

Isaiah 12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Isaiah chapter 12. You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation, and you will say in that day, Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously. Let this be made known in all the earth. Shout and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

The few verses of Isaiah chapter 12 bring to an end the section of the book that began either in chapter 6 or chapter 7. At the end of Isaiah chapter 11, there was a recollection of the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea in the story of the Exodus. Verses 15 and 16 of that chapter read as follows.

And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the river with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals.

And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt. Both the preparation of a path through the wilderness, and the opening up of a passage through the sea, should remind us of the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

[1 : 3 3] Chapter 12 is a reframing of the subsequent song of Moses in the context of a new deliverance, a new Exodus. Just as Moses sang his song after the original crossing in Exodus chapter 15, so the redeemed in the eschatological deliverance in Isaiah's prophecy would sing a new song too, one which hearkened back to that of Moses.

Richard Borkham observes that the song in Isaiah chapter 12 is clearly playing off that song of Moses from Exodus chapter 15. It isn't an entirely novel composition.

It picks up the words of the opening verses of Moses' song in Exodus chapter 15, verses 1 to 2, for instance. An even stronger background for the songs of Isaiah chapter 12 is found in Psalm 105, in verses 1 to 2 of that psalm we read.

A similar verse is found in Psalm 148, verse 13.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted. His majesty is above earth and heaven. Borkham observes the way that Psalm 105 was verbally linked with Exodus chapter 15.

[3 : 0 9] However, these links are principally found in places other than those in which its language is adopted by Isaiah chapter 12. In its sharing of key terminology with Exodus chapter 15, Psalm 105 was seen to function as a sort of an interpretation of that earlier song.

In chapter 12 of his prophecy, Isaiah is using that earlier interpretation to develop his own resetting of the song of the sea. These songs form a natural conclusion of the wider section, and there are two songs, one from the second half of verse 1 to verse 2, and the other from verses 4 to 6.

They use language that should now be familiar, in that day. Yet whereas that coming day has often been spoken of to this point as a day of judgment and doom, here it is that day's aspect of salvation that is very much to the fore.

That day will mark the passing of the Lord's anger against his people. The Lord has purged his people through judgment, and as the remnant is established, they know salvation in the Lord.

The direct identification of the Lord with salvation is of course familiar from the earlier song of the sea, and the statement, I will trust and will not be afraid, is very much in keeping with the wider themes of this section.

[4 : 22] Ahaz, faced with the threat of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion, was charged to trust and not to fear, and here we see the vindication of that particular posture. Just as the Lord provided water for his people in the wilderness, so the Lord provides the wells of salvation for his people in their need.

As God himself is the salvation of his people, the waters of these wells of salvation should perhaps be related with the Lord's own personal presence with his people. If the first song focuses upon the speaker's own relationship with the Lord, and his own personal trust in the Lord, the second song is a more outward-looking statement of the greatness of the Lord's acts of salvation, declared to other people.

The first song opens with a statement of the speaker to the Lord, and then a declaration of his faith and confidence in the Lord. In the second song, he is summoning others to join with him in his praise.

The Lord's praises will be declared among his people, and declared in such a manner that all of the nations will become witness to his greatness. The greatness of God is seen in his identity as the Holy One of Israel.

God acts for the sake of his holy name, as we see in places like Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 22 to 23. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

[5 : 47] And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Through his work of salvation the Lord demonstrates that he alone is the Lord. He is unique and set apart from all others. A question to consider, how is Isaiah chapter 12 used in the vision of Revelation chapter 15?