

Everything is ready – please come



Lord our King, we thank you for your abundant love and generosity to all people. Make us worthy of that love and help us to love our neighbour as ourselves, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Becky Mynett *reflects on* Matthew 22:1-14

In today's Gospel Jesus tells the Temple authorities a parable. He is critical of the way they run things, but he has a message for us too. According to Kenneth Bailey, an expert on the Middle East, it is not only traditional for the host of a banquet to send out invitations some time before the event, so that they know how much food to prepare, but on the day itself to send a message: "Everything is ready – please come."

In Jesus' parable, the guests – who have already accepted the invitation – snub the host and murder the messengers. Jesus portrays the leaders of Israel, whose ancestors made a covenant with God, as the guests. The king's slaves are the prophets that God sends to remind Israel of their promises and to show them a vision of God's kingdom. But the prophets are ignored or even murdered. Now God has had enough. In the parable, the king destroys the murderers and burns their city (a troubling verse that probably refers to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70). God then opens the kingdom to whoever will come.

But this comes with a warning. While we are all admitted to the kingdom, we must still reflect its values or, like the man who is inappropriately dressed, we may find that we are not chosen after all. 🙄

Books of the Old Testament

Part 23 – Isaiah

by Richard Greatrex

Richard Greatrex continues our book-by-book series about the Bible.

Isaiah is the first of a fifteen-book collection of the later prophets. It spans from the late eighth century BC, when Assyria was ascendant, through Babylonian control into Persian rule. It poses scholars questions regarding its formation. Some insist that it is derived from an eighth-century Jerusalem prophet to Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. Others detect the hand of two authors or editors, while a few even see three. However, although specific themes and styles dominate each section,

many of these are discernible throughout.

In Isaiah God is known as the Holy One of Israel, the Lord who will judge and restore Zion. The prophet insists that the political and religious Jerusalem elites carry a profound ethical responsibility for all those they govern; matters of social justice are high on his agenda. Jesus, who cites Isaiah eight times, also places social justice at the heart of his mission.

Isaiah became so important for Christians that it was known as the Gospel in the Old Testament, teaching vital lessons about faithfulness, service, inclusiveness and social justice as essential elements of a God-centred life. 🙏

“ I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:14

Creatures of the Bible

The locust

by Caroline Fletcher

Locusts are only around seven centimetres long, but have always been feared. Even today, they inflict devastation: billions of locusts have recently destroyed Madagascan crops, for instance.

The Bible vividly conveys why they terrify people. One of Moses' plagues brought so many locusts to Egypt that they turned the land black and consumed every single plant (Exodus 10:15). Proverbs describes young locusts marching "in rank", for

they advance like a hostile army devouring everything in their path (30:27). Adult locusts have wings and Revelation likens the noise of flying swarms to "the sound of many chariots" (9:9). In flight, though, they are at the mercy of the wind: the Egyptian plague ended when the swarm was blown into the sea (Exodus 10:19).

The Gospels say that John the Baptist ate locusts (Mark 1:6). Some think this means locust beans, but it is entirely feasible that John snacked on these insects. Indeed, many enjoy eating them today. 🙏