

Isaiah 11:12–16 — He Shall Assemble the Outcasts of Israel

The Regathering, Ephraim and Judah Reunited, the Way Made Plain, and Israel's Millennial Song

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:12–16; 12:1–6

“And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it into seven streams, and make men go over dry shod.

And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.”

A Passage That Will Not Be Made to Mean the Church

This passage, taken on its own terms, can only mean the future regathering of Israel. No attempt to apply it to the church makes any coherent sense. A Jewish reader in Isaiah's day would have understood it immediately and literally. God has his own people — the two houses of Israel — scattered among the nations,

and he is going to gather every last one of them back to the land. It is this kind of scripture that has kept an expectation alive among the Jewish people through every century of dispersion, pogrom, and persecution. Their own scriptures are plain about it.

Verse 11 precedes our section with the critical phrase: “the LORD shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people.” The first time was the exodus from Egypt. This will be the second time — and it will be a gathering from every direction: Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, the islands of the sea, and — as Isaiah 49:12 indicates — even the land of Sinim, which appears to refer to China. God knows where every one of his dispersed people is, and he will fish them out.

The Banner to the Nations and the Agencies of Regathering

God will set up a banner — some indication to the nations that the time for the assembly of Israel has come. Then the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah will be gathered from the four corners of the earth. The agencies of this regathering will be diverse. Matthew 24:31 speaks of the Son of Man sending his angels to gather his elect from the four winds. Other scriptures show that nations will bring them, governments will facilitate their return, fishers will fish them out from wherever they are. All of these agencies — angelic, human, governmental — will converge on the single purpose of bringing every last Jew home.

Ephraim and Judah: The Old Division Healed

Verse 13 is a remarkable statement of what the restoration will involve: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. This is not merely the healing of the split between the northern and southern kingdoms that took place under Jeroboam. It goes deeper. The rivalry between Ephraim and Judah runs back to the days of the judges, when the men of Ephraim were habitually

aggrieved — coming to Gideon and to Jephthah with complaints that they had not been called to the battle, requiring placation, full of themselves.

The names carry a deeper typical meaning as well. Ephraim means fruitfulness, and represents the principle of service. Judah means praise, and was the tribe where the divine center — the throne of David, the temple — was established, representing worship. The tension between Ephraim and Judah runs through Israel's history as the tension between service and worship, between those who put activity before adoration. The prophets noted: Ephraim became a cake not turned — half-baked, one-sided. Ephraim has gray hairs and knows it not. Service without worship is unbalanced, and the fruit of that imbalance was visible all through Israel's history. When the Lord restores his people, both the historical breach and the deeper moral tension will be resolved together.

Ezekiel 37 depicts this reunion in two ways: the valley of dry bones rising to form one body, and the two sticks — one for Ephraim and one for Judah — becoming one in the prophet's hand. Both figures speak of the same great reunion of the two houses of Israel under the Messiah's reign.

Edom, Moab, and Ammon: Ancient Enemies Brought to Obedience

Verse 14 names Edom, Moab, and Ammon as nations upon whom Israel will lay their hand, bringing them to obedience. This is no accident of geography. Daniel 11:41 records that when the king of the north sweeps through the land on his way to Egypt, these three specifically escape out of his hand — and they escape because God has purposed that his own people Israel, and not the Assyrian, will bring them into subjection. God superintends the details of the endtime invasion so that these ancient adversaries are reserved for a particular reckoning at Israel's hand. Edom was Esau; Moab and Ammon were from Lot. All three were nations closely related to Israel by blood, and all three had been a particular plague upon

Israel throughout their history. The tables will be turned at last.

The Way Made Plain: God Removes Every Obstacle

Verses 15 and 16 describe God's removing of every obstacle to the regathering. The tongue of the Egyptian sea — apparently the northern end of the Red Sea — will be utterly destroyed. The great river (always the Euphrates when named simply as “the river” in the Old Testament) will be smitten into seven streams and men will go over it dry-shod. Whatever blocks the returning remnant from the west will be removed; whatever blocks them from the east will be removed. God will make a highway for the remnant of his people from Assyria, as he once made a way for Israel through the Red Sea out of Egypt.

Revelation 16:12 speaks of the Euphrates being dried up to prepare the way of the kings of the east — which is a different event and a different purpose in the sequence of endtime events. The two cannot be the same occasion. But the principle is consistent: God removes what stands between his purposes and their fulfilment. The parallel with Egypt is deliberate and fitting: the same God who opened the sea will open the way again. This is the second exodus, and it will be greater than the first.

Chapter 12: The Millennial Song

Chapter 12 is brief — only six verses — and follows directly from the end of chapter 11 as the song that Israel will sing in the millennium, consequent upon the regathering. It is a true song, which can only be sung by those who have genuine reason to sing. A true song can only be founded upon what is real. The world does not have a true song because it does not have the foundation for one. Christians have a true song because Christ dwells in them. And here in the millennium, Israel under the Messiah will have a true song — because of who is in their midst and what he has done.

Verse 3: “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” This is the true slaking of man’s thirst. Not possible by any other means. There is a difference between this and what the Christian has: John 7 speaks of rivers of living water flowing from the believer’s belly — the spring is within and it pours out. Israel in the millennium will happily draw water from the wells of God’s salvation — an external spring to which they come with joy, rather than an internal spring. The Spirit will be poured out upon them and will operate upon them, but not indwell them as in the present period. The indwelling of the Spirit is the distinctive mark of this dispensation, uniting the believer to Christ as head in heaven. Millennial saints will not have that; they will have the operations and outpourings of the Spirit, which is a great blessing but a different order of blessing.

The Holy One of Israel will be in the midst of them. Christ will have come personally and ordered everything for Jehovah’s glory. The Shechinah glory will have returned to the temple. All of this fills their hearts and mouths with praise. It is the highest point of blessing for an earthly people under God’s government on this earth.

With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation... for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.