

2 God is sovereign over the nations (Isaiah 13–24)

Isaiah began by confronting Judah: they were not following where the LORD was leading (Isaiah 1–5). Isaiah was called to participate in God's frustration with their unfaithfulness, refocusing them on *the Holy One of Israel* (Isaiah 6). Even the king was faithless, but God was present in the Immanuel child (Isaiah 7). God would use Assyria to bring God's people down, and then God would humble Assyria (Isaiah 8–10). An anointed ruler would sprout from the stump of David's dynasty to restore the fallen people of God and bring the nations back into heaven's reign (Isaiah 11–12).

Any questions on the first twelve chapters of Isaiah?

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What's in a name? The LORD of hosts

Seventy times, Isaiah refers to God as *YHWH šēḇā'ōt*. Our translations read:

- the LORD of hosts (KJV, ESV),
- the LORD of Heaven's Armies (NLT, CSB),
- the LORD Almighty (NIV, GNB)

šēḇā'ōt means **hosts**, multitudes, a vast array. Military forces were often described as hosts. You don't tell your enemies how many troops you have, just that you have hosts arrayed against them. Israel's armies were described as hosts (especially in Numbers). So were their enemies' (e.g. Judges 4:2–7; 8:6; 9:29; 1 Samuel 12:9).

There are also **hosts** of stars in the sky (Genesis 2:1). Many cultures of the Ancient Near East regarded them as the powers of heaven, so God warned his people not to worship the starry hosts (Deuteronomy 4:19; 7:3).

YHWH šēḇā'ōt declares that Israel's God reigns over the multitudes in both realms. He is sovereign over all people and creatures of the earth (not just Israel/Judah), and he is sovereign over the angels and creatures in the heavenly realm.

The LORD of heaven's armies is far too narrow an interpretation. It sounds like a subset of the heavenly beings and misses the earthly realm completely. *The LORD Almighty* recognizes God's authority but doesn't emphasize the scope of God's reign: the multitudes of creatures in both realms.⁸ The literal *LORD of hosts* is stronger.

That is the point Isaiah is making in Chapters 13–24. The LORD reigns over the nations, so the nations should drop their arrogant claims to be running the world and submit to the one who is Lord of both heaven and earth.

All nations answer to the LORD of hosts. That includes:

- Babylon and Philistia (13–14)

⁸ For more detail, see this study of Zechariah 8, the chapter that uses this phrase most: <https://allenbrowne.blog/2021/05/14/lord-of-hosts/>

- Moab (15–16)
- Damascus (17)
- Cush and Egypt (18–20)
- Babylon, Edom and Arabia (21)
- Jerusalem (22)
- Tyre (23)
- the whole earth (24)

The LORD reigns over all the nations. As their sovereign, he decrees their outcomes.



“The Neo-Babylonian Empire/Judah Exiled” in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010), 171

2.1 Who rules the nations? (Isaiah 13–19)

Babylon (Isaiah 13–14)

What do you make of this? Who is this about?

Isaiah 14:12-15 (KJV)

¹² How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!

How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

¹³ For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:

I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

¹⁵ Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Who is *Lucifer*? (verse 12)

What was Lucifer's sin? (verses 13-14)

People often use this text to discuss Satan's origins, especially in combination with Ezekiel 28.⁹ They often read it the way we just did—without reference to its context.

Isaiah 14:4 is the heading over this oracle. Who is it about?

Confused? How can they describe Nebuchadnezzar as Lucifer trying to ascend into heaven, exalting his throne above God's? (verses 13-14)

Okay, *Lucifer* is not a name for Satan. It's a Latin word: *lux* (light) + *fer* (carry), so light-bearer.¹⁰ Most translations have *morning star* (NIV), *Day Star* (ESV) or similar. The parallel phrase in verse 12 is *son of the dawn*. We still call Venus the morning star as it heralds the dawn. The word is unique here (nowhere else in Scripture), though the image of *the bright Morning Star* is applied to Jesus in Revelation 22:16.

