

## Prayers

### To God

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the King of glory! You are the Servant of all people! You are the Saviour of the world! You are the Friend of each sinner!

We honour You, Jesus Christ, because you are indeed all good things to all people. You govern the whole universe, and yet You carry each one of us within the palm of Your hand in love and compassion. We rejoice to feel Your love and know it personally, and we praise You. **AMEN**

### For myself

*Get down on your knees to worship God, or take some other position that is different from your usual. Listen expectantly as you worship*

### For others

*Pray for those who have difficulty writing, typing, or handling computers, for whatever reason. Ask the Lord to open both your heart and the hearts of others to a better understanding of the problems people have with different forms of relevant literacy within our world.*

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## Meditation

Watch, my friend, my companion in Christ:  
For the Spirit is moving where we did not perceive it;  
He is speeding swiftly through the needy world,  
Inviting us to run with Him, to take hold of His divine guidance.

Pray, my friend, my companion in Christ:  
Be sincere in coming before our great Lord and our God;  
We will find the future as we share with God's heart  
And our prayers become a pathway to our greater obedience!

Listen, my friend, my companion in Christ:  
For the Lord our God is speaking to all through His Word;  
And once again He is challenging us  
To use our minds with care and delight to explore His Revelation.

Wait, my friend, my companion in Christ:  
For while we continue to do the good things He has asked of us,  
More things lie ahead; the Spirit is at work,  
We have yet to see His greater grace and wondrous provision.

Rejoice, my friend, my companion in Christ:  
The Lord has His hand on us and all that lies ahead of us;

He has a plan for us and for His world.  
Both you and I are privileged to share in it, so let us glory in it!  
HALLELUIAH!

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## Bible Passage

### **Luke 10:17-24**

<sup>17</sup> The seventy returned with joy, and said,

*"Lord, even the demons submit to us as we use Your name!"*

<sup>18</sup> Jesus replied,

***"I saw satan fall from heaven like lightning! <sup>19</sup> Look, I have now given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot, and authority over every power of the enemy. There is nothing that can harm you. <sup>20</sup> So do not rejoice in the evidence that the spirits submit to you. Rejoice, rather, that your names are written in heaven."***

<sup>21</sup> At that same time, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said,

***"I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from those who are wise and clever and have revealed them to young children; yes, Father, for this is what You wanted!***

***<sup>22</sup> All things have been handed on to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, or the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal Him."***

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus turned to the disciples and said to them privately,

***"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! <sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."***

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## Review

This is a stunning piece of scripture in which we read about the success of the seventy disciples on mission (10:17), and Jesus' enthusiastic response (10:18-20). He is delighted that God's plan of the salvation for humanity and the defeat of Satan is now having significant success! Luke adds Jesus' joyful prayer, in which He gives praise to God for the fulfilment of His plan, though the contents of this threefold prayer may surprise us. He rejoices in its simplicity (10:21), His role in it (10:22) and the fact that it is now happening in fulfilment of prophecy (10:23,24).

Verses 18 to 20 are well-known, because they are often quoted as evidence that Jesus was present at the 'pre-creation' events in heaven when Satan was cast out of heaven. The passage is important because it is the only place in the New Testament which is said to support this theory. However, if we read this passage without these ideas in mind, it could mean various things, as evangelical scholars have long noted. Here are the possibilities:

1. The saying is a warning against pride, for together with the rest of the paragraph (10:18-20), Jesus warns the disciples that their true glory is in their personal salvation

(10:20) and not the glamour of defeating evil (10:19), even though the fall of Satan is spectacular (10:18).

2. Here, Jesus perceives that the success of the mission is a death blow against Satan, who consequently 'falls', as prophesied by Isaiah (14:12), who describes the fall of the evil king of Babylon, a Biblical 'image' of Satan.
3. Alternatively, the passage may refer backwards, not forwards, and together with Isaiah 14:12, it describes the time when Satan fell from heaven before the creation of the world.

The trouble with any assessment that prefers one of these conclusions over another is that for many, interpretation number three is a matter of fundamental doctrine. So if I put more weight on theory number one, some might feel that I am trying to take away a central plank of Biblical evidence about the nature of creation and the fall of Satan. Allow me therefore to suggest a different route to deal with such dilemmas. We will explore whether it is possible to hold together some or all of these suggestions.

Firstly, I believe the theories about the fall of Satan are broadly correct, for this was explored by Jewish people in the period between the Old and New Testament, where this precise idea appears in other important Jewish documents written between the time of the two Biblical Testaments. This idea is referred to in just a few pictures of evil found in the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 14:12f.), and also in Revelation 12:8f. But our passage it is not just a proof text for doctrine, it is part of the story of Jesus and the disciples here in Luke.

