

The prophet Isaiah ben Amoz 740-700BC

07. Isaiah 24-39



Introduction to chapters 24-27

The opening verse (24:1) indicates the focus of these chapters, which is on God's final judgment of evil whatever historical form it may take. This forms a fitting conclusion to a section that has pronounced the divine judgment against the nations that have acted against God's chosen people. It is a small step to widen the scope of the judgment to speak of God's judgment of any and every power that proudly acts against God's will.

Brevard Childs in *Isaiah* (The Old Testament Library, Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001 page 173), speaks of chapters 24-27 as 'divine admonition and encouragement to a community of faith living under great pressure and struggling to discern in its historical experiences the ways of God in human lives.'

Isaiah 24:1-23 : The world lies under God's judgment

Isaiah 24:1, 3-5

Now YHWH is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants ... [The judgment applies to all] ...

The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for YHWH has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

Isaiah 25: 1-5 : A Thanksgiving Psalm

YHWH, you are my God; I will exalt you; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. For you have made the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a flood pounding a wall, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

Isaiah 25:6-8 : Communion of all peoples with God

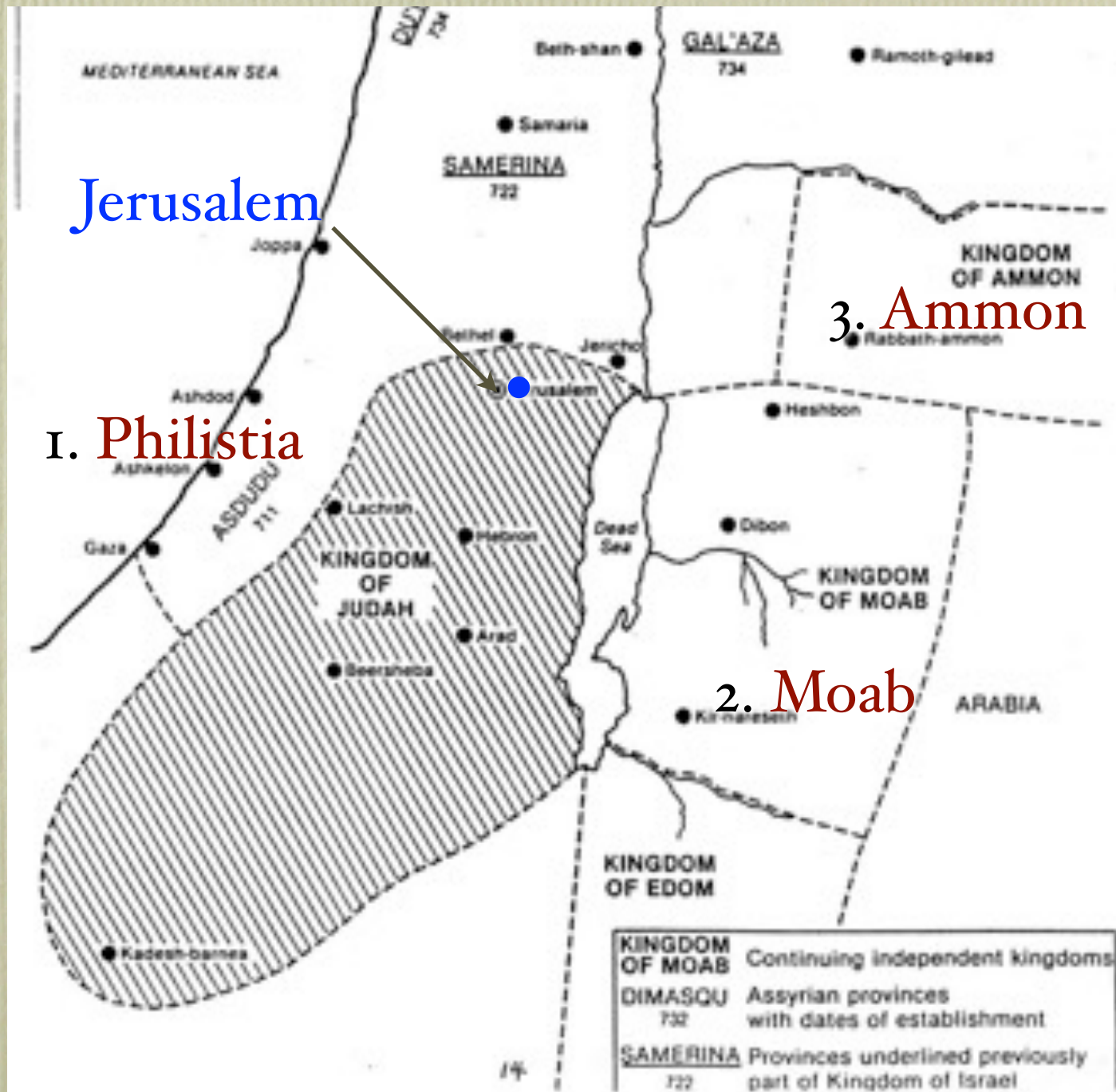
On this mountain YHWH of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; **he will swallow up death forever.** [see 1 Corinthians 15:54] Then the Lord YHWH will wipe away the tears from all faces, [see Revelation 7:17; 21:4] and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for YHWH has spoken.

