

Isaiah 12:1-6  
A Concluding Hymn of Praise  
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In our passage for today, the prophet Isaiah looks far into the future with the eyes of a prophet, and he sees the salvation of God's people. He also looks into the distant past, and he sees a precedent in ancient redemptive history, a parallel in the past to the future salvation of God's people. He sees a precedent and parallel in the salvation of God's people from their slavery in Egypt at the time of Moses. At a climatic moment in this earlier divine act of redemption, God's people sang a hymn of praise. This hymn of praise is recorded for us in Exodus 15; we call it the Song of Moses. God had parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow Israel to cross on dry ground, and then God had returned the sea to its full depth to drown the pursuing Egyptians, their horsemen and their chariots. Then we read as follows in Exodus 15:

Exodus 15:1-2

- 1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider he has thrown into the sea!
- 2 The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; he is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him. ..."

Isaiah takes this language from this earlier hymn of praise sung centuries before and uses it as his pattern for another hymn of praise in response to God's coming second great act of restoration and redemption.

What is this second great act of restoration? It begins with the restoration of the nation of Israel under Ezra and Zerubbabel. Isaiah had prophesied that God would judge His people Israel by destroying their nation and scattering them among the pagan nations of the world of that day. This prophecy of judgment was fulfilled in the Babylonian Exile. Then, after seventy years, God used the Medo-Persians to overthrow the Babylonians. God put it within the heart of Cyrus, the king of this conquering Medo-Persian Empire, to allow Israel to return to the land of promise and to re-establish their nation. The gathering of a remnant of Israel back to the promised land under Ezra and Zerubbabel was the beginning of the promised restoration, the beginning of the anticipated salvation which Isaiah rejoices in.

Yet, as I have argued before, the national restoration after the Babylonian Exile does not fulfill all the glory and promise of these prophecies about a coming redemption. As a matter of fact, God seemed to take away some of the glory at the time. For example, when the temple was rebuilt, the older people who remembered Solomon's temple wept because the new temple did not have the glory of Solomon's temple. The ark of the covenant had been lost forever. The Shekinah glory never returned to the Holy of Holies. The priests never recovered the Urim and the Thumim. There was something lacking about the glory of these fulfillments of prophecy. To find a fulfillment of these new

covenant prophecies in all their glory and promise, one has to look further to the far distant future, to the ultimate and final fulfillment of the land promise which God made to Abraham. Remember that the land promise to Abraham was a forever promise, an eternal promise, an everlasting promise. The fulfillment is not temporary.

Genesis 13:14-15

- 14 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are -- northward, southward, eastward, and westward;
- 15 "for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever."

Because the land promise is a forever promise, it is a promise which can find its ultimate and final fulfillment only in eternity.

Also, the specific land promised to Abraham from the river of Egypt in the south to the Euphrates River in the north and between the seas, the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Dead Sea to the east, was a picture and pledge of a greater inheritance. For the Messiah, the land promise is extended to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9:10b

- 10 ... He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'

God promised Abraham land up to the Euphrates River as the northern boundary of the promise land. Then God promised that the Messiah would have not only that land but also land from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. The Messiah will inherit all the nations of this earth.

The ultimate fulfillment of the land promise is when God gives to His people the whole earth forever in a renewed and glorified form. That will occur at the end of this age when Christ will send His angels to gather His people as harvesters gather wheat into a barn. Christ will resurrect His people, and Christ will renew the earth, freeing it from the curse which descended upon it when Adam first sinned. Christ will even raise the entire cosmos to a higher, more glorious level of existence consistent with the new glory of our resurrection bodies.

Romans 8:19-22

- 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.
- 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;
- 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
- 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Revelation 21:1-5

- 1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

- 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.
- 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."
- 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

That is the ultimate fulfillment of the land promise and the ultimate realization of the salvation which we read about in today's passage.

So we see a preliminary fulfillment of the land promise in the re-establishment of the earthly Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. We also see its perfect and final fulfillment in the new earth of eternity. There is also a sense in which the land promise is fulfilled in this age as people come to Christ in faith for salvation. In this age of the new covenant, the emphasis is on gathering people into the heavenly Jerusalem. That too is part of the land promise first given to Abraham.

Hebrews 11:8-10,16

- 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

- 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;
- 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
- ...
- 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Whenever anyone in this age comes to faith in Christ, they become citizens of that heavenly city. In this age, Jesus sends His gospel messengers to gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Jesus gathers them in this age not to some location upon earth but into the heavenly Jerusalem. Remember what Jesus said when he observed the great faith of the Roman centurion:

Matthew 8:11

- 11 "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus here used the old covenant language of restoration and return and applied it to the conversion of pagan Gentiles in this age.

Here is my point. In our text for today, Isaiah praises God for salvation. As we meditate upon this hymn of praise, we should take into account all of these aspects of salvation which I have

mentioned. Isaiah was focussing primarily upon God's returning a remnant of Israel to earthly Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Yet this salvation also includes God's new covenant gathering of the elect from the nations of the earth into the heavenly Jerusalem. It also includes God's final gathering of His people on a new earth for eternity. I believe that is the proper evaluation of Isaiah's hymn of praise based on the subsequent outworking of redemptive history and the fuller revelation found in the pages of the New Testament.

Let's now look at this hymn of praise under four headings: the Promise, the Provision, the Picture and the Praise.

First, the Promise. We find the specific promise of salvation that is the subject of praise in the first verse.

