



BIBLE LENS

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Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

Reality

March 20–26, 2023



from the **Golden Text**

[Isaiah 12:2, 3](#)

Behold, God is my salvation; . . . Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Water in the wilderness is a recurring image in Isaiah (see other examples in [35:7](#); [41:17, 18](#); [44:3, 4](#); [58:11](#)). For desert-dwellers—and for everyone in desolate circumstances of any kind—this metaphor for God’s salvation is compelling and comforting.

Viewed by scholars as a cap to the first eleven chapters of Isaiah, the six verses of chapter 12 form a prayer of thanksgiving for prophesied acts of divine deliverance.

from the **Responsive Reading**

[Isaiah 35:1, 2, 6–10](#)

The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. . . . Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: . . . And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall

return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Spoken to the Hebrew people in exile, this oracle symbolically depicts their return from Babylon as a passage through verdant land—a promise representing their restoration as God’s chosen. Early Christians recognized the fulfillment of these verses (describing universal healing as well as the joyous homecoming) in the advent and life of Christ Jesus.

Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon were areas of Canaan renowned for their beauty and fertility. In contrast to the desert, Lebanon was mountainous, with the “glory” of its cedars; Carmel was a hilly, wooded region featuring flowering shrubs and vistas of Mount Carmel; Sharon (also called Saron; see [Acts 9:35](#)) was a fruitful plain north of Jaffa.

Ransomed suggests a common reality of ancient times—the payment required for release of someone enslaved for debt. Bible authorities take “the ransomed of the Lord” to mean God’s children freed from physical captivity—and, in its deeper sense, liberated by His love from sin and sorrow.

from Section 1

2 | [Psalms 63:1, 2](#)

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

Translation

*O God, you are my God,
and I long for you.
My whole being desires you;
like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land,
my soul is thirsty for you.
Let me see you in the sanctuary;
let me see how mighty and glorious you are.*

—Good News Translation

3 | [1 Corinthians 2:9, 10](#)

As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

No human faculty, Paul asserts, can make God’s purposes clear—the searching Spirit alone reveals them. One source puts it this way: “The magnificent treasure of God’s revealed truth is accessible to the mature believer.”

4 | [Romans 11:33, 36](#)

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! . . . For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever.

Translation

How very rich are God’s wisdom and knowledge!

.

All things come from him.

All things are directed by him.

All things are for his praise.

—New International Reader’s Version™

from **Section 2**

6 | [Proverbs 20:5](#)

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.

Translation

The purposes of a person’s heart are like deep water.

But one who has understanding brings them out.

—New International Reader’s Version™

Just as water is drawn from a deep well, purposes and thoughts hidden in the heart are discerned by wisdom. A similar adage declares, “The words of a man’s mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook” ([18:4](#)).

7 | [Proverbs 23:7](#)

As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.

In context, this maxim refers to hosts who encourage guests to eat liberally while inwardly begrudging them food. More

largely, it cautions against insincerity and urges alertness to actions that expose motives.

8 | I Corinthians 2:11–14

What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Translation

Who knows the thoughts that another person has? Only a person's spirit that lives within him knows his thoughts. It is the same with God. No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but we received the Spirit that is from God so that we can know all that God has given us. And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom but with words taught us by the Spirit. And so we explain spiritual truths to spiritual people. A person who does not have the Spirit does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God. That person thinks they are foolish and cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit.

—New Century Version®

Paul employs what a commentator calls a “like by like” strategy in this text: “Like things are able to be known by like things.” Spiritual truth comes only from Spirit and is grasped solely through spiritual understanding.

Questions often arise about the use of the term *Holy Ghost*, which appears almost exclusively in the King James Bible. At the time of that version in 1611, *ghost* and *spirit* were interchangeable terms for the living essence of a person—and many earlier translations used *Holy Ghost*. But as *ghost* took on spectral significance over time, *Holy Spirit* was adopted by most translators. Both phrases represent divine Spirit.

from Section 3

9 | Psalms 37:7, 11

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. . . . The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Translation

Be silent before the LORD and wait expectantly for him;

*do not be agitated by one who prospers in his way,
by the person who carries out evil plans.*

.

