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Isaiah chapter 25

6On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. **7**And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. **8**He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. **9**It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Psalms chapter 23

English Standard Version

1A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. **2**He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. **3**He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. **4**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **5**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **6**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Context Summary

Psalm 23:1–3 extolls the blessings bestowed on David by the Lord, his personal shepherd. The scene is peaceful and personal. In John 10:11 Jesus identified Himself as the Good Shepherd. He does for His sheep what David describes in Psalm 23:1–3. He leads his sheep (John 10:3–4); guides them to pasture (John 10:9); restores their souls (John 10:10); and protects them (John 10:11–15).

Psalm 23:1

ESV

A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

What does Psalm 23:1 mean? These words are some of the most-frequently quoted in the entire Old Testament. Even those unfamiliar with the Bible may recognize this verse, which has been used in countless ways over the ages.

In this verse David expresses his confidence in the Lord as his shepherd. The word for "LORD" in this verse is from a Hebrew term known as the *tetragrammaton*. This is four letters: *yodh, he, waw, he*; in English these are essentially YHWH. This is often transliterated as *Yahweh* or even *Jehovah*. This is the biblical name of the covenant-keeping God of Israel.

David knew by personal experience that Yahweh shepherds His people. He cares for all their needs. When he was a shepherd boy, David cared for his sheep, making sure all their needs were met. In similar fashion the Lord cared for David. David lacked nothing. Believers, too, can be sure the Lord, the Good Shepherd, meets all our needs. He listens to our prayers, and if we call on Him, we will receive His grace and help in a time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

An interesting name for the Lord is found in Genesis 22:14. Abraham had been commanded by God to take Isaac and sacrifice him. When Isaac inquired of his father Abraham where the lamb was for the burnt offering, Abraham told him the Lord would provide the sacrifice. As Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, the angel of the LORD stopped him. Abraham had demonstrated his faith in God. The Lord provided a ram that was caught in a thicket by its horns as a sacrifice instead. Abraham promptly sacrificed the ram and called the site of the sacrifice, *Jehovah-Jireh*, meaning "The Lord will provide."

Psalm 23:2**ESV**

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

What does Psalm 23:2 mean? David writes that the Lord provides rest in green pastures and guides him to still waters. Shepherds in biblical times did not "drive" their sheep. Instead of pushing the herd from behind, they walked ahead of the flock, which followed. The land of Israel did not have plentiful, verdant pastureland except in the rainy season. Shepherds needed to guide their sheep to green pasture, otherwise the sheep would go hungry.

Further, sheep will not drink from a rushing stream. Nor will they instinctively seek out clean water—they are prone to drinking whatever is nearby. Therefore, a good shepherd leads his sheep to calm, clean water.

As a good shepherd, the Lord guided David to green pasture; that is, He provided well for David, giving him abundance, rest, and peace. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, provides all of this care for His followers. He gives us rest (Matthew 11:28), abundance (Matthew 6:33; John 10:10; Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 4:19), and peace (John 14:27).

Just as a shepherd in Bible times knew his sheep by name, so our Good Shepherd knows us personally and calls us by name (John 10:3). We should be quick to heed His call and follow Him!

Psalm 23:3**ESV**

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

What does Psalm 23:3 mean? David credits the Lord, his shepherd, with restoring or refreshing his soul. In Bible times, if a sheep became injured, its shepherd would treat its wounds until its good health returned. How often the Lord restores us to good spiritual health after the evil world system has hurt us, or, even more often, when we have hurt ourselves by failing to follow Him closely! When Peter relied on self-confidence to keep him faithful to the Lord, he failed miserably, but the Good Shepherd graciously restored him to spiritual health (John 21:15–19).

Sheep were accustomed to following their shepherd in well-worn paths, but occasionally a sheep would stray from a safe path and become lost. Then the shepherd would leave the rest of the sheep in the custody of helpers and go searching for the lost sheep. Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), leads us in paths of righteousness, but we may wander from the chosen path. Then Jesus searches until He finds us and restores us. In Luke 15:3–7 Jesus told a parable about a shepherd who had one hundred sheep, but when one went astray, he searched for it until he found it. Then he laid it on his shoulders, brought it home, and summoned his friends and neighbors to celebrate its recovery with him.

