30-31.) Note that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the evidence of God's commitment to justice and the proof that He has, indeed, appointed a day of final judgment.

II. Let Your Heart be Strengthened, ...Despite the Degenerate State of Society (Isa 24:16b-20)

In verse 16b we find Isaiah mourning over the state of the society in his day: *"But I said, I pine away! I pine away! Woe to me!"* To "pine away" means to lose vigor and health because of grief. When Isaiah takes his eyes off of God's promise to visit the world with a final righteous judgment, and when he focuses on the degenerate state of society all around him, he comes close to despair.

Why does Isaiah pine away? He explains that he does so because *"the treacherous have dealt treacherously! Indeed, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously!"* (vs. 16b.) There is a complete breakdown of integrity and commitment; there is the abandonment of moral obligations—the Hebrew word, נִגַּד, translated "to deal treacherously," means "to deal falsely," "to act unfaithfully." Verses 17-18a are describing a society in which treachery reigns, in which the most fundamental moral obligations are abandoned and human bonds have been forsaken: *"Terror and the pit and the snare confront you, O inhabitant of the earth! ¹⁸Whoever flees at the report of the terror will fall into the pit; and whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare."* It is a society in which no one is safe; a society in which no one can be trusted; a society in which no one is dependable.

Indeed, as verses 18b-19 indicate, here is a society that is under the judgment of God: *"the floodgates of the heavens have been opened and the foundations of the earth tremble. ¹⁹The earth is broken apart, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken violently."* Compare the figurative description of the LORD's judgment upon Judah in Isaiah's day with the LORD's actual act of judgment upon the world in the days of Noah:

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹²And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. (Gen. 7:11-12)

In the case of the society of Israel in Isaiah's day, the judgment of God initially took the form of giving the people over to their own sinful course and withdrawing the restraining influence of His Holy Spirit. In verse 20 the society and the world are portrayed first as a staggering drunk, then as a hammock swaying back and forth, finally collapsing under the weight of its own transgressions: *"The earth shall stagger like a drunken man, it shall sway back and forth like a hammock; the weight of its transgression shall be so heavy upon it that it shall collapse—never to rise again."*

Do you ever feel like Isaiah when you consider the present degeneration of society and the abandonment of moral obligations? The closer you walk with Christ, the more sensitive and appalled and heartbroken you become when you witness the present state of affairs.

Christian, let your heart be strengthened, despite the degenerate state of society. Consider the assurance the LORD gave to the prophet Habakkuk:

How long, O Jehovah, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? ³Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. ⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. ⁵Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed, for I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. (Hab. 1:2-5)
Note: Following Habakkuk's appeal (vs. 2-4,) the LORD responds in verse 5 with the assurance that He, in His righteousness and faithfulness, will do a great work in His appointed time.

III. Let Your Heart be Strengthened, ...by the Knowledge that You shall Rejoice in the LORD's Righteousness and Glory (Isa. 24:14-16a, 23)

In verse 13 the LORD's judgment of the world is described as the violent shaking of an olive tree, leaving but a few olives remaining. Those "remaining olives" represent the redeemed; those who have put their trust in the LORD and are devoted to Him. In terms of New Testament fulfillment, it is a reference to those who have put their trust in Jesus the Messiah and have become His disciples, now having Him as their Representative before the judgment seat of God, there presenting His righteousness on our behalf and appealing to the blood He shed on the cross of Calvary to make payment for our sins. Note how this is vividly portrayed by a comparison of Revelation 6:15-17 and Revelation 7:9,14,

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and **who can stand?**" (Rev. 6:15-17)*

*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, **standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.** They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ... And the angel said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9,14)*

According to verse 14, these shall lift up their voice and shout praises *"for the majesty of Jehovah."* On that great and awesome day, the redeemed shall lift up shouts of praise at the spectacular display of the wonder of the LORD's glorious being together with all His attributes, note. 2 Thessalonians 1:7,10, a passage in which the Apostle Paul speaks about the day *"when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels ... ¹⁰on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."*

From the uttermost parts of the earth—from all over the world—will the redeemed raise their song of praise: *"Glory to the Righteous One!"* (vs. 16a.) The LORD is especially praised for His righteousness, displayed in the judgment of this present sinful world and the redemption of His people. Note Revelation 16:5,7, a passage depicting the response of the angels and the redeemed to God's act of final judgment:

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "You are righteous, you who are and who were, you who are the Holy One, because you have by these means executed judgment ... ⁷And I heard the altar respond, saying, "Yes, indeed, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and righteous!" (Rev. 16:5,7)

Verse 23b reports, *"[His] glory shall be before his elders."* The language is referring to the event described in Exodus 24:9-11,

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. (Ex. 24:9-11)

This passage from Exodus describes the scene of the elders of Israel—representing the people—standing in the presence of the LORD, beholding His

glory and enjoying His fellowship atop Mt. Sinai following the Exodus out of Egypt. In the light of New Testament revelation, the prophecy pertains to the entire church of the Lord Jesus Christ—composed of the total number of the redeemed, from both the Old and New Testament eras, comprised of both believing Jew and Gentile alike—as we shall eternally behold the righteous glory of God and share in the divine glory.

As a Christian, do you ever grieve over your own lack of righteousness? Does your spirit ever become overwhelmed, not only by the degenerate state of society at large, but also by the large remnant of the old sinful nature you still find present in your own life? If you can identify with the apostle Paul when he writes *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”* (Rom. 7:24), you can also join with him in exclaiming the assurance he immediately goes on to express: *“Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (Rom. 7:25a.) Here is the confidence that deliverance shall come through the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ and, and that His victory shall be fully experienced by the Christian.

Christian, let your heart be strengthened, knowing that you shall rejoice in the LORD’s righteousness and glory. Let us rejoice and trust in the assurance given by the Apostle John:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 Jn. 3:2-3)

Conclusion

Yes, at times our spirit may become overwhelmed by the degenerate state of society and the world, and also by the large remnant of the old sinful nature still present in our lives. But as Christians, may we let our hearts be strengthened by the knowledge that the LORD shall at last cause His righteousness to prevail over the world and in our lives—to God be the glory!