After all the talk of YHWH's punishing Judah's enemies, this extraordinary piece is a timely reminder that punishment is always in view of bringing people to acknowledge YHWH and to receive life from him. We are accustomed to hearing this in relation to Israel, but here the prophet is speaking about 'all peoples'(25:6,7), 'all nations'(25:7), 'all faces'(25:8), 'all the earth'(25:8). The background seems to be a liturgical celebration of the universal lordship of YHWH, probably on the occasion of the pilgrimage festival of Booths (see Zechariah 14:16).

Isaiah 25:9-10 : A Second Thanksgiving Psalm

It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God;
we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is YHWH for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.
For the hand of YHWH will rest on this mountain.

Isaiah 25:10-12 : Against Moab



Isaiah 26:1-6 : :A Third Thanksgiving Psalm

On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city; he sets up victory like walls and
bulwarks. Open the gates, so that the righteous nation
that keeps faith may enter in. Those of steadfast mind
you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you.
Trust in YHWH forever, for in YHWH you have an
everlasting rock. For he has brought low the
inhabitants of the height; the lofty city he lays low. He
lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot
tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.

Isaiah 26:7 - 27:1 Keep believing God will intervene

Isaiah 26:7-9

The way of the righteous is level;
O Just One, you make smooth the path of the righteous.
In the path of your judgments, YHWH, we wait for you;
your name and your renown are the soul's desire.

My soul yearns for you in the night,
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

Isaiah 26:10-12

If favour is shown to the wicked,
they do not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness they deal perversely
and do not see the majesty of YHWH.

YHWH, your hand is lifted up,
but they do not see it.

Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.

YHWH, you will ordain peace for us,
for indeed, all that we have done, you have done for us.

Isaiah 26:13-14

‘YHWH our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone. The dead do not live; shades do not rise — because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them.

Israel's enemies have been destroyed by God and they will never rise again.

Isaiah 26:15

It is different with Israel. The psalmist goes on to recall the empire of David when YHWH ‘enlarged all the borders of the land’.

‘But you have increased the nation, YHWH, you have increased the nation; you are glorified; you have enlarged all the borders of the land.’

Isaiah 26:16-19

YHWH, in distress they sought you, they poured out a prayer when your chastening was on them. Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near her time, so were we because of you, YHWH. We were with child, we writhed, but we gave birth only to wind. We have won no victories on earth, and no one is born to inhabit the world. *Your* dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.

Isaiah 26:20 - 27:1 God will punish those who have oppressed his people

Isaiah 27:2-6 : YHWH's care for his people

A pleasant vineyard, sing about it!

I, YHWH, am its keeper; every moment I water it.

I guard it night and day so that no one can harm it;

I have no wrath. If it gives me thorns and briers,

I will march to battle against it. I will burn it up.

Or else let it cling to me for protection,

let it make peace with me, let it make peace with me.

In days to come Jacob shall take root,

Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots,

and fill the whole world with fruit.

Isaiah 27:7-11 : The Exile was to purify the people

Isaiah 27:12-13 : Conclusion to Isaiah 13-27

On that day YHWH will thresh from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel.

And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Isaiah 28: 1-13 : The Fall of Samaria (721BC)

Isaiah is making the point that the dangerously foolish policies that brought about the fall of Israel are the kinds of policies that are being followed by the Jerusalem court. They will have the same outcome. Verses one to four paint a picture of a regime that is living in luxury totally oblivious of the destructive storm (Assyria) that God is gathering to bring about their destruction (28:2). The beautiful garland that is Ephraim is like the garland on the head of a senseless drunkard at a funeral banquet. They don't seem to realise that they are celebrating the death of all they hold dear.

Isaiah 28:1-4

Ah, the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, of those overcome with wine! See, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters; with his hand he will hurl them down to the earth. Trampled under foot will be the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim. And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, will be like the first ripe fig before the summer; whoever sees it, eats it up as soon as it comes to hand.

Isaiah 28:8-10

All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean. “Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”

Perhaps it is better just to repeat the Hebrew of verse ten:

{šaw lāšāw šaw lāšāw qaw lāqāw qaw lāqāw ze‘êw šām ze‘êw šām}

The priests and prophets are talking gibberish, and giving legitimation to the policies favoured by the court.