In this context, the king of Babylon pretended to be ushering in a bright new day for God's people. Like Babel in Genesis 11:4, he was trying to reach up into the heavens to take the power of God into human hands. Since the LORD reigned over Judah, by taking Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar was trying to take God's throne.

How does that sound? Does that make more sense than spiritualizing it?

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The previous chapter explains that the LORD of hosts planned to use Babylon as a weapon to bring down his disobedient people (compare Ezekiel 21):

Isaiah 13:1-5 (NIV)

¹ A prophecy against Babylon ...

⁴ Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude!

Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations massing together!

The LORD Almighty is mustering an army for war.

⁵ They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens—the LORD and the weapons of his wrath—to destroy the whole country.

After destroying Judah, Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian empire:

Isaiah 13:17-19 (NIV)

¹⁷ See, I will stir up against them the Medes ...

¹⁹ Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Babylonians, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁹ On Ezekiel 28, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/02/09/you-were-in-edén/>

¹⁰ "Lucifer" in *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* ed. C. Soanes and A. Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2004).

We've already seen how God responded to Israel's unfaithfulness. Assyria conquered them (7:20). Then God brought Assyria down because of its pride—its claim to be running the world when sovereignty belongs to the LORD. (10:12).

God is responding to Judah's unfaithfulness in the same way. Babylon will conquer them. Then God will bring down the king of Babylon—for the same reason: his prideful claim to have taken God's throne (14:12-15).

Egypt (Isaiah 19)

Isaiah receives God's word that he will deal with Judah's neighbours:

- The Philistines to the south (14:28-32)
- The Moabites to the east (15 – 16)
- The Arameans to the north (17)
- The Cushites and Egyptians to the southwest (18–20).

The issue in every case is who is running the world. If the nations were doing right, they'd recognize the LORD of hosts as sovereign over their nation and its rulers. God is correcting them because they've rejected his authority, replaced him with idols and ethics of their own making (compare Romans 1:21ff).

Tonight we'll just cover the oracle concerning Egypt (Isaiah 19).

Isaiah 19:1 (NIV)

¹ A prophecy against Egypt:

See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt.

The idols of Egypt tremble before him,
and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear.

The language here recalls when the LORD approached Egypt in a cloud to protect his people from the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:19-20). Ten plagues demonstrated to the Egyptians that the LORD reigns. The powers the Egyptians trusted (Pharaoh, the Nile god, the sun god, etc.) are not in control of their lives.

Isaiah 19:2-4 (NIV)

² "I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—

brother will fight against brother, neighbour against neighbour,
city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

³ The Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their plans to nothing;
they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead,
the mediums and the spiritists.

⁴ I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master,
and a fierce king will rule over them,"
declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.

Isaiah doesn't say who the *cruel master/fierce king* was. The Assyrians defeated Egypt in 720 BC, and a Cushite dynasty ruled Egypt after that. What is clear is that their trust in their human and spiritual powers was misguided. Their destiny is decided by their true ruler: *the Lord, the LORD of hosts* (verse 4).

When Moses demonstrated that he was speaking for the LORD, *Pharaoh summoned wise men and sorcerers and the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts* (Exodus 7:11). But listening to other voices that claim spiritual power didn't end well. It still doesn't:

Isaiah 19:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools;
the wise counsellors of Pharaoh give senseless advice.
How can you say to Pharaoh,
“I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings”?

¹² Where are your wise men now?
Let them show you and make known
what the LORD Almighty has planned against Egypt.

The LORD of hosts rules all people. His plans decide the fate of the nations. Eventually, they'll stop fighting the God of Judah and recognize his authority:

Isaiah 19:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ In that day the Egyptians will become weaklings. They will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them. ¹⁷ And the land of Judah will bring terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be terrified, because of what the LORD Almighty is planning against them.

¹⁸ In that day five cities in Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD Almighty.

But don't read these oracles of judgment as if God intends to destroy the nations. His plans are not to destroy them but to rescue them from the powers of evil and include them under his leadership as his people. Just listen to this!

