

Proper 28

[Home](#) [Up](#)

Pentecost 26 November 17, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit that, always keeping in mind the end of all things and the day of judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of life here and may live with your forever in the world to come, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Or

Almighty and ever-living God, before the earth was formed and even after it ceases to be, you are God. Break into our short span of life and let us see the signs of your final will and purpose, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

{1} Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is at hand; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests.... {12} At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, "The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm." {13} Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them. {14} The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. {15} That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, {16} a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. {17} I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the LORD, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. {18} Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Zephaniah wrote during the reign of Josiah (639-609), and reflects his prophetic anger with the syncretism of the reigns of Manasseh and Amon which still continued in Josiah's reign.

7: The verse provides the setting of verses 12-18 in connection with the "day of the Lord." The verse is ironic, for the sacrifice is Judah, and the guests are the Babylonians.

12. *"The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm."*: On the day of the Lord those who are complacent and do not believe that God will reward or punish will know the wrath of God. Nothing will be able to save them. The prophet speaks in Yahweh's voice.

13. *Thought they build houses...though they plant vineyards*: As they entered the Promised Land the Israelites would occupy houses they had not built, and eat produce they had not planted (Joshua 24:13; Deuteronomy 6:10-11; Nehemiah 9:25); The curses in Deuteronomy 28:30, 39 fall on those who do not keep Yahweh's law. Amos (9:14) said that Yahweh will restore the fortunes of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and that they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them and plant vineyards and drink their wine. Jeremiah (29:4f, 28) said that the exiles in Babylon should build houses there and plant gardens and eat their produce; they should make their homes in Babylon. Isaiah (65:21) promised "...They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit."

14-17. *the great day of The LORD*: This was the day when it was assumed Yahweh would execute

judgment on Israel's enemies and punish them. It would be a day of rejoicing. But here it is seen as judgment on Israel because of their sin against Yahweh. It will be a day of wrath.

Isa 65:22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;

15. a day of wrath: The hymn traditionally ascribed to Thomas of Celano (died 1255), *Dies irae dies ille*, is based on these words. [1]

18. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them: "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath..." (Proverbs 11:4). See Ezekiel 7:19 which quotes these words from Zephaniah. [2]

a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth: A summary of the cataclysm described in verses 2-6.

Psalm 90:1-8 [9-11] 12

{1} Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. {2} Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. {3} You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." {4} For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. {5} You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; {6} in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. {7} For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. {8} You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. {9} For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. {10} The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. {11} Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. {12} So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

This is the only psalm attributed to Moses. It is a prayer of the community.

1. Lord: Hebrew, *Adon*; here and at the end of the Psalm (verse 17) it identifies Yahweh as the ruler of the whole world.

2. from everlasting to everlasting you are God: Unlike the creation which however long it may last will at last crumble, Yahweh is everlasting.

4. a thousand years in your sight is like yesterday when it is past: "...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (2 Peter 3:8). While we should not be literalistic in understanding this metaphor, it makes clear the radical difference between Yahweh and his people. For Yahweh even unimaginable periods of time are as mere hours.

9. all our days...our years come to an end like a sigh: Romans 6:23: "the wages of sin is death."

10. The days of our life are seventy years: By comparison with Yahweh's eternity human life is brief.

12. that we may gain a wise heart: "Folly does not know the seriousness of repentance. Wisdom alone penetrates to the abysses of the human condition of being lost and forfeit to death. But wisdom is not an ability of the human being; it is gained by prayer from God.... He himself must teach those who pray." [3]

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

{1} Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. {2} For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. {3} When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! {4} But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; {5} for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. {6} So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; {7} for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. {8} But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. {9} For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, {10} who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. {11} Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

2. the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night: The day of the Lord is the day of

judgment, and reaches back to the first lesson with its promise of darkness and gloom. Peter uses the same words in 2 Peter 3:10.

5. *children of light*: Luke 16:8; John 12:36; Ephesians 5:8. Light is a metaphor for the spiritual enlightenment. A child of light is one who is spiritually enlightened.

children of the day: Romans 13:13: "let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy."

