

## Prayer

O God, our Maker, Lord and Saviour; there are a thousand ways for us to tell You that we love You, a thousand ways for us to show You our obedience, and a thousand ways for us to live for You. Give us the courage to find the right words to say to You, the right things to do for You, and the right way to live according to Your will, right now, we pray. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: The Family

*Pray today about the laws in your country which affect family finances; for example, tax law, finances, benefits, and the like. Pray that your legislators will respect family life.*

### On-going prayers

- *Praise the Lord for those who have been healed of deadly diseases*
- *Pray for those suffering because of international food shortages*
- *Pray for your government*

## Meditation

Lord Jesus, save us from this fallen world  
where people think they take the place of God:

And if everyone would embrace democracy  
Then there will be peace on earth!

And if we could find the cures for all ills,  
Then everyone will live healthily!

And if the poor were all given aid,  
Then poverty would all go away!

And if we pour money into technology  
We can solve all the world's problems!

And if psychologists isolate what 'religion' is  
Then no-one will need to believe in anything!

And if we put all the bad people in jail  
Then everyone will be able to live in peace!

Lord Jesus, save us from this worlds fantasies!  
Come again in glory, and bring Your Kingdom on earth!

## Bible Study - Isaiah 25:1-12

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| <p><sup>1</sup> O LORD, You are my God;<br/>I will exalt You, I will praise Your name;<br/>for You have done wonderful things,<br/>plans formed of old, faithful and true.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> For You have made the city into a ruin,<br/>the fortified city into rubble;<br/>The foreigner's palace is a city no more,<br/>it will never be rebuilt.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Therefore strong peoples will honour You;<br/>a city of awesome nations will fear You.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> For You are a refuge to the poor,<br/>a refuge to the needy in distress,</p> | <p style="text-align: right;"><i>a shelter from the rainstorm<br/>a shade from the heat.<br/>When there is a spirit of terror<br/>like a wall of rain</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><sup>5</sup> <i>like heat in a drought<br/>And the uproar of foreigners<br/>You subdue the heat<br/>with the shadow of clouds;<br/>the song of the ruthless<br/>will be silenced.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><sup>6</sup> <i>On this mountain the LORD of hosts<br/>will provide for all peoples<br/>a feast of rich food,<br/>a feast of matured wines,<br/>of rich food with marrow,<br/>of refined and aged wines.</i></p> |
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- <sup>7</sup> *And on this mountain He will destroy  
the veil thrown over all peoples,  
the web which is woven over all  
nations.*
- <sup>8</sup> *He will destroy death forever!  
The Lord GOD will wipe away a tear  
from every face,  
and the disgrace of His people  
He will remove from all the land:  
For the LORD has spoken.*
- <sup>9</sup> *It will be said on that day,  
Look! This is our God!  
We waited for Him and He saved us!  
This is the LORD for whom we waited;  
let us rejoice and be glad in His  
salvation!*
- <sup>10</sup> *The hand of the LORD will rest on this  
mountain,  
And Moab will be trampled in its place  
as straw is trodden in a pit of  
manure.*
- <sup>11</sup> *He will spread out his hands in the  
midst of it  
as a swimmer spreads his hands to  
swim;  
but the LORD will make his pride fall  
in spite of the skill of his hands.*
- <sup>12</sup> *He will bring down the fortifications,  
the high ramparts of your walls,  
He has brought them down,  
Levelled, even to the dust.*

## Review

Within the complexity of the Hebrew poetry in this passage which scholars have struggled to understand and translate for us over the years, we can clearly see the evidence of an eternal message of salvation which transcends time. When Isaiah said these words and those around him wrote it down for our benefit, the people of Judah and Jerusalem looked forward to the Lord's deliverance and rescue from their enemies, and this poem spoke to them of God's reassurance and promise of victory over their enemies. Centuries later, to us who are God's people through the grace of Christ, this prophecy speaks in part of our own liberation and salvation and even more of the final victory of Christ over all evil and death at His last judgement in the End Times.

