

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – December 16, 2018

[Isaiah 12:2-6](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Isaiah 12:2-6 (From *Homiletics*; “Come Children, Die”, December 17, 2000)

Isaiah's ministry was just beginning during a major historical conflict, the SyroEphraimite War of 734 B.C. In this episode, King Rezin of Damascus and King Pekah of Israel proposed a military alliance with Judah in order to repel the advances of the Assyrian King Tiglath Pileser III. When Ahaz refused to join their coalition, Rezin and Pekah threatened to invade Judah themselves. This prompted Ahaz to do something extraordinary. He appealed to the Assyrian monarch himself for aid against the SyroEphraimite coalition. Ahaz's actions, which had the eventual effect of transforming Judah into a vassal of Assyria, initiated some of the most famous prophecies of Isaiah's career.

Isaiah 7-12 centers on the SyroEphraimite crisis, and features prophecies concerning three children. Two of these are the prophet's own children whose names foreshadow the fall of the Israelite kingdoms as well as their hoped-for restoration. One, whose name foreshadowed the exile, was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "The spoil speeds, the prey hastens" (8:1). Another, whose name foreshadowed the restoration, was named Shear-jashub, "A remnant shall return" (7:3).

But the remaining child, whose parents might either have been Ahaz and his queen, or Isaiah and his prophetess wife, was the famous Immanuel (7:14), whose name contrasted God's abiding presence in Israel's history with the fleeting existence of those who threatened it. The prophet also promised, through Immanuel, that a future Davidic descendent would arise who would have more faith in God and would receive more favor from God than Ahaz ever had. He would be the Shoot of Jesse (11:1), and his arrival would herald the day on which God would intervene and save Israel from her own disastrous choices and return her exiles to their homes (11:11). Chapter 12 concludes this series of famous prophecies by describing Israel's response to the actions of God "on that day" when he would save his people.

In Chapter 12 begins with the phrase "You will say IN THAT DAY, I will give thanks to you, O Lord" (12:1). That same phrase recurs in 12:4. In fact, the theme of the whole chapter is the thanksgiving of a people who, regardless of their own provocative behavior, have cause to believe that God will once again turn to save them on a future day that he will choose.

The day of God's saving action has also been a theme in the preceding chapters. It is mentioned in 10:20; 10:27, 11:10 and 11:11, each of which reintroduces the content of the names of the three prophetic children. The first and last of these four predict Israel's restoration after exile using the image of the returning remnant. Chapter 10:20 states that "On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them [presumably Assyria], but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return." Chapter 11:11 states that "on that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people" from the many lands to which they have been scattered. Chapter 10:27 evokes an image of one carrying off spoil or being carried off captive -- "On that day his burden will be removed from your shoulder and his yoke will be destroyed from your neck." Chapter 11:10 recalls the promise of Immanuel when it states, "On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples." Chapter 12 carries on this theme of God's day by portraying it as the day on which the people will speak their gratitude for God's faithful saving help.

"Salvation" is mentioned no less than three times in verses 2-3. The image of "wells" or "springs of salvation" from which the people would draw water (12:3) is an image unique to this passage. Because of Israel's dependence upon rainfall and underground springs for the majority of the water that kept them and their flocks alive, the comparison of God's life-giving salvation to an underground spring would be a very powerful image. Psalm 116:13 has a similar image, but although here it is only a "cup of salvation," again, God's saving help is compared to water that sustains and nourishes.

There is also an unusual title for God in verse 2. Although the NRSV translates this divine name as "LORD GOD," the textual notes in most annotated Bibles indicate that the Hebrew phrase being rendered here is not the standard YHWH Elohim, but rather, Ya-YHWH. This seemingly awkward pairing of the tetragrammaton and its abbreviation has prompted translations throughout the ages, beginning with the Greek and Latin versions, to delete the abbreviated name as a suspected scribal error.

There is, however, no such error here. What Isaiah is doing is quoting a verse from another, more ancient, Israelite song of thanksgiving and praise of God, Exodus 15:2, which begins "YA is my strength and my might." Psalm 118:14 also cites this exact verse, and both Isaiah and the Psalmist preserve the archaic spelling, both of YHWH's name as well as the word "my might," or "my song" as other versions have it. The Hebrew of Exodus 15:2 does not add the first person ending, perhaps because this earlier form of Hebrew did not require it in that the suffix is present on the word meaning "my strength." It is a testimony to the reverence with which the Song of the Sea was treated that neither later writer was willing to add the single letter to their version which would have placed the first person ending where it would seem to have been required by later Hebrew. Isaiah is willing, however, to clarify for his later hearers that YA is indeed YHWH with whom they are familiar.

The only other textual issue of any note is that there is a Ketiv-Qere in verse 5 regarding the word translated "be made known." The traditional reading (the Qere) corrects the form that is written (the Ketiv) from "this is known in all the earth" to "this is to be MADE known in all the earth." The difference in the Hebrew spelling is minor but the result of the change in meaning is significant. One assumes that the earth already knows what great things God has done. The other places upon Israel the burden of notifying the earth of the great deeds done for them by the Holy One of Israel who dwells in Zion. In this light the message is clear -- God's people must complete the fulfillment of prophecy by declaring God's saving acts to all the earth.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at WorkingPreacher.org.

Reflection Questions on Isaiah 12:2-6:

- 1.** “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” (v.3) For a people for whom water equaled life, this exclamation is a weighty promise indeed. What might an equivalent metaphor be for us today? What gives you life?
- 2.** As noted in the commentary above, Isaiah was prophesying in the midst of conflict, and this vision of joy “in that day” looked to promised better days ahead. After millennia, how do we receive the promise? Is it just “wishful thinking”? Or is it something to which we can still cling as we long for salvation in the midst of our present troubles?
- 3.** How do these words resonate with you in this season of Advent, as we remember “Immanuel” who both came and is coming? What does the joy of such salvation look like in these “in between” times, when we celebrate the one who has already come, but whose kingdom is not yet a reality?

What questions do you have?

What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?