So we can find more in the passage, and this part of Luke's story is about the defeat of evil through the mission of the disciples. Moreover, Jesus characteristically sees the defeat of evil both on this earth, but also in heaven; He saw the two as one (see also John 12:31f.). Moreover, we must not ignore Jesus' key point in the passage when He says to the disciples, '*do not rejoice in the evidence that the spirits submit to you ...*' (10:20). It is a timely reminder that whatever work is done by Jesus' disciples for the Kingdom, every believer is equal before God as a saved sinner, and no more, for this is what the book of life records (Exodus 32:32, Phil 4:3, Rev. 3:56, 13:8, 17:8). There is plenty here for us to appreciate in this passage!

Jesus was clearly delighted by the good news from the disciples; perhaps this success encouraged Him on His way. The short speech Jesus gave next falls neatly into three 'sayings', with each of them being full of a spirit of thanks and praise. The first two of them are found in Matthew 11:25 (10:21-22), but the last is found only here in Luke (10:23,24).

To begin with, Jesus gives His Father thanks for the simplicity of the Gospel message. His words remind us of the time He took a child and placed it in the midst of the disciples, telling them that unless they became more like little children they would not enter God's Kingdom (9:47,48). Yet the more we think about what Jesus said, the more revolutionary it is. In the first century, people generally believed that it was very difficult to understand God or 'approach Him' in any way, and even today, people tend to believe instinctively that faith is a difficult business. Jesus' words here challenge us to put aside our preconceptions and come to God in simplicity, as we find Him in Christ.

We find this simplicity in what Jesus says next, for in words that we might have thought were from John's Gospel before we located them here, Luke reports Jesus identifying perfectly with God as the 'Father'; '*no one knows the Son except the Father or the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal Him*' (10:22). How close this sounds to what John says in His Gospel, '*No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father*'. (John 6:46, and many similar passages). This, of course, is the simple Gospel. We find God through Jesus, and Jesus alone, because He reveals the Father to us. Pray that God's people will not allow their faith to become more complex than this!

Lastly, Jesus adds a further 'beatitude', blessing all the disciples who had been on mission and done His work. They were blessed because they now fulfilled the prophecies of the ancient prophets, and heaven rejoiced at their glorious completion. It is wonderful to read these words and reflect that Jesus, at this point in His journey, and having set His face to Jerusalem (9:22,44), was truly happy that God's will was being done.

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## Going Deeper

### **Notes on the text and translation**

#### **V17 'the seventy'**

Other translations:

*'the seventy two' (NRSV)*

There is genuine confusion in the ancient copies we have of the Bible text over whether there were seventy or seventy two. There are four or five early copies of the Bible dating from the third, fourth and fifth centuries, and a few scraps of papyri containing parts of it that come from earlier in the second century AD. We possess no earlier copies or originals of these great works. So when around half of them have '70' and the rest say '72', what are we to think? It suggests that we would be wise not to place too much importance on the actual number here.

This large number, 70 or 72 indicates that Jesus was commissioning more disciples than his basic 12; he trusted many more, and His purpose was as large a mission as possible, indeed, to the whole world.

#### **V2 'but do not rejoice in the evidence that the spirits submit to you'**

Other translations:

*'do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you' (NIV)*

*'do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you' (NRSV)*

This is a small matter. The Greek sentence is constructed in such a way as makes Luke's meaning sound awkward when translated directly into English, as is found in the NRSV. The NIV simplifies the whole construction. I have attempted to give Luke's construction in Greek some meaning, so that the whole paragraph reads well, while not departing far from the essential text.

#### **V21 'I praise You ...'**

Other translations:

*'I bless You' (NJB)*

*'I thank You' (NRSV)*

Surely, you might say, this is a straightforward phrase. Nevertheless, the Greek word used here is not the normal one for 'praise', or 'worship', or even 'thanks'; it is the word 'confess'! Unfortunately, we use the word in English in a predominantly negative way, such as in the phrase, 'I confess my sins'. But there is another way to use the word, and an example of this is when we speak of 'confessing the faith'. Here the word 'confess' is used positively, in the sense of enthusiastically agreeing with something. This is what is going

here at this point in the text. Jesus is enthusiastically agreeing with the Father! The term 'praise' is perhaps the most helpful in English, because there is no other adequate English word. But if we do not study the text to this depth we will never spot such fascinating details of scripture!

## **Further Comments**

### ***The fall of Satan***

I tend to think of the fall of Satan as something that was clearly not recorded in Genesis for a reason. That does not mean to say that our theories are right or wrong, just that they are not exactly front stage in the great Biblical story of Creation, other things are. We therefore only catch a glimpse of this in later Scriptures, and the passages that refer to this frequently have other purposes and meanings that must not be ignored, as here. It is nevertheless important to try and search out our understanding of evil and Satan, and see if it is possible to fit them into the Creation story as we know it, even if it is not described, per se, in the Bible. Let us not be ashamed to draw our conclusion from various scriptures and also from the writings of godly people not found in Scripture.