Context Summary

Psalm 23:4–6 shifts in mood from the tranquility portrayed in verses 1–3. It is a somber passage, but carries the assurance that the Lord protects His sheep and fills their days with His blessings. This passage differs from the first three verses by addressing the Lord, David's shepherd, directly. In verses 1–3 David talks *about* the Lord, but in verses 4–6 he talks *to* the Lord.

Psalm 23:4

ESV

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

What does Psalm 23:4 mean? David could walk through a dark ravine, perhaps even death, fearlessly, because the Lord walked with him. David explains his lack of fear because "you are with me." It is interesting to observe that the "shadow of death" drew David closer to the Lord. He addresses the Lord as "you," whereas in the peaceful places he called the Lord "he."

A shepherd in Bible times carried a rod and a staff to protect his sheep. The *rod* was a cudgel: a short, thick, heavy stick similar to what modern people might call a *baton* or *mace*. This was worn at the shepherd's belt. The staff was a long, lightweight pole with a curved end—a *crook*—that the shepherd used to move, count, and examine the sheep at evening when they returned to the fold.

Both the rod and staff were used as weapons to protect the sheep. David trusted the Lord to protect him, just as a shepherd protected his sheep from any attacking animals. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is with believers at all times (John 10:11, 14). He promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20). He is with us

when we walk over rough ground as surely as He is with us "beside still waters" (Psalm 23:2). Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

Psalm 23:5

ESV

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

What does Psalm 23:5 mean? This verse may describe a gracious host as he provides a banquet for an honored guest, or it may continue the metaphor of the shepherd-sheep relationship. If it refers to a host preparing a banquet, David views himself as the Lord's honored guest with David's enemies present as captive onlookers.

If it refers to a shepherd-sheep relationship, David compares the Lord's generosity to that of a shepherd who generously prepares a feast for his sheep, spreading the food on a table or trough. As the sheep slept, they were protected by a circular stone wall and the shepherd who slept across the opening. Jesus identified Himself as the door to the sheepfold (John 10:7–9).

A gracious host would anoint his guest by applying a soothing oil to the guest's head. A shepherd would use oil to treat his sheep's wounds. David may have been thinking about the Lord as his host or shepherd when he wrote, "you anoint my head with oil" (Psalm 23:5). The cup David depicts as overflowing may refer to the brimming cup the host provided or to the large cup a shepherd used to give water to thirsty sheep. Either interpretation leads to the conclusion that the Lord provides for us more generously than the heart can desire.

Psalm 23:6

ESV

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

What does Psalm 23:6 mean? David expresses his conviction in this verse that the Lord's goodness will be with him throughout his life. Whether green pastures

and still waters lay ahead, or David was required to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord's goodness would accompany him.

Over the years of his long life David had found that God is good all the time. Further, the Lord's unfailing love would be present with him every step of life's journey. Paul encourages us in Romans 8:38–39 to count on God's love in all of life's circumstances. Nothing can separate us from His unfailing love. We can use trials to make us more aware of God's love so that we grow, rather than become bitter. David anticipated that at the end of his life he would enter heaven—the house of the LORD—and live there forever.

Having the Lord as our shepherd makes life worthwhile and blessed, and when our journey on earth ends we will enter heaven to live with our Shepherd forever (John 14:3). Revelation 7:16–17 promises that in heaven believers will never hunger or thirst or suffer again, "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Philippians chapter 4

4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. **5**Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; **6**do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **9**What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

10I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. **11**Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12**I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13**I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Context Summary

Philippians 4:10–20 describes how Christians can overcome worry and worldly desires, regardless of their circumstances. By making a purposeful decision to be content, a believer can trust God to provide our true needs, and not be consumed with materialism or anxiety. Paul has learned this skill through his many trials and ministry experiences. Paul also thanks the Philippians for their generosity, and expresses his confidence that God will bless them for it.

Philippians 4:13

ESV

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

What does Philippians 4:13 mean? Despite his frequent need, and harsh treatment, Paul joyfully declares his confidence that God will allow him to endure anything. Paul's words reflected the Gospel teachings that nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37). Paul had declared elsewhere that if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)?

