

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Isaiah 25:6-9

NRSV

In accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus says that he will not drink wine again “until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (see Mark 14:25). Earthly language is inadequate for expressing heavenly notions. Chapters 24 to 27 of Isaiah are a prophecy about the *end-times*; our reading is a description of the celestial banquet to which Jesus refers. (Other ancient Near East cultures also use a banquet as a description of the final happiness of the godly.)

Chapter 24 begins with the announcement of the destruction of the earth. There will be total upheaval of the social order (24:2). God will then destroy the earth. Most people will have broken the covenant with him, so he will cause them to “suffer for their guilt” (24:6) and die. Only a godly remnant will remain. The earth will be a gloomy place (24:7-13) but then the survivors will praise God’s name (24:14-16a). “On that day” (24:21) God will imprison rebellious angels and the kings of the earth for a long time and then punish them (24:22). “... the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem ...” (24:23). As the seventy elders beheld God’s glory at Sinai, so Israel’s elders will again see him enthroned in his majesty.

Then “on this mountain” (25:6), at Jerusalem, God will provide a banquet “for all peoples”, for the godly of all nations, with food and the wine of which Jesus speaks. The dead are pictured as being covered with a “shroud” (25:7) or “sheet”; this will be removed when God *swallows up*, does away with, “death forever”. God’s kingdom will be established. In eternal life, he will “wipe away” (25:8) one of the roots of all misery, our mortality, and he will remove the collective shame of breaking the covenant. The remnant, the godly, will acknowledge “our God” (25:9), for whom we have waited and who has saved us; let us “rejoice in his salvation”.

Psalm 24

NRSV

This psalm is based on a Canaanite myth which tells of the divine conquest of the unruly forces of chaos. The psalmist has transformed it into a hymn of praise to God, the victorious creator, followed by a liturgy on entering the Temple. In question-and-answer form, it was probably sung antiphonally, as the Ark was borne to the Temple. Vv. 1-2 acknowledge God as creator. V. 3 asks: who will be admitted to the Temple? Vv. 4-6 give the answer: those who are pure, do not worship false gods, and do not harm others with false oaths. They will be blessed by God, with prosperity. In vv. 7-10, the pilgrims identify God in terms traditionally associated with the Ark: he is “King of glory”, the “Lord of hosts” (v. 10), the war hero of Israel (v. 8b). The “doors” (v. 9) are those between the outer court and the

sanctuary of the Temple. Perhaps a priest asks: “Who is the King of glory?” (v. 8) from within, and the people answer from the court. (The “heads”, v. 7, are the lintels of the doors.) God dwells in the sanctuary.

Revelation 21:1-6a

NRSV

This book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1) made known through John. It is prophecy which reveals secrets of heaven and earth. Our reading is from John’s record of his vision of the end-times. He has told of the destruction of the old city, Babylon (code name for Rome) and of the old heaven and earth (20:11); the ungodly have been driven off to punishment (20:15). Only the godly, a remnant, remain. Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66:22 predict that all creation will be renewed, freed from imperfections and transformed by the glory of God.

Now John sees the new creation. The “sea” (21:1), a symbol of turbulence, unrest and chaos, is no more. He sees “the new Jerusalem” (21:2), probably not made with bricks and mortar, “holy”, of divine origin, beautiful and lovely as a “bride”. (Marriage is a symbol of the intimate union between the exalted Christ and the godly remnant. Some see the city as the church, set apart for God’s use in the world.)

John hears “a loud voice” (21:3) interpreting 21:2: God again comes to “dwell” (be present spiritually) with “his peoples”. Sorrow, death and pain – characteristics that made the old earth appear to be enslaved to sin – will disappear (21:4). God, “seated on the throne”, speaks in vv. 5-6: he will do everything described in 21:1-4; he is sovereign over all that happens in human history. (“Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so God encompasses all.) God will give the gift of eternal life (“water”, 21:6b) to all who seek him.

John 11:32-44

NRSV

Lazarus, Mary’s brother, has died. Martha has told Jesus that he would not have died had Jesus been present, but that the Father will grant whatever Jesus asks. Jesus has said to her: “Your brother will rise again” (v. 23), which she takes to refer to the general resurrection Jews expected at the end of time. Jesus has answered: “I am the resurrection and the life” (v. 25); even though a believer dies physically, he or she will live on as a person. She has added: “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (v. 27).

Now Mary repeats Martha’s earlier assertion (in v. 21). Jesus is stirred with indignation, probably at the sorrow death brings. Touched by the pain of those he loves, he weeps: he shares that pain in some real way. Martha tries to restrain Jesus from viewing the decomposing corpse of his friend (v. 39). Jesus says to her: *did I not tell you that if you believed you would see God’s power to end death?* God, Father and Son, bring Lazarus back to physical life. Jesus verbalizes his thanks to the Father as he tells the unbelieving “crowd” (v. 42) that he is sent by the Father. On Jesus’ command, Lazarus emerges, still wrapped in burial cloths.