Also verse 8, *we belong to the day*. In both of these places it is possible to read "the day" as a reference to the day of the Lord when all will be judged.

10 awake or asleep: Alive or dead.

Matthew 25:14-30

{14} "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; {15} to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. {16} The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. {17} In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. {18} But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. {19} After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. {20} Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' {21} His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' {22} And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' {23} His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' {24} Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; {25} so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' {26} But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? {27} Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. {28} So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. {29} For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. {30} As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

14. *it is as if a man, going on a journey*: "It is necessary to supply something like the beginning of the previous parable—'The kingdom of heaven may be compared, in its establishment, to the story of a man going abroad.'" Perhaps instead we should supply something like this: "Should the kingdom of heaven be compared to the story of a rich man who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them." This would fit with Crossan's proposal below.

15. *five talents*: A "talent" is "a measure of money worth 6000 denarii (one denarius was a day's wage..." [5]

24. *I knew that you were a harsh man*: The servant describes the master accurately considering what his response is. The description is of a person who violates all of the expectations of a proper Israelite. He is a profiteer who seeks to benefit at the expense of others James 2:6 provides an early Christian attitude toward the rich: "Is it not the rich who oppress you?" . He does not seem to be an appropriate model for how the kingdom works.

25. *I went and hid your talent in the ground*: "Later customary law provided that since burying a pledge or deposit was the safest way to care for someone else's money, if a loss occurred the one burying the money had no responsibility." [6]

27. *you ought to have invested my money with the bankers*: To invest money at interest is clearly in violation of Torah, if the one to whom the money is loaned is an Israelite (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36 f.; Deuteronomy 23:19 f.). Since Jesus would have been talking within an Israelite context, the master's complaint is not that of a proper Israelite.

29. *For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away*: This proverb is found in other

contexts in the Gospels. See Matthew 13:12; Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18; 19:26. "It is a common maxim, like our saying, 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'—a more or less cynical comment on the injustices of life." [7]

The parable, as it is presented, reflects the interests of the elite landowners, while Jesus' audience was made up primarily of poor peasants. Malina and Rohrbaugh point out that in the world of the first-century Mediterranean seeking to make a profit was morally wrong and brought dishonor to those who sought to gain riches. In that world it was the third slave, the one who buried his master's money, who did the honorable thing. They further point out that Eusebius, the first historian of the Church, cites a version of the parable found in the *Gospel of the Nazoreans*.

"...since the Gospel (written) in Hebrew characters which has come into our hands enters the threat not against the man who had hid (the talent), but against him who had lived dissolutely—

For he (the master) had three servants:

A one who squandered his master's substance with harlots and flute girls,
B one who multiplied the gain,
C one who hid the talent;
and accordingly,
C' one was accepted (with joy),
B' another merely rebuked,
A' and another cast into prison

I wonder whether in Matthew the threat which is uttered after the word against the man who did nothing may refer not to him, but by epanalepsis [8] to the first who had feasted and drunk with the drunken. (Eusebius, *Theophania* on Matt. 25:14f., cited from Hennecke-Schneemelcher-Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha* 1:149)." [9]

John Dominic Crossan carries the discussion a step further. "Rohrbaugh concluded that 'Jesus' peasant hearers would almost certainly have assumed [the parable] was a warning to the rich about their exploitation of the weak. Is it possible that there were right?' But Rohrbaugh reasoned that Jesus' audience included not just peasants but others as well. That is surely correct. Even if Jesus' audience were composed primarily of peasants, it would not have been exclusively so. And even among peasants, there would be diversity of outlook.... If an audience contained others as well as peasants and if 'the elitist reading is bad news for peasants' while 'the peasant reading is bad news for masters' ..., would not audience debate have been inevitable—and also intentional on Jesus' part...? ...the function of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God was to create debate about justice, to raise consciousness about oppression, to ask how God would run this world if God sat on Caesar's throne, and to do all that through internal transformation rather than external domination. Parables were the ethical mode of education upward rather than indoctrination downward. They lured the audience into self-education. And education is, first, foremost, and always, about knowing your options. Parables were the special pedagogy of Jesus' kingdom of God." [10]

"In the context of Matthew, this parable clearly is not about profit, abilities, sharing wealth, or the like. It is about how to behave in the period before the soon and sudden coming of the Messiah. Minimally, the story, using the scenario of the rapacious, greedy rich and their world, tells the audience not to be lazy or useless persons." [11] If heaven is like the parable's description, it is a merciless, graceless environment, hardly the abode of the one who loved the world enough to give his only Son.