This perspective can also be found in the Old Testament. Jeremiah 32:17 notes that nothing is too hard for the Lord. Job 42:2 declares God can do anything. God's closest followers have long known that with God, nothing is impossible, whether Abraham's promised son Isaac, the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea, or the people entering the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. God provides on time, in His time, every time. Paul's confidence can be found throughout his writings (2 Corinthians 3:4; 7:16; 8:22; 10:2; 11:17; Galatians 5:10; Ephesians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:4).

This verse can, however, be taken out of context. Paul's comment is specifically referring to the ability of a Christian to endure under hardship and persecution. Despite well-meaning use of the words, this text does not teach that a Christian is empowered to accomplish *any task* simply because they are saved.

Philippians 4:14

ESV

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

What does Philippians 4:14 mean? Even though Paul was confident in God's provision for his needs, he expressed thanks to his readers for their concern.

Their acts of generosity were a way of taking some of Paul's hardship on themselves. And, of course, their acts were the way God fulfilled His promise to provide. Their kindness was an expression of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and reflected Paul's teachings elsewhere regarding kindness to others (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:24; Titus 2:5).

It's important to note that the Philippians shared, or had fellowship with, Paul's trouble. Galatians 6:2 teaches, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." These believers sought to share in Paul's struggles and supplied resources to help. Paul's "troubles" included marks on his body from being beaten for his faith (Galatians 6:17). Paul's one other use of "trouble" in Philippians is in 3:1 where he says it is "no trouble" to write to them. Regardless of the trials Paul faced, his attitude toward God, as well as the assistance provided by other believers, helped him to continue to persevere.

Philippians 4:15

ESV

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

What does Philippians 4:15 mean? Paul notes that the Philippian believers were the only church to financially support him when he left Macedonia. Paul remembered their unwavering, unique support. The phrase "beginning of the gospel" is not a reference to the start of the church, but rather the initial preaching of the gospel among the Philippians. In the early days of their congregation they helped finance Paul's work, a noble action which Paul made sure to thank them for, even years later. This gift is probably the same one mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:8, received when he was in Corinth.

Interestingly, Paul refers to their financial gifts as a "partnership with me in giving and receiving." They gave financially and received spiritual benefits. A similar relationship exists today between local churches and those they support in ministry and missionary activities. Through financial support, one local church can impact many others in faraway places through the people they assist. This support also benefits the spiritual lives of those who give.

Philippians 4:16

ESV

Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. **What does Philippians 4:16 mean?** Paul will soon refer to recent gifts the Philippians had sent him through Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18). He has also mentioned their earlier giving in verse 15, which is likely the same gift mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:8. In this verse, Paul adds other times they had supported his work. Even when Paul was serving in other areas, these Christians were willing to aid him.

Paul's work in Thessalonica is described in Acts 17:1–9 with some additional details in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. His ministry in this city was brief, less than a year. Even so, it was apparently long enough for the Philippian believers to send at least two gifts and perhaps more. In total, the Philippian church had sent Paul gifts on a minimum of four occasions. This makes the Philippian church the most giving towards Paul's ministry, at least based on specific occasions mentioned in the New Testament. An interesting note is that Paul's most "joyful" letter is also credited to his most giving church.

Philippians 4:17

ESV

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

What does Philippians 4:17 mean? Paul clarifies his thanks for their gifts in this verse. The focus of his gratitude was not merely the money itself, but rather the blessings upon the Philippians for their generosity. We are told God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Those who sow (give) bountifully will also reap (receive) bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6). This does not mean believers "give to get," but that God is pleased when His people donate toward His work.

The apostle has already spoken of life being focused on things above (Philippians 3). In this chapter, Paul focuses on how finances can help regarding heavenly realities. A Christian's finances can be used to help others come to know Christ, support Christians leaders, and result in blessings upon those who give. Finances can also be used to help those in need (Proverbs 19:17) and meet the needs of one's family and those in the church (Acts 2:45; 1 Timothy 5:8).