The whole prophecy has parallels with Psalm 126;

- <sup>1</sup> When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
- <sup>2</sup> Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy ...
- <sup>3</sup> The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.
- <sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.
- <sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.
- <sup>6</sup> Those who go out in tears, bearing seed, will come home carrying sheaves, with joy!

This Psalm is a song based on the themes of Isaiah 25. The returning exiles from Babylon sang this song and praised God using themes from the prophecies of Isaiah which had upheld them within their ordeal: confidence in the Lord's ultimate victory over the enemies of His people (25:2,10f.) and restoration as a cause for rejoicing (25:4,5), the idea that God would 'wipe away every tear' (25:8) and create great joy amongst His people; and the blessing of ample provision after austerity (25:6). They are simple yet powerful themes for all people.

It is true that there is much in this prophecy which speaks of God's destruction of all His evil enemies, and we should not shy away from the notion that in order for God to be ultimately victorious, He had to make moral judgements and let their consequences unfold (25:7). That is the nature of our world whether we like it or not. But the general consequence of this work of God will indeed be that 'He will destroy death forever!' (25:8). You would be forgiven for thinking that this quote comes from the apostle Paul, perhaps from 1 Corinthians 15 where he speaks about the end times and God's re-creation of all things. The nearest New Testament quote we will find is in Hebrews, where the letter describes the work of Christ on the Cross:

*'... so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.'* (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The whole of this passage is about the transformation God brings about in order to establish His Kingdom; the powerful are laid low (25:2,3,10-12), the downtrodden are raised up (25:4-9) and are given a banquet of rich food (25:6), and weeping is turned into great joy (25:8,9). These are eternal themes to be found throughout scripture from now on, and are certainly found frequently within the New Testament.

The truly wonderful thing in this passage is that just as the people of Judah were able to experience the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies several hundreds of years later when they returned from exile, so may we find them fulfilled in our own lives now through Jesus Christ. One day, we will discover that they fully describe God's New Creation; His New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1f.).

### Going Deeper

We will now go through this passage, focussing on the description given of the Lord's protection of His people (25:3-5), the banquet of the Lord (25:6f.) the destruction of death and the disgrace of His people (25:8), and the acclamation of the Lord by His people (25:9). The poetry of this passage is complicated and is difficult to understand; certainly, scholars have struggled with the translation of this passage for centuries, as you will see from my notes. However, few of its literary difficulties call into question the great sense of anticipation with which this whole prophecy is filled.

#### Notes on the text and translation

- V3 *In most translations, the last line of verse 3 reads 'cities of ruthless nations will fear you', interpreting the Hebrew entirely generally. However, the language is much more direct, and it is better to translate; 'a city of awesome nations will fear You'*
- V4 *the phrase I have translated 'a spirit of terror' is important for understanding the whole text at this point, Isaiah is contrasting the work of the Lord with the terror of the nations at the End Times*
- V6 *No-one is really sure about the unique words used in this verse. Some of them are not found anywhere else in the Bible or other literature. It is uncertain what they mean, but it is all about a rich banquet with high class foods and mature wines!*
- V7 *The words in this verse are fascinating. Two parallel phrases describe a veil, covering or web thrown over all the nations, as if they have been 'shrouded' from God. One of the words, the one I have translated 'web' is a word which also means 'a cast molten image', like the image of a calf made by Aaron when Moses delayed on the mountain – Ex 32:4f. Perhaps Isaiah saw the nations 'shrouded' by idolatry?*
- V8 *The first great phrase 'He will destroy death forever!' could stand by itself as a sentence, or be linked with the previous verse, as the Hebrew word for 'destroy' is the same one used at the beginning of verse 7, and is sometimes translated as 'swallow up', or 'engulf'. There is no doubt however, about what it means here.*
- V10 *The first line of verse 10 'The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain' is thought by some to form the end of the prophecy which began in verse 6 'On this mountain ...' However, because the Hebrew indicates that the consequence of this will be what happens in the rest of verse 10, I have translated it as if it was the beginning of the next prophecy, rather than the end of the last.*
- V10 *There was a well known Moabite town in Isaiah's day named 'Mad'men' (Jer 48:2) which is close in sound to the word for a dung-pit used here 'mat'ven'. There is a clear intention to make a pun using these words!*
- V11 *The last two lines of verse 11 are almost impossible to translate. The very last line can be translated 'despite the cleverness (or struggle) of his hands'. It is difficult to see what the logical flow of this prophecy might be saying; see Bible study.*