Reflection

All of the lessons deal with the expectation of the day of the Lord and the last judgment. The first lesson points out that God's people should not take comfort in the expectation of the day of Yahweh. Her enemies may well be punished, but God's people will also face devastation and ruin because of their indifference to the covenant law. Only the meek who seek righteousness may escape Yahweh's wrath (Zephaniah 2:3).

The Psalm is a response to the first lesson. "...we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed..... our years come to an end like a sigh" (verses 7-9). The psalmist recalls that Yahweh had been the dwelling place of his people, and prays that Yahweh will teach "us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."

The second lesson declares that the children of light are destined not for wrath but salvation when the Lord comes. So, we should to keep awake and be sober, encouraging and building each other up as we wait for the day of the Lord.

The Gospel calls on us to live our lives, not for our own pleasure or profit, but to carry out the will of God as we wait for the kingdom of heaven.

Hymns [12]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

321 E--The Day Is

505 D--Forth in Thy

399 II--We Are the

443 II--Rise, My Soul

405 G--Lord of Light

408 G--God, Whose Giving

322, 726s, 770s/754v, 364

Prayers of the People [13]

P or A: We lift up our eyes, as a servant to our master and pray for our needs and those of all people saying, "Hear us, O God," and responding, "We depend on your mercy."

A: We do not know on what day or at what hour Christ will return. Let your church be continually occupied with encouraging one another and building one another up. You have not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through Jesus our brother and Lord. Hear us, O God. We depend on your mercy.

A: Your people have had more than enough of contempt, too much of the scorn of the indolent rich, the derision of the proud. Raise up women and men who will lead nations and people, bring mutual respect, peace and security for all. Equip us as citizens of Canada and the world to offer our gifts and services when they are needed. Do not allow us to hide our talents Hear us, O God. We depend on your mercy.

A: For those in need of wholeness and healing we pray to you. Take us to them as messengers of your love and allow us to touch them with your care. We pray for the terminally ill, people with cancer or AIDS, who ask only for moments free from pain. We remember those we know who need you _____. Hear us, O God. We depend on your mercy.

A: We thank you that we are children of the light and of the day. Make us love the light rather than the darkness. Keep us mindful of all that we say and do that it may be glory and honor for you. Hear us, O God. We depend on your mercy.

P: You have entrusted so much to us as your children. Guide us in our use of all that you give. Care for those for whom we pray and see to our needs as may be best for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or [14]

Presider or deacon

As we wait in pregnant expectation for the day of the Lord, let us offer prayers to God for all in every danger and need.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For all peoples and their leaders, and for justice and righteousness in the world.

For good weather, abundant fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times.

For the sick and the suffering, travelers and refugees, prisoners and their families, and the dying and dead.

For our city and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with the blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Almighty God, who gave us salvation through Jesus Christ and made us children of light, hear the prayers we offer this day and bring us to the time and season of your glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Notes

[1] F.L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 402.

[2] Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, p. 199, note to verse 19.

[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 217.

[4] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, p. 488.

[5] Fritz Reinecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (translated. Edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr.) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980. p. 74.

[6] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 149.

[7] Wright, *ibid.*, p. 491.

[8] “a figure by which the same word or clause is repeated after intervening matter.” *OED in loc.*

[9] Malina, *ibid.*, 150.

[10] John Dominic Crossan, “The Parables of Jesus,” *Interpretation*, July 2002, pp. 252-253. Rohrbaugh’s study is, “A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror?” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 23(1993) 32-39.

[11] Malina, *Loc. cit.*

[12] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0102.txt>

[13] http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a2.txt

[14] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>