Philippians 4:18

ESV

I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Matthew chapter 22

English Standard Version

1And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, **2**“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, **3**and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. **4**Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ **5**But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, **6**while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. **7**The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. **8**Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. **9**Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ **10**And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. **12**And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. **13**Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ **14**For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Context Summary

Matthew 22:1–14 contains Jesus' parable of the wedding feast. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who threw a banquet for his son. The king's chosen guests refuse to come, to the point of violence against his messengers. So, the king fills the wedding hall with common people he finds out and about; some bad, some good. One guest is thrown out into the darkness, though, for trying to attend the feast without wearing a wedding garment. Jesus summarizes the message with the famous phrase, "Many are called, but few are chosen." This parable touches on Israel's rejection of the Messiah and salvation

by grace. This touches on very similar themes to those of the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:12–24), but with critical differences.

Matthew 22:1

ESV

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying,

What does Matthew 22:1 mean? Jesus begins a third parable (Matthew 21:28, 33), presented in an exchange with priests, elders, and Pharisees gathered in the temple, along with others who are near. All three parables reveal how the Jewish religious leaders have failed to obey God on behalf of the people of Israel. In addition, they show that God will welcome others into His kingdom and relationship with Him.

The first parable described two sons (Matthew 21:28–32). One said no to his father's instruction but then obeyed. The other said yes and did not obey. Jesus was clear that the one who repented and obeyed did the will of his father. The second parable described some tenants of a vineyard who refused to give to the owner his share of the crops (Matthew 21:33–44). Instead, they mistreated and killed his servants and then his son. Soon the owner would come and kill the tenants and rent the vineyard to others.

Now Jesus will compare the kingdom of heaven to king who gave a wedding feast.

Matthew 22:2

ESV

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,

What does Matthew 22:2 mean? This is the beginning of a third parable (Matthew 21:28, 33) meant to show how Israel, mostly through its leadership, had rejected God's call to live in righteousness and receive His Son, the Messiah.

Jesus begins as He often has in Matthew: making a comparison to the kingdom of heaven. Parables should not be read too closely, as if every detail of the story

is meant to line up perfectly with some real-life counterpart. Instead, parables are meant to illustrate a single main point through analogy.

This time Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven by depicting a king who threw a great wedding feast for his son. The marriage of king's son would call for great celebration in any era. It often raises the question of who will be invited to the feast and who will be left out. Those in the lower classes would never expect an invitation, while the most prominent would anticipate being included. However, this parable approaches the question of what happens when those invited do not wish to come.

Matthew 22:3

ESV

and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

What does Matthew 22:3 mean? Jesus is delivering a parable about a king providing a wedding feast for his son: a great event in any culture or kingdom. The invitations would have gone out in advance, notifying those who would be included in the feast. When the event was ready, the servants would have been sent out to notify the people that the time had come.

In this case, though, the invited wedding guests refused to come to the feast. They did not want to go. The idea that anyone would refuse the king's hospitality and an opportunity to attend a great, royal feast would have been shocking to Jesus' listeners. That *none* of the invitees accepted is outrageous. This parallels the hyperbole—exaggeration for effect—which Jesus employed in other parables (Matthew 18:23–24).

Given the context of the first two stories (Matthew 21:28, 33), Jesus' meaning is already becoming clear. God is the Father throwing the feast. Entrance into the kingdom of heaven is often described with the metaphor of a great feast (Matthew 8:10–12; 9:15). Jesus Himself is the Son of the King and the Bridegroom for whom the feast is being held. The response of the invited guests will establish a lesson Jesus will continue to expand on in this chapter.

Matthew 22:4**ESV**

Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."'"

What does Matthew 22:4 mean? Jesus' parable has taken a surprising turn. The central event is special, but not uncommon: a king throws a great wedding feast for his son. Usually, this raises the question of who will be allowed to attend. Shockingly, in this case, those invited *refused* to come (Matthew 22:3).

So, the king sends out another group of servants with a better description of what those invited can expect to find at the feast. The dinner is ready! The king has slaughtered his own royal oxen and fattened calves to serve to his guests. In other words, the king has gone to great lengths to make sure this will be a meal for the ages, a great party, a fantastic time. This is special.

Despite offering good reasons to attend the great banquet, however, the king has also told this groups of servants to deliver the invitation as a command: "Come to the wedding feast." There is benefit and blessing involved, but ignoring the invitation is to defy the clear will of the king.

And yet, in this parable, the invited guests still will not come.

