

November 1, All Saints B (Isaiah 25:6-9; Revelation 21:1-6a)

## **God swallowing up death indicates the ultimate defeat of sorrow and chaos.**

by [Niveen Ibrahim Sarras](#) in the [November 2024](#) issue

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The assigned reading from Isaiah embodies key themes for All Saints' Day: hope, resurrection, and divine triumph over death. It vividly portrays God swallowing up death and wiping away tears, encapsulating belief in eternal life and the unity of all believers. It provides solace to those grieving the loss of loved ones and reaffirms the church's faith in God's promises, rendering it an appropriate scripture for remembering our departed saints.

Isaiah 24-27 is often referred to as the Apocalypse of Isaiah. Although this material does not constitute apocalypse in the manner of the book of Daniel or Revelation, it is designated as such due to its vivid imagery of cosmic chaos and divine victory. Scholars generally date these chapters to the postexilic period, approximately the fifth to fourth centuries BCE.

The assigned verses explicitly celebrate God's victory over chaos, serving as a song of thanksgiving and triumph that positions Jerusalem as a symbol of divine light for the world. This section marks a transition from oracles of judgment in previous chapters to visions of salvation, emphasizing God's sovereignty and the eschatological hope for all nations.

The hymn in Isaiah 25:6 parallels Exodus 24:11, which describes a significant moment in the Sinai covenant ceremony. Moses, Aaron, and the elders ascend the mountain, behold God, and remain unharmed, underscoring the divine grace bestowed upon them. Their act of eating and drinking in the presence of God symbolizes the sealing of the covenant, which signifies peace and communion with God.

The meal in Exodus 24 is likely provided by the elders themselves. Isaiah 25, however, depicts God as the divine host on Mount Zion, preparing a feast of the finest food and aged wine. God assumes the role of primary host—not only for the people of Israel but for all nations, inviting them to gather on the mountain of the Lord and partake in God’s abundant blessings. As in the contemporary hospitality of my own Palestinian community, in the ancient world guests at a banquet were under the host’s protection. As in Exodus 24, the banquet in Isaiah 25 signifies the sealing of a covenant. However, in this case, God initiates a covenant with all the nations of the earth, ensuring their inclusion in the feast and affirming that God will ultimately eradicate death.

Isaiah uses the Hebrew word *lote* to describe “the shroud/the face of the covering,” according to Alec Motyer’s commentary. The word “means here ‘the outer veil’ or ‘the overspreading veil.’ Shroud is a contextual translation, anticipating the reference to death in verse 8.” The shroud is a burial garment, and this covering/shroud, which covers all people, symbolizes the Eastern custom of veiling one’s face in mourning for the deceased (see 2 Sam. 19:4). Removing this shroud signifies triumph over death. Death, which all people fear, will be defeated forever. As a result of sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 3:23), death is unavoidable through human effort, but God alone possesses the power to abolish it. Christians interpret Jesus Christ as fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy through his death and resurrection.

But as Jaap Dekker points out, death also serves as a symbol of imperial powers. During the postexilic period, Isaiah’s audience, along with many other nations, experienced the tyranny of dominant empires, resulting in widespread suffering, death, and displacement. In this context, God is envisioned as the deliverer who will liberate all people from the oppression of such imperialistic forces.

The passage metaphorically describes how God will swallow up death, indicating the ultimate defeat of death, sorrow, and chaos. God is determined to destroy the death that grieves the nations, providing a message of hope and restoration. Isaiah portrays God as one who will wipe away tears and remove disgrace, illustrating divine comfort. Revelation 21:4 reflects this promise within the framework of the new creation and the final realization of God’s redemptive plan, portraying a future in which God’s presence eliminates all suffering and death and wipes away all tears.

Isaiah’s prophecy functioned as a beacon of hope and encouragement for a community grappling with immediate political and social challenges. On All Saints’

Day, it offers profound comfort and hope to those in mourning, affirming that their grief and suffering are not overlooked. The text insists that God is actively engaged in addressing their pain and involved in their healing.

Building upon this reassurance, the prophecy highlights present suffering within a broader divine plan, promising that pain will ultimately be fully eradicated and replaced by peace. This vision also inspires individuals and communities to strive toward a more just and compassionate world, fostering both personal and communal resilience amid grief, suffering, and hunger.