Isaiah 19:19-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the LORD at its border. ²⁰ It will be a sign and witness to the LORD Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them. ²¹ So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD.

Egypt (or at least Pharaoh) was the oppressor of God's people. But the Egyptians themselves were oppressed by a *cruel master/fierce king* (verse 4), as they had been

by Pharaoh (Genesis 47:19). So the LORD of hosts planned to rescue Egypt from their oppression, and include them as his people. Does this sound like good news?

Would God do this for the other nations that had oppressed Israel? The most violent oppressor of the eighth century BC was Assyria. Would God rescue them and include them as his people too?

Isaiah 19:23-25 (NIV)

²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria.
The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria.
The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.

²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria,
a blessing on the earth.

²⁵ The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.”

What a picture of a world rescued from the oppression of wars and evil, into the reign of the one who has always reigned over heaven and earth—the LORD of hosts.

And now I have to let you in a secret. When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek, the Septuagint used the word *Pantokratōr* for LORD of hosts. *Pan* means all, and *kratōr* means ruler, so the *Pantokratōr* is the all-ruler, the sovereign with authority over everyone and everything.

The New Testament therefore uses *Pantokratōr* for LORD of hosts (2 Corinthians 6:18 quoting 2 Samuel 7:8). And Revelation uses *Pantokratōr* to describe the LORD of hosts who has given his authority to the Lamb. Messiah Jesus bears the authority of the *Pantokratōr*. Christ leads the nations to allegiance (faith) to the one who rules the nations:

Revelation 15:3 (NIV)

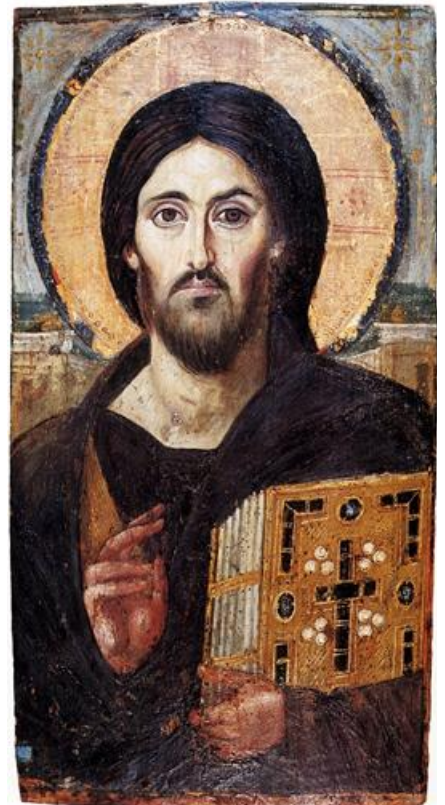
And [they] sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

“Great and marvellous are your deeds, **Lord God Almighty**.
Just and true are your ways, King of the nations.”

The ruler (*kyrios*) is God (*theos*) the All-Ruler (*Pantokratōr*). As the parallel expression explains, he is *King of the nations*.

It is the Lamb who leads the nations back to the one who has always reigned over heaven and earth. It's the Messiah who made the way for Egypt and Assyria to join with the Jews as the people God, citizens of the reign of the LORD of hosts.

Whether Isaiah understood it or not, he was laying a foundation for the gospel, the good news of God's reign.



Pantokratōr: icon from the 6th century AD.

2.2 Who rules the world? (Isaiah 20–24)

You can answer the title above now: The *Pantokratōr* does! After reaffirming his reign over Egypt and Cush to the south (21), along with Babylon to the north and Edom and Arabia to the east (21), Isaiah reaffirms God's reign over Judah.

Jerusalem (Isaiah 22)

Jerusalem is the place where the LORD was giving Isaiah these visions:

Isaiah 22:1-4 (NIV)

¹ A prophecy against the Valley of Vision:

What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs,

² you town so full of commotion, you city of tumult and revelry?

Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle.

³ All your leaders have fled together;

they have been captured without using the bow.