Matthew 22:5**ESV**

But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business,

What does Matthew 22:5 mean? After the first two parables in this dialogue (Matthew 21:28, 33), Jesus' listeners are beginning to understand what He is suggesting. The general topic is how Israel—most specifically, her religious leaders—have ignored God's call and command. In this story, a king has sent out two rounds of servants asking people to attend his son's wedding. The second group described how great the meal would be and delivered the invitation as an order: *come* (Revelation 22:17).

Clearly, the king is meant to represent God, and the wedding feast represents the kingdom of heaven. Some listeners may have not understood yet that Jesus was picturing Himself as the son of the king, making Him the Son of God. But

who were these guests that refused to attend even at the direct command of the king?

Jesus now shows that some refused directly while others simply ignored the message from the king's servants. They paid no attention to the servants and just continued going about their daily lives. The sense is both that they were not interested in attending the feast and that they were busy with other responsibilities. This parallels the way in which some people dismiss God out of simple disinterest.

Others in the parable will be more aggressive in their refusal (Matthew 22:6), just as some in the world are actively hostile to God and His messengers.

Matthew 22:6

ESV

while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

What does Matthew 22:6 mean? In Jesus' parable, the chosen citizens of a kingdom are actively refusing their king's invitation—really, a command—to come to a wedding feast for his son. Some have simply ignored the servants who delivered the message from the king, continuing to go about their daily lives (Matthew 22:1–5). Now Jesus pictures others as defiantly refusing the invitation. This group abuses the messengers and then kills them. They have gone beyond simply refusing to honor the king; they have started an active rebellion by murdering His servants.

This brings the meaning of Jesus' parable into sharper focus; it closely follows the pattern of the previous story (Matthew 21:33–44). In that parable, those renting a vineyard not only refused to pay the rent to the owner in the form of a share of the crops, they mistreated and killed the servants sent by the owner to collect his share.

Once again, Jesus pictures the prophets sent to Israel with the message of God as these servants of the king. Like the servants, those prophets were often mistreated and killed by the leaders and people of Israel (Acts 7:52). The issue being rejected, in this case, is the son of the king. God had invited Israel's religious leaders to welcome His Son, Jesus, as the Messiah. Not only had they rejected that invitation by rejecting Jesus; they would soon kill God's Son, as well (Matthew 16:21–23).

In the last parable, Jesus asked how the landowner would react to the murder of his servants and his son (Matthew 21:40). The obvious response was that he would respond in terrible judgment (Matthew 21:41). Here, Jesus will not pause to ask about the response. He will simply state the obvious (Matthew 22:7).

Matthew 22:7

ESV

The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

What does Matthew 22:7 mean? Jesus' current parable (Matthew 22:1–6) started out nicely. A king spared no expense, inviting those He had specially chosen to attend a great banquet for his son. When the time came, the king sent out messengers to let the people know the feast was ready. That's when the story got ugly. Not only did the people refuse to go, but some also simply ignored even the king's second round of messengers. Worse, another group abused and killed them.

Now the king is understandably angry with His subjects. He sends out His army to destroy the people who killed his messengers. He even burns their city. The king will not allow an uprising to form against him.

For those who understood the meaning behind Jesus' parable, He was delivering a warning. Israel's religious leaders were represented in the story by those who murdered the king's servants. Over Israel's history, they had both ignored and killed God's prophets or stood by while others did so (Acts 7:52). The same had happened even to the last prophet, John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1–12).

God would not bear with that rebellion forever. Judgment was coming from God for the refusal of the religious leaders to recognize and honor God's Son. Many commentators believe the destruction of Jerusalem and burning of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 to be at least a partial fulfillment of this warning. Prior to Christ's earthly ministry, God had used other nations in judgment against Israel's rebellion (2 Chronicles 36:22; Isaiah 10:5–11; Habakkuk 1:6).

And yet, this is not the end of the parable. The feast is still ready, so the king decides to find other guests to invite since the first guests have refused.

Matthew 22:8**ESV**

Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.'

What does Matthew 22:8 mean? The time has come, in Jesus' parable, to celebrate the wedding of the king's son (Matthew 22:1–7). The oxen and calves have been slaughtered. The feast is prepared. The king, though, has no guests. The original guests he invited to the wedding refused to come, to the point of murdering the king's messengers. The king now describes those originally invited guests as "unworthy." This is meant as a parallel to how Israel's leaders rejected God's prophets and were subject to judgment.

