

Whenever you're reading the Bible, it's important to read things in context. Because when you keep in mind everything that the Bible says around a passage, that will help you understand what it is that God is trying to say. And it's certainly no different today with our Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 12, because Isaiah 12 is actually the very end of a passage that begins all the way back in Isaiah chapter 7. And so when we understand the situation from Isaiah 7 to Isaiah 12, we'll be able to understand clearly what it is that God is trying to tell us. So we want to understand, then, the situation that Isaiah is facing all the way back in chapter 7, so that we can understand what he's telling us in chapter 12.

So what is that situation? What is he dealing with in chapter 7? We hear right away in verses one and two: "In the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, 'Syria is in league with Ephraim,' the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." So in other words, the situation that they're facing here in Isaiah 7 is a kind of civil war. The northern kingdom of Israel has made an alliance with a foreign nation, with Syria, and they are banding together in order to attack Jerusalem. And so King Ahaz along with all the people in the southern kingdom are afraid. They're wondering, "What's gonna happen? What is this alliance going to do? Are they going to defeat us? Are they going to destroy us? Are we going to win? We're just not really sure." And because of that uncertainty, because of this fear, they're left wondering what is going to happen in the days ahead.

But the Lord sends Isaiah the prophet to Ahaz at that time with a very clear message. He says to him, "This alliance you're so afraid of, it's going to come to nothing. It will fail. Within 65 years," the Lord says, "the northern kingdom of Israel will be gone. And you won't have to be afraid of them anymore." "And I want to prove it to you," the Lord says. "I want you to know beyond all doubt that this is going to happen. So ask me to do something. Ask me a sign, whatever you want. In that way, I will prove to you that I am going to do what I say." But Ahaz says in chapter 7 verse 12: "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." Because the problem, Christians, is that Ahaz was a godless man. Ahaz did not believe in the Lord. And so he wants nothing to do with God. He figures, "I'll take care of things on my own. I'll do things my own way." And as a result, he goes against what the Lord says.

But at that very moment, God brings a judgment upon Israel because of that sin. Because Israel is turning away from the Lord, God is going to bring his wrath against them. And in fact, as we hear, God tells us, "Yes, these kings are still going to lose. I'm still going to bring them down. But then I'm going to bring another nation upon you." As we hear in chapter 7 verse 17: "The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah--the king of Assyria!" The Assyrians would invade, and they would wipe away everything before them. The sins of Israel had brought this judgment, and God was going to destroy everything that they trusted in. So because of Ahaz's sin in turning away from God and trying to rely on himself, Assyria would come and bring an end to the kings of Judah, bring an end to the line of David. Because Israel had not been relying on the Lord, Assyria would come, and they would put an end to that kingdom. Everything would be destroyed. Because the prophets had been telling lies in God's name, saying things that he never said and promising things that he had never promised, Assyria would come,

and they would destroy the temple. God would remove his name away from Jerusalem. And because the people had turned away from the Lord and turned towards their sins, Assyria would come, and they would take them into exile, take them out of the land, never to return again. A terrible judgment was being brought by the hand of the Lord upon the people, this terrible wrath of God against their sin.

But Christians, not everybody in Israel was godless. Not everybody followed after idols and followed after false gods. There was always a remnant among the people, a smaller group of people who believed in God, who trusted in him, who looked to him for everything. And when they heard this message, this judgment that was coming against them, that would have been a very difficult thing for them to deal with. Because why was God casting them off? Why was God turning away from them? After all, didn't God promise to them that there would always be a king, someone to sit on David's throne? And yet Assyria was on the way to bring that all to an end. Didn't God promise that they would have a kingdom and a land to live in? But now Assyria is on the way, and all of that will be destroyed. Didn't God promise that he would always be with them, that he would take care of them? But now Assyria is on the way, and it seems like God has abandoned them. Where could they turn for help? What had happened to God's promises? What was going to happen to them in the days ahead? That's what they were struggling with. And if they didn't have anything to hold onto, if they didn't have any kind of hope, their faith would have died. Because they needed something, they needed somewhere to turn. But where would that be?