The whole passage describes the awesome things the Lord will do when He brings victory to His people and establishes His Kingdom, ultimately at the End Times. Firstly, he will reduce the 'city to a ruin' (25:2). Cities, in Isaiah, are places where people have sinned and rebelled against God, in contrast to the perfect 'Zion', the dwelling place of God and His people (see this contrast in Isaiah 1:21 and 1:26). All earthly cities are subject to God's

wrath and condemnation for their godlessness, and in Isaiah 25, the destruction of them leaves many 'nations' homeless and seeking somewhere to go, so they gather to the only city left, to Zion (25:3).

### **The protection of God's people (25:4,5)**

In the light of such turmoil, the Lord offers protection to His people, as described in verses 4 and 5. He gives refuge to 'the poor', and this reminds us of Jesus' teaching that the 'poor in spirit' will 'inherit the Kingdom'. Whilst Jesus' teaching in the 'Beatitudes' (Matt 5:1-11) goes further than Isaiah 25, it is possible that Jesus had some of Isaiah's prophecies in mind as he taught these famous principles. Our passage goes on to talk about refuge from distress (see 'blessed are they who mourn ...' – Matt 5:4); shelter from the storms of life (see; 'blessed are the persecuted ...' – Matt 5:10); a shade from the heat (possibly 'blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...' – Matt 5:6); protection from the 'uproar of foreigners' (perhaps 'blessed are the meek ...' – Matt 5:5).

You may feel that the connections here are not very exact, but given that Jesus quoted Isaiah more than any other prophet, it is in my view possible that His own teaching in the 'Beatitudes' was, like that in Isaiah, an expression of God's love and protection for a downtrodden people. Together, both passages remind us of the spiritual qualities which are needed in a person to take advantage of the Lord's protection at times of crisis. These connections enrich our understanding both of Isaiah 25 and of the 'Beatitudes'.

### **The banquet of the Lord (25:6)**

The idea that God sits down to eat with his people is one which first occurred in Exodus, when Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu went up on the mountain of God together with seventy elders and 'ate and drank' with God, without Him laying his hands on the people to kill them. The event is regarded by Jewish people as a miracle of the Old Testament! This ideal of fellowship with the Lord persisted and in Isaiah's work, eating and drinking together represents peace and wholeness (see 36:16, 37:30f. and 55:1f.). Here, a sumptuous banquet is described possibly using words which referred to the fabulous culinary dishes and fine dining of the day, words which describe luxury (fatness) and refinement (mature wines) and richness. The Lord would provide only the best!

In the New Testament of course, the Lord uses the image of a banquet to describe the End Times, as in the parable of the 'wedding banquet' (Matt 22:2f.) and other stories (Luke 12:36, 14:8), and many of the most famous incidents in Jesus' life involved eating; the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:15-21) and the four thousand (Matt 15:32-38), the Last Supper (Matt 26:20f.) and the meal at Galilee (John 21:9f.). In all of these instances, eating together was a sign of fellowship, of peace and comfort in the Lord's presence. The Lord has always promised rich blessings to His people who remain faithful through distress and who persevere through sufferings to the End. We enjoy that feast in part now, through the sharing of bread and wine, but one day we will enjoy that feast in heaven!