Religious Jews of that era understood the idea of God drawing clear distinctions around what could be in His presence. Under the Old Testament law, that even extended to excluding certain people from aspects of worship. This included those who disobeyed God's law, but also meant those with various health issues. Some in the Jewish ruling class prided themselves on their spiritual worthiness before God and their ability to keep the law and extra rules more than others.

Especially in context with the prior parables (Matthew 21:28, 33), it's becoming clear that Jesus meant to represent Israel's religious leaders with the guests who refused to come to the king's feast. Those listening must have been shocked by the claim made in this verse. The king calls those very people "unworthy," with their favored status revoked due to their own refusal to honor the king's son.

Matthew 22:9**ESV**

Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'

What does Matthew 22:9 mean? In Jesus' parable (Matthew 22:1–8), the king still wants guests at the wedding feast to honor his son. His first chosen guests have refused to come. Some lacked interest and others acted out in rebellion against him. The king has called those guests, who represent Israel's religious leaders, "unworthy" to attend the feast.

Now the king tells his servants to take his invitation to common people they will find on the "main roads." Some translations choose "street corners" and others "highways" for the Greek phrase *diexodous tōn hodōn*. The idea includes places where people are most likely to be gathered, as well as the roads that lead out of a town into the countryside. This is a point of distinction between this parable and the one Jesus relates in the gospel of Luke (Luke 14:15–24). There, the frustrated master commands invitations be given to those in all places in the city, especially those where the destitute would gather. Here, Jesus has given a dire warning about the destruction of that entire city (Matthew 22:7).

All who will come are invited, though the following verses will reveal there is yet one requirement for attendance (Matthew 22:11–12).

Matthew 22:10

ESV

And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

What does Matthew 22:10 mean? As told in this parable (Matthew 22:1–6), the king's chosen citizens have refused to come to a wedding feast in honor of his son. After enacting harsh, but deserved, judgment (Matthew 22:7–9), the king has called the original invitees unworthy and sent his servants out of the city into highways and intersections to invite all who would willingly come to the banquet. The servants succeed in finding guests, filling the wedding hall with people of all kinds, both "bad and good."

Those who may have somewhat followed the meaning behind Jesus' parable may now be confused. To understand the king as God and Jesus as His Son, they are doing well. The king's servants may represent prophets and, later, evangelists. The unworthy guests are the religious leaders who have refused to honor God's Son, Jesus, as the Messiah. The comment about "bad and good," however, can be confusing when it comes to the replacement guests. If the wedding banquet is the kingdom of heaven, how can both "bad and good" be represented there?

In one sense, this follows Jesus' pattern of distinguishing between outward appearances and a person's sincerity in responding to God (John 7:24; Matthew 21:31–32). In the form of this parable, Christ is explaining a kingdom in which some who have not rigorously followed the Old Testament law are welcomed by God. At the same time, there is a difference between superficial attendance and sincere obedience, as shown in upcoming verses (Matthew 22:11–14). It's good

to keep in mind that parables are loose analogies— not every minute detail is meant to have an explicit parallel.

Commentators disagree whether these guests gathered from the roadways are meant to predict the inclusion of Gentiles, or simply represent Jewish people who are outside of Judaism and the elite religious class. In either case, Jesus' description of them being welcomed to the feast is something new, especially since some of them are "bad." The following verse offers additional explanation of who might be included at the feast. Invited or not, something else is required for them to be fully *welcomed* by the king.

Matthew 22:11

ESV

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.

What does Matthew 22:11 mean? Jesus' parable of the king and the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1–10) takes some surprising twists and turns at the end. First, the king directs his messengers to invite all the common people they find in the streets to come to the feast. This is because the chosen guests have refused to come. Those who arrive are welcomed as they fill the wedding hall, including both the bad and the good people.

Now, though, the king finds someone who has been *invited*, and has *attended*, but is not *welcome*. He asks the man how he was able to enter the feast without a wedding garment. The man has no answer for this. It's not clear if the wedding garment is meant to be an explicit reference to something, or simply a representation of the man's shallowness. In the parable, all are welcome, good or bad, to come to the king in honor of his son. But going through the motions is not the same as deeply embracing the full meaning of the event (Matthew 7:21–23). This connects to similar messages Christ has offered in recent parables (Matthew 21:28–31).