But Christians, God gave to his people at that time another revelation of what was to come. Assyria would come. Yes, they would come just as God said, and they would certainly wipe everything away. But Assyria would also fall. That kingdom which had done so much against them would suffer judgment for their sins and for their arrogance as well. They would not win in the end. God would bring back against them the things that they had done to his people. And on that day, the Lord said, the people of Israel will return. They will be brought back out of exile and put back into their own land. Because God was going to bring them back, just as he said. No longer would they be scattered, no longer exiled, but they would be in the land, just as God had promised that they would be. And more than this, too, the Lord said that he would give them the Son of David to be their king forever. Immanuel, born of a virgin, God with us, would come to be the promised king who would be with them forever. The line of David would not come to an end, but would continue on forever, just as God had said. And God himself would be with his people as we hear in Isaiah 9 verse six: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The Prince of Peace, God himself, would be their promised king, and they would never be without a kingdom again. And this promised branch of David would come forth from the stump of Jesse to reign as their king and to do something far greater than they could even imagine. As we hear in chapter 11 verse 11, "In that day, the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people." God would bring them back again, not just once, but twice, gathering in his people from all the nations on the day of Pentecost. On that day when he proclaims the Gospel to go out to all nations, God will bring them in and will set up a kingdom which would go on forever. All of these things would happen. All of these things would certainly come to pass. And on that day when they see all of this happen, the Lord says, they will rejoice. As we hear in chapter 12, our

reading for today, "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.'" Even though God was angry with them, sending upon them the kingdom of Assyria to punish them for their sins, yet they would rejoice when the Lord raise them up again, when they saw all of the wonderful things that he promised to do. God himself would restore them and be with them as their God forever. They knew how things would end, and for that reason, they had hope, something to hold onto for the future.

And Christians, God gave them this vision of the future, 700 years into the future, in fact. 700 years of what was going to happen, so that they would have something to hold onto, so that they would know that no matter what happened, no matter how bad it seemed to get, they would still have the promises of God. And Christians, Christ has done the same for you. He has told us what is going to happen. He has told us how these days will go, so that no matter how bad they seem to be, no matter how terrible things are, we know that Christ is in control.

Because just consider the days that we're dealing with, the things that we have to put up with. The evils which seem to be growing with each passing day. things which were done in the dark, now being done out in the open, so we wonder, "Where are things going? When will this ever come to an end? If we didn't have anything to look forward to, we might lose hope." Or how it seems like the church is losing influence and losing numbers with each passing year, how churches seem to be getting smaller and smaller and smaller. What are we supposed to do with that? Where can we turn when it seems like Christ's church is failing? Or even when we live in a time in which fear seems to rule the day, when people are afraid of everything that is happening, when people are afraid of death, when people are just generally afraid, what we supposed to do with that spirit of fear? Where can we turn to find help? And in these days when the love of many has grown cold, we need something to hold onto.

And Christians, God has given us something to hold onto, because he has told us exactly what is going to happen. The Lord is the one who controls history. The Lord is the one who rules over all things. And no matter what happens, no matter how terrible it seems to be, Jesus has already won. Jesus has the victory forever! And he has told us these things in advance so that we have something to hold onto, so that we can know that all of these present troubles will give way to a joy which knows no end.

So Christians, "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 because he has given you a certain future. Sing praises to the Lord because Jesus is alive. Sing praises to the Lord, because he will come again to judge the living and the dead. And on that day when he comes back to take care of everything, He will bring an end to all evil. He will bring an end to all suffering. And he will bring with him a joy which will never come to an end. We need not be afraid, Christians, because God is in control.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you are the master of all history and the one who leads our steps. We pray that you would strengthen our faith to trust in you because you have told us

all things so that we may trust in you, no matter what happens in the days ahead. Help us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.