### **The conquest of death (25:8f.)**

The truly amazing feature of this passage is Isaiah's triumphant and climactic shout; 'He will destroy death for ever!' It is hard for us to imagine how revolutionary such an idea must have been in Isaiah's day. Yet it is extraordinary to think that this truth was revealed to Isaiah after he had dwelt on the tragedies of God's people in his own day; seeing the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel and all the death and mayhem of invasion by Assyria (728, 721 BC etc.). Out of all this, Isaiah saw God's revelation that if anything on earth was ever going to make sense, then there had to be a heavenly victory over all evil, including the final enemy, death itself! Without this, all those who had died before had died in vain (as was commonly believed), and what purpose could possibly be found in that, either for God or for His people alive at any given time?

Again, what Isaiah says about the conquest of death is astonishing; 'the Lord will wipe away every tear from every face' (25:8). Yes, this passage is as 'universalistic' as this, but surely God's love is indeed universal. He loves all people and is there ready to be compassionate whatever has happened; it is only our choice if we turn away from such compassion, as so many people do, even today, in ignorance of its embrace. Isaiah also

says that as death is destroyed, 'the disgrace of His people He will remove from the land.' (25:8). This sentence reminds us of the terrifying passages in Isaiah 24 which speak of the destruction of the land because of sin. People cannot restore the land by their own work or efforts; according to Isaiah's prophecies, only God can enable the land to recover from the abuse it has received at the hands of those who have exploited it.

'This is our God!' is the shout which is raised at the end of the passage. What a wonderful God who does such things for us even though we do not deserve them! 'We waited ... He has saved us ... let us rejoice and be glad!' All of these words from Isaiah 25:9 are the staple diet of phrases for songs of praise and adoration to Almighty God. They are found in many Psalms and in many hymns and songs written in the Christian era. Historically, they are found first in Isaiah.

## **Application**

This whole passage draws us to think about the great benefits of our faith and the wonderful things which await us in heaven! A Christian, just like anyone else, may be afraid of death because death is an unknown, a barrier through which we cannot see and yet something each and every one of us will go through. Our privilege through Christ and through God's revelation to Isaiah, is to have confidence that because of our salvation, we find that death is conquered for us and there is a heaven for us to enjoy. We will sit down at a feast with the Lord God Himself when we arrive there! It is fashionable today to criticise people who say too much about this because it is felt that we talk about what we do not know and cannot know. The truth is that we can only talk about these things and have confidence in them through our faith in God and His Son Jesus. Isaiah did not know Jesus personally; however, from his prophecies, it does seem that he had a glimpse of the One who would come and be 'God with us', to lead us into the great heavenly future that the Lord has prepared for us: a time when all earthly strife will finally be put in its place and overcome. This is Isaiah's vision and our blessing.

## **Questions (for use in groups)**

1. The needy need help now; so why should we talk about the help they might receive in the future? Does the Gospel hold out hope for them now?
2. Discuss in your group the vision you have of what heaven will be like.
3. What do you feel about death? Is it something you do not like to think about, or something you either fear or do not fear? Discuss this with others.

## **Discipleship**

### **Personal comment:**

*There are times when I long to be a part of what God has for me in the future, but the Lord has a purpose for us all in our life on this earth, and our future in heaven is something we can only enjoy when we have fulfilled His purposes for us on earth. I thank God that I can be content with the life He has given me now, and also look forward to my heavenly future!*

### **Ideas for discipleship programme**

- Look up some of the references in this study on the promises of God for our heavenly future. What do they mean to you?
- Walk around an area near your home and pray about how the Lord will judge our world and what happens in it. Pray for the people you see, and their eternal future.
- Meet with a friend to share your experiences of the death of close friends or loved ones; and discuss how the death of others has affected you.

## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, You alone know when You will come again in glory and bring all this world's suffering to an end. Strengthen Your people who live through troubled times today, and save them, we pray, from the Evil One; AMEN