All you who were caught were taken prisoner together,

having fled while the enemy was still far away.

⁴ Therefore I said, "Turn away from me; let me weep bitterly.

Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people."

Isaiah is moved to tears by these visions of Jerusalem falling because it rejected the LORD's authority. It's the grief Jesus felt as he realized the city would murder the Messiah God had sent them, and so the city would fall (Matthew 23:37–24:21).

Jesus used phrases similar to Isaiah's.

Isaiah 22:9-13 (NIV)

⁹ You saw that the walls of the City of David

were broken through in many places;

you stored up water in the Lower Pool.

¹⁰ You counted the buildings in Jerusalem

and tore down houses to strengthen the wall.

¹¹ You built a reservoir between the two walls

for the water of the Old Pool,

but you did not look to the One who made it,

or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.

¹² The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day

to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth.

¹³ But see, there is joy and revelry,

slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep,

eating of meat and drinking of wine!

"Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!"

Verse 13 describes a people without hope. Paul quotes this in 1 Corinthians 15:32.

Isaiah says God must transfer the government of Jerusalem to someone else:

Isaiah 22:15-22 (NIV)

¹⁵ This is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says:

“Go, say to this steward, to Shebna the palace administrator: ...

¹⁷ “Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you
and hurl you away, you mighty man. ...

¹⁹ I will depose you from your office,
and you will be ousted from your position.

²⁰ “In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah.

²¹ I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around
him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to
those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah.

²² I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what
he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”

To whom was the authority of David given after the house of David had fallen?

Compare the person described in verse 21 with the person John saw in his vision of Jesus: *dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest* (Revelation 1:13). Then compare verse 22 with how John recorded Jesus' words for the assemblies that recognized his authority: “*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open*” (Revelation 3:7).

Heaven's authority is restored to the earth in the authority given to Messiah Jesus.

The earth (Isaiah 24)

Isaiah receives a vision of a devastated world. God intended the earth to be fruitful (Genesis 1:11-12), but the earth has been defiled by its people:

Isaiah 24:1-5 (NIV)

¹ See, the LORD is going to lay waste **the earth** and devastate it;
he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants—

² it will be the same for priest as for people,
for the master as for his servant, for the mistress as for her servant,
for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender,
for debtor as for creditor.

³ **The earth** will be completely laid waste and totally plundered.
The LORD has spoken this word.

⁴ **The earth** dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers,
the heavens languish with **the earth**.

⁵ **The earth** is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws,
violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. ...

The images in this chapter remind modern readers of the ways we devastate the earth today. We have a whole genre of movies that depict a post-apocalyptic world, scorched by nuclear weapons and incendiary bombs. Isaiah was not predicting these things, but we're still inventing ways to devastate the earth God gave us.



Verse 3 suggests Isaiah had war in mind. Invaders *completely laid waste* the cities they captured, *plundered* what was worth taking, and set fire to what they'd trashed. Invasion reduces everyone to the status of slave, regardless of previous position (v. 2).

But it's not the invaders who are blamed in verse 5. It's the people of God who *disobeyed the laws* and *broke the everlasting covenant*, leaving the land vulnerable.

There's a crucial wordplay here. The word *earth* (עֶרֶשׁ) is also used for *land*. *The heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1) and *the land of Israel* both use עֶרֶשׁ (e.g. Genesis 1:1 and Ezekiel 40:2). So, what is this chapter talking about? Does verse 1 say the LORD would *lay waste the earth*, or *lay waste the land*?

It's ambiguous. One commentator put it like this:

Like other translations, NIV has **the earth** for *ha'arets*, which was its meaning in 23:8, 9, and 17, but in 23:1, 10, and 13 the same word meant "the land." ...