Some commentators suggest that it was traditional for a king or lord to provide clean wedding garments for his guests. If so, this man was likely refused to wear it and cast it aside. If that is the understanding, it could be that the wedding garment represents being covered by the righteousness of Jesus (Romans 3:21–31). This would make the man representative of those who want the benefits of a relationship with God but refuse to submit to Him or obey His teachings (John 14:15).

Others see the garment as representing a person's willingness to set aside one's former "dirtiness" before entering the king's presence. This seems unlikely, as the man is about to be completely rejected for his choice, which would suggest merit-based salvation: the exact opposite of biblical teaching (Titus 3:5; Romans 11:5–6).

Still another idea, based on Matthew 22:14, suggests the man was not given wedding clothes because he was never chosen to attend the feast. He was called, by some of the servants, but not actually chosen by the master. Whatever is meant by the wedding clothes, the man who does not have them will pay a high price.

Matthew 22:12

ESV

And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

What does Matthew 22:12 mean? In a parable, a king has invited an unlikely collection of people to the wedding feast for his son. They have literally come from the roadways and street corners at the urging of the king's servants. The wedding hall is full of both bad and good people who have all said yes to the king after his first chosen guests said no (Matthew 22:1–11).

Now, though, the king has seen a man who is not wearing a wedding garment. The story does not explain whether the man refused to wear a garment provided by the king's servants or whether he simply came unprepared and in unclean clothes, hoping to be included in the feast anyway.

Though the king first addresses the man as friend, what comes next suggests this is a formality. As a parallel to how God interacts with sinners, this reflects how God demonstrates a level of love even to those who hate Him (Matthew 26:47–50).

The king asks how the man was able to get into the wedding hall without a wedding garment. The man has no answer to this. Either the servants failed to screen the guests carefully, or the man snuck into the hall in some way. In any case, the man will not be allowed to stay. His lack of a proper garment means he's not here to fully participate, or to cooperate—he's simply looking to gain benefit on his own terms (Matthew 7:21–23).

Matthew 22:13**ESV**

Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

What does Matthew 22:13 mean? The concept of being hurled into "outer darkness," along with "weeping and gnashing of teeth," is a common expression used by Jesus to describe God's eternal judgment (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30). In the context of this parable (Matthew 22:1–12), this is the fate of a man who attempted to attend the wedding feast without a wedding garment. There are many debates over what—if anything—the wedding garment is meant to symbolize. In some way, however, this man represents those who believe they will be able to enter the kingdom of heaven without meeting God's standard.

The New Testament teaches that God's standard for entrance into His presence is perfect righteousness (Matthew 5:48; 19:17), and that no human being other than Jesus has ever achieved this (Hebrews 4:15). Only those who come to God covered by the righteousness of Jesus, through faith in Him, will receive God's gracious welcome into eternity (Romans 3:21–31; 4:22–25). For this reason, some commentators suggest the wedding garment represents the righteousness of the Son who is loved by the King (Isaiah 61:10).

Matthew 22:14**ESV**

For many are called, but few are chosen.”

What does Matthew 22:14 mean? This passage, especially including this verse, contributes to a sense of tension between two ideas. Scripture seems to counterweight two concepts which are not contradictory, but which overlap in complex ways. On one side is God's choice of those who will enter the kingdom of heaven. On the other is the mandate for people to accept the invitation and receive the gift of God's grace by faith in Christ. Even in Jesus' parable, some willingly refuse the invitation. Some accept and fully engage. One seems to accept the invitation, but not entirely. Jesus concludes by saying that many are called to come and participate, but few are chosen to stay.

In a later passage, Jesus will refer several times to a chosen group called "the elect" (Matthew 24:22, 24, 31). It is clear from the gospel that everyone included

in the elect—all those who are chosen—received the gift of God's eternal grace after trusting in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–9). God calls to everyone to come to Him through faith in Christ (Acts 4:12). This demonstrates the limits of human understanding (Isaiah 55:8–9). Mysteriously, and in some interrelated way, only those elected by God will believe, and yet those elected will believe by their own choice. Only those who truly believe (John 3:16–18), those who sincerely and deeply *obey* the call, are the chosen ones.