Having said this, it does not seem to me to be the primary purpose of Jesus here to make a casual reference to a doctrinal matter. I do believe that Satan's pre-creation fall is a reasonable explanation of how we understand evil to work within the Bible records, but this passage of Scripture only refers to it incidentally. So while the subject remains important, this study focuses on the other ways we can understand what Jesus says here.

### ***Snakes and scorpions***

This passage, together with Mark 16:18, refers to the authority of God's people to 'tread' on or 'crush' scorpions and snakes. This should be obvious to us, but although it may be tempting to think that this can be the basis of some dramatic miraculous events, this is not the best way to interpret this. In Psalm 91 we read the following:

*<sup>13</sup> You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. (Psa 91:13 NRS).*

This is clearly complex picture language that describes the authority of the believer over evil, and an earlier verse of the psalm explains '*no evil shall befall you*'. From as early as Genesis 3, the Bible uses the image of the snake as representative of Satan, so there should be no difficulty for us in understanding this point.

### ***Names written in heaven***

In our passage Jesus refers to the Biblical idea that God has a record book in which He keeps a list of the people who are entitled to share His glory in heaven. We first find reference to this in Exodus 32:32, where Moses mentions such a book and describes God's right to remove people's names from it. Daniel also has a visitor (Gabriel - Daniel 10), who speaks to him about a 'book of truth'; it is only a brief allusion, and one that is difficult to tie down. Much stronger, however, is Paul's reference to the people having their names written in the 'book of life' (Philippians 4:3), and the many references to this in Revelation (3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 21:7).

This idea is not one that either adds or subtracts from our general picture of the saving grace of God, however, for Scripture does not allow us to stretch it this far. It should not be used with any sense of implied threat ('is your name written in the book of life?'), it should be used as an encouragement to God's people of the mercies of God and the accuracy with which He does His work.

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# Discipleship

## ***Application***

### ***Rejoicing in the defeat of evil***

There is no doubt that it is a wonderful thing to see the enemy flee before us. If we have taken authority in Jesus' name, then it is possible to stand against all manner of personal, social, institutional or family evil, and be victorious. Sometimes we lack the perception and incisiveness to do as much deliverance ministry, but we can still be effective by taking our stance against what is evil, in Jesus' name. It does not take much for people to agree what is wrong whether this be in our own lives, or in the life of the church or society. When we act together as Christ's disciples to bring down Satan's strongholds, and see Him fall, then there truly will be rejoicing in the church! Victory in battle always bring happiness! Perhaps some find it hard to rejoice in church because no battles have been fought; we must think about such things carefully.

### ***The simplicity of the Gospel***

God's people face a constant challenge to keep the Gospel simple. Many a Bible College has challenged its students to write an essay entitled 'this is the Gospel'. Then, when the students have written their several sides of A4 paper, a tutor will ask them to reduce this first to a paragraph, and then to a sentence. All of us should be aware of the need to be brief and concise in what we believe and in expressing our faith. The proclamation of the Gospel depends on us all being able to share it simply with those who need it at its simplest.

### ***Jesus at the centre of history***

We do not know how long our planet will continue or how long history as we know it will continue. We are getting closer to a better scientific understanding of our world and how it works, but God has a plan for it, and this will govern our future. While the rest of the world looks inexorably to the future with little understanding of the past, Christians should place their trust in Jesus who stands at the very epicentre of history. Many different things have happened since Jesus was alive, but the truth remains that Jesus is the Son of God and has shown us the way to the Father. In Him we have access to God and can hope for a future only known by Him. In Him we have salvation and the assurance of quality eternal life, forever. As Jesus reminds us here, the prophets of ancient times foretold what would happen when Jesus came into the world and they knew He would die for our salvation. Let us not look anywhere else for our hope than to Jesus.

## ***Ideas for what to do***

- Have you heard preachers speak about the fall of Satan in pre-creation history, quoting this passage of Scripture? This is strongly advocated in some quarters. Have a look at some of the passages of Scripture that are often used to back up the theory, and try to get your head around what they say; Isaiah 14:12f. Luke 10:18f., John 12:31f. Revelation 12:8-13.
- Write a prayer of praise to God for the blessing of the Gospel, and use some of the themes and ideas found in verses 21 to 24 in this passage

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

1. Discuss verse 18, and whether you believe this refers to the pre-creation fall of Satan, or prophetically, to Jesus' defeat of Satan on the Cross, or to the disciples' defeat of Satan.
2. If God is intent on revealing Himself to little children, how is He doing this today, and are we picking it up?
3. Is what is happening within the churches today a reason for great joy in heaven or on earth? If not why not?

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## **Final Prayer**

Yours, Lord God, is the power and the glory, and You, Lord God are the victor over all evil. Fill our hearts with such praise, we pray, and may we always be ready to join in the chorus of heavenly praise that is Your eternal glory O Lord. HALLELUIAH

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