If you were a Judean hearing the prophecy, you would not be sure which way to understand it. Is this a depiction of disaster on the land of Israel, or on the world as a whole? As the chapter unfolds, the ambiguity deepens. On the one hand, verse 4 also uses the word that specifically refers to **the world**. But then verse 5 sounds like a description of the people of God. Judah cannot simply dismiss this vision as a depiction of calamity that does not affect them.¹¹

That's the point. The earth is devastated as people destroy each other for power. The Abraham project aims to restore the blessing of God's sovereignty to the nations. But if God's people are destroyed, if their land is captured and incorporated into the kingdom of the world, then the whole earth is destroyed. What happens to them happens to the world.

The ruination of the city in the land becomes the ruination of the earth and its nations:

¹¹ John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Baker Books, 2012), 137–138.

Isaiah 24:10-13 (NIV)

- ¹⁰ The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred.
¹¹ In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom,
all joyful sounds are banished from the earth.
¹² The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces.
¹³ So will it be on the earth and among the nations,
as when an olive tree is beaten,
or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.

But if the devastation of God's people means the devastation of the earth,
the salvation of God's people means the salvation of the earth:

Isaiah 24:14-16 (NIV)

- ¹⁴ They raise their voices, they shout for joy;
from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty.
¹⁵ Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD;
exalt the name of the LORD, the God of Israel,
in the islands of the sea.
¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we hear singing:
"Glory to the Righteous One."

But I said, "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me!

The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!"

The peoples of the world—from *the west*, from *the east*, from *the islands of the sea*—
join their voices together to give honour to the LORD. They declare him to be the
Righteous One, the ruler who does right by all the peoples of the earth.

Remember Isaiah's call? "*I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne*" (6:1),
with his attendants remarking on the unfailing devotion of the LORD of hosts,
proclaiming, "*The whole earth is full of his glory*" (6:3).

That's what's happening here. The ends of the earth are declaring the majesty of the
ruler who sets everything right: "*Glory to the Righteous One*" (24:16).

But once again, Isaiah is conscious that he and his people still need to be set right.
At his commission, Isaiah lamented that he and his people were not being faithful to
the King, the LORD of hosts (6:5). Now as the nations sing, "*Glory to the Righteous
One*," Isaiah sees *treachery* and *betrayal* from the covenant people (26:16). I guess
Isaiah was right: when God provided the Messiah, that is what he faced.

In the latter part of Isaiah, we'll see more about the suffering servant of the LORD who
carries in his own body, for his people, the pain of their disobedience (Isaiah 53).

As the apostles understood, the rulers of this world rejected the Christ, the anointed
ruler God provided for his people and the world. (See Acts 4:24-27.) But the human
powers that served evil were defeated as God enthroned his anointed by raising him
from the dead (Romans 1:4). That's the promise God gives through Isaiah:

Isaiah 24:21-23 (NIV)

- ²¹ In that day the LORD will punish
the powers in the heavens above
and the kings on the earth below.
- ²² They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon;
they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.
- ²³ The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed;
for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and before its elders—with great glory.

Please understand how the prophetic symbolism works here. The day when God causes these powers to fall is presented as the sun, moon, and stars falling from their places in heaven or refusing to give their light (compare Isaiah 13:10; 34:4).

In the ancient world, rulers all claimed to have been given their authority by their gods. They'd consult the gods or read the stars to find when to go to war. But Isaiah says the LORD is ruler over all the powers people recognize—in heaven and on earth. He pictures the brightest lights in the heavens (sun and moon) hanging their heads in shame and dismay before the one who rules over the rulers of the nations and the powers in the heavens. The LORD of hosts reigns over them all, and he reigns on earth through the people he has chosen to represent him.

Questions or comments about Isaiah 24?

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2.3 So what?

There's a great deal in these chapters. What struck you?

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For me it's the claim that the LORD of hosts rules over everyone and everything in heaven and on earth. Israel's God decrees what happens for the nations (Isaiah 13–21) as well as for his people (Isaiah 22), for the whole earth (Isaiah 24).

In the beginning, God said, "*Let there be ...*" and it was so (Genesis 1). In the end, what the LORD says endures, becoming *new heavens and new earth* (Isaiah 65:17).

What questions remain unanswered for you?

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In preparation for next time, **read Isaiah 31 and 37.**