People have a right to hear from the priests the law of God that it is their duty to know. They have a right to hear from the prophets words learned in prayer and communicated humbly and rightly, whatever the cost to the prophet. But both priest and prophet are providing religious legitimation for the policies favoured by the court. All the people get is the kind of repetition that one expects in a kindergarten. In fact it will get worse. All they will hear is the sound of a foreign and unintelligible tongue (Assyrian). YHWH wanted the people to enjoy 'rest'(menûhâ) – secure possession of the land and freedom from external threat, but they would not listen.

Isaiah 28:11-13

Truly, with stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people, to whom he has said, “This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose”; yet they would not hear. (quoted 1Corinthians 14:21)

Therefore the word of YHWH will be for them

[ṣaw lāṣāw ṣaw lāṣāw qaw lāqāw qaw lāqāw ze‘êw šām ze‘êw šām]

in order that they may go, and fall backward,
and be broken, and snared, and taken.

Isaiah 28:14-15

Therefore hear the word of YHWH, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter.”

They are relying on the false visions of the prophets who tell them what they want to hear. The only true shelter is YHWH (see 25:4).

Isaiah 28:16-17 : YHWH promises a new beginning

Therefore thus says the Lord YHWH,

See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a massive stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:

“One who trusts will not waver.”

And I will make justice the measuring line,
and righteousness the plumb line;

(see Romans 9:33; 1Peter 2:6; 10:11; Matthew 21:42;
Ephesians 2:20; 2Timothy 2:19)

Isaiah 29:1-8 : siege of Jerusalem 701BC

Isaiah 29:9-14 : They are unwilling to see

Isaiah 29:9-10

Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor, blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not from wine; stagger, but not from strong drink! For YHWH has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep; he has closed your eyes, you prophets, and covered your heads, you seers.

quoted by Paul: Romans 11:8

Isaiah 29:13

YHWH said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.

quoted Mark 7:6-7; Colossians 2:22

Isaiah 29:14

So I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden.

quoted 1 Corinthians 1:19

Isaiah 29:15-17. The limits of political 'wisdom'

Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for YHWH,
whose deeds are in the dark,

and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"

You turn things upside down!

Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?

Shall the thing made say of its maker,

"He did not make me"; see Romans 9:20

or the thing formed say of the one who formed it,

"He has no understanding"?

Shall not Lebanon in a very little while become a fruitful
field, and the fruitful field be as common as forest?

Isaiah 29:18-21

On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The lowly shall obtain fresh joy in YHWH, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease to be; all those alert to do evil shall be cut off – those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit, who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate, and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right.

Isaiah 30:1-7 : The folly of alliance with Egypt

Isaiah 30:8-14 : Keep the prophecy for future generations

Isaiah 30:15-17 : An ignominious defeat awaits them

Isaiah 30:18 YHWH is waiting

Therefore YHWH waits to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.
For YHWH is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.

Isaiah 30:19-33 : later attempts to spell this out

Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Then you will defile your silver-covered idols and your gold-plated images. You will scatter them like filthy rags; you will say to them, "Away with you!" ... on the day when Yahweh heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.'

Isaiah 30:27-33 : the end of Assyria

Isaiah 31:1-9 : rely on YHWH, not on Egypt

Isaiah 32:1-8 : The ideal ruler

Isaiah 32:9-20 : summons to mourn, but things will change

Isaiah 32:15-18

A spirit from on high will be poured out on us,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.

The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness,
quietness and trust forever.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

Isaiah 33:2

YHWH, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.

Isaiah 33:7-13 : A scene of social and physical disaster

Isaiah 33:14-16 : How does one avoid the judgment?

“Who among us can live with the devouring fire?
Who among us can live with everlasting flames?”
Those who walk righteously and speak uprightly,
who despise the gain of oppression,
who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it,
who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed
and shut their eyes from looking on evil,
they will live on the heights;
their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks;
their food will be supplied, their water assured.

Isaiah 33:17-21 : A future without fear

Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches far away ... No longer will you see the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a language that you cannot understand. Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be pulled up, and none of whose ropes will be broken. But there YHWH in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go.

Isaiah 35-39 was composed after the exile to link Isaiah 1-34 with the writings of the Isaiah School in Exile

Isaiah 35:3-6 : The final restoration of Judah

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. (Hebrews 12:12) Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. [see Matthew 11:5]

Isaiah 35:6-8

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty
ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray (see Revelation 21:27)

Isaiah 35:9-10

No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of YHWH shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 36-39

An historical appendix. Apart from the 'Prayer of Hezekiah' (Isaiah 38:10-20), the text is found also in 2Kings 18:13 - 20:19.

It deals with Hezekiah's role in forming an anti-Assyrian alliance which included Egypt, the campaign of Sennacherib, the devastation of Judah, the siege of Jerusalem, and the situation in Judah after the lifting of the siege (701BC).