Isaiah 12:1

1 And in that day you will say: "O LORD, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.

When God is angry with His people, His anger is going to be a temporary anger intended to hurt but not to harm. This is the anger of chastisement and not the wrath of judgment.

In contrast, God's anger against the pagan Babylonians was the wrath of judgment, and God permanently destroyed them as a people and culture. They were erased from the pages of history. God's anger against Israel was not the wrath of judgment but the fatherly anger of chastisement. God sent trials upon them for their spiritual good. The hymnist put it this way:

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

The author of Hebrews expressed this truth this way:

Hebrews 12:5b-6

- 5 ... "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor  
be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;  
6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every  
son whom He receives."

The Babylonian Exile was a chastening of God's people for their idolatry and their immorality. God used the hardships of the exile in pagan lands to cleanse Israel of their idolatry, to give them a new heart sorrowful for their sins and to work faith in them. Then, when they as a people repented, God comforted them and restored them.

God still works this way today with individuals and churches and even with entire cultures.

Hebrews 12:11

- 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Romans 5:3-4

- 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations,  
knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;
- 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

James 1:2-4

- 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various  
trials,
- 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
- 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be  
perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

If we are truly God's people, then God is going to deal with our sins in this life through chastening, through a temporary anger which is designed to be for our own good and which will be following by comfort. God does not deal with us with the wrath of judgment. We are not destined for the wrath of God.

Now we must remember that God's not dealing with us in terms of His wrath of judgment is not the result of a mere change in mood or of a convenient loss of memory. God's justice demands that sin be judged. God's holiness demands that iniquity be cast out from His presence. God is able to be both just and our justifier only through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. God poured out His wrath against our sins upon Jesus as He suffered upon the cross, so that God would not have to pour out that wrath upon us. The cross is the burnt over place, the place where the fires of God's judgment will never burn again. When God calls us to the cross in faith, He calls us to the one place of safety from His holy wrath against sin.

This is the promise of salvation. God does not treat us as our sins deserve because of the atoning work of Jesus on our behalf.

Romans 5:1

- 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our first point is the promise of salvation, and our second point is the provision of salvation. This passage makes very clear that God is the one who provides us with salvation.

Isaiah 12:2

- 2 Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; he also has become my salvation.'"

Salvation is not something we earn or merit or work for. Salvation is all of grace, all the work of God. We do not sew one meritorious stitch in the garment of salvation.

Jesus paid it all,  
All to him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow.

The promise, the provision, and thirdly, the picture. The prophet draws a picture of our receiving salvation.

Isaiah 12:3

- 3 Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

The garden of Eden was before the fall was a well watered place. A river ran through it and afterward divided into four rivers. The garden was so well watered that there was not even any need for rain. A mist or spring went up from the ground and watered the whole face of the ground. The garden of Eden as a well watered place is an appropriate metaphor for the person who lives his life in fellowship with God. That person is like a tree planted by a river of water that brings forth its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither.

Sin, in contrast, turns a person's life into a waterless desert, a place that cannot sustain spiritual life. When a person experiences salvation, it is like a wanderer in the dry wilderness coming upon an oasis where there is a well filled with accessible, life giving water. This is that living water which becomes in a person a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. This is Isaiah's powerful picture of the salvation experience.

Our first point is the promise of salvation, our second point is the provision of salvation, our third point is the picture of salvation, and our fourth point is the praise of salvation. In verses one through three, Isaiah describes our salvation, and then in verse four he exhorts those who experience this salvation to praise the God who saved them.

Isaiah 12:4-6

- 4 And in that day you will say: "Praise the LORD, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted.

- 5 Sing to the LORD, for He has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth.
- 6 Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"

Isaiah says here that the people of God shouldn't limit themselves to declaring God's work of salvation to one another. Isaiah here says that the people of God should declare God's deeds to all the nations of the world. Evangelism involves our praising God through telling all people everywhere about the wonderful work of salvation which God has accomplished and which we have experienced. We need to exhort the people of this world to look to the one living and true God for their salvation. There is no other true way of salvation.

If we really are filled with gratitude for what God has done for us, we can't help but tell others about it. We can't hold it in. We have to share the good news with others. We have to talk about it. That is how we were created. That is part of our humanity as social creatures. When something is especially meaningful to us, joyful to us, precious to us, we can do no other but to talk to others about it. That is what evangelism is. It is sharing the good news which is too good to keep to ourselves.

Isaiah exhorts God's people to proclaim God's salvation to the world. This is consistent with what we learn in the New Testament. The gospel is the power of God unto to salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and then to the Greek. God's people are from every nation, tribe and tongue. Therefore, the proclamation is universal.

So Isaiah in our passage looks at salvation. What he looks at immediately is the then coming restoration of the nation Israel. The nation Israel hadn't even been exiled yet, but Isaiah as a prophet looks forward to Israel's future salvation from the future time of exile. Isaiah does not see all the details of the way His prophecy of salvation would be fulfilled in coming redemptive history. There were mysteries about the new covenant which were not revealed until the time of the new covenant. I believe this prophecy about God's gathering His people continues to be fulfilled in this age as the gospel is proclaimed to all the nations and people from the east and the west and the north and the south come to sit down at the banquet of salvation with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And I believe this prophecy also looks forward to that glorious day when God's people will be gathered in that great final harvest and will be privileged to live forever on a glorified new earth.

As we close our consideration of Isaiah's hymn of praise, let's remember that summary of the message of salvation found back near the very beginning of Isaiah's prophecy:

Isaiah 1:18

18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD,  
"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as  
snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as  
wool."