*the humble will inherit the land
and will enjoy abundant prosperity.*

—Christian Standard Bible®

This psalm, a scholar remarks, “calls its readers to trust in divine providence and thus live faithfully, therein finding health for life. Then a sense that the wicked are prospering will not be threatening. . . .”

Whereas the Hebrew sense of meekness involved subjugation and poverty, Christian doctrine connected it with an inner faith in and dependence on God. And while inheriting the earth or the land originally related to possession of Palestine, for believers it came to mean the arrival of the Messianic kingdom.

10 | [Genesis 26:1, 12, 16, 17, 19–22, 26–28, 31](#)

And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. . . . Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. . . . And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. . . . And Isaac’s servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. . . . Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? And they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; . . . And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

In Scripture, Isaac is featured mainly as the child of the aged Abraham and Sarah who was nearly sacrificed (see [chap. 22](#))—and as the old man who was deceived by his wife, Rebekah, and son Jacob (see [chap. 27](#)). While Abraham and Jacob have several story cycles, chapter 26 of Genesis is the only biblical record in which Isaac is the central character. But he is the link of continuity for God’s covenant, established with him instead of his older half-brother, Ishmael (see [17:19–21](#)).

Though his father and son sojourn outside Canaan (in Mesopotamia and Egypt), Isaac never leaves the Promised Land. In fact, God commands him to stay, emphasizing covenantal stability (see [26:2–4](#)). Of the three, he is also the only one whose name is not changed and who has just one wife.

In this brief account, Isaac moves from famine to plenty in the Philistine town of Gerar (see [vv. 12–14](#)). His riches arouse the envy of the neighboring Philistines, who twice fill his newly dug wells with dirt. Naming these sites Esek and Sitnah, alluding to contention and strife, Isaac refrains from violent reprisal and determinedly directs his men to dig a third well. When his forbearance brings success, he names this location Rehoboth, signifying “wide place.” At this point, Philistine king Abimelech acknowledges God’s power exercised on Isaac’s behalf and initiates a peace treaty.

In the New Testament, Paul likens Christ’s followers to Isaac, identifying them as “children of [the] promise” ([Romans 9:7, 8](#); [Galatians 4:28](#)).

11 | [Isaiah 12:3](#)

With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Translation

*“As fresh water brings joy to the thirsty,
so God’s people rejoice when he saves them.”*

—Good News Translation

from **Section 4**

13 | [Luke 5:1–7, 11, 15](#)

It came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: . . . And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. . . . And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. . . . And great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

Simon’s protest at Jesus’ request to let down the nets is probably one of surprise, not disrespect. Most fishing took place at night, when fish moved to shallow water. Yet, that night the disciples’ work hasn’t yielded even a small catch. Now that it’s daylight, they are washing their nets for the following night’s fishing (see [v. 2](#)).

A short time before this, the Master had cured Simon’s mother-in-law of a fever and healed crowds of people of multiple diseases (see [4:38–41](#)). Here, at the overwhelmingly large draft of fish, the disciples’ commitment to follow Jesus is sealed (see [vv. 8–11](#)).

The sea in this account has been known by four different names—Chinnereth, Galilee, Gennesaret, and Tiberias. Chinnereth was a Hebrew Bible name. Galilee (its contemporary name) indicated the region surrounding the freshwater lake, the locale of much of Jesus’ ministry; Gennesaret was a plain and town northwest of the sea; and Tiberias was the capital of Galilee, built on the western shore in honor of Roman emperor Tiberius.

from **Section 5**

14 | [James 1:17](#)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Translation

Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.

—New Living Translation

15 | [Psalms 37:37](#)

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

Translation

*Look at those who are honest and good,
for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace.*

—New Living Translation

16 | [John 5:2–9](#)

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I

am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

Ancient Jerusalem had two large public areas for ritual purification—the pool of Bethesda, where this event occurs, and the pool of Siloam. The first pool was near a gate (*market* was added by translators) for bringing sheep to the Temple for sacrifice. Its water’s intermittent movement—possibly the bubbling up of a subterranean stream—prompted superstitious belief in its healing capacity.

Scriptural authorities long puzzled over the configuration of the five porches. Then a 19th-century excavation revealed a rectangular pool consisting of two basins divided by a wall. All four sides were flanked by porticoes, with a fifth portico across the central barrier. The southern basin is understood to have been a site for ritual bathing, the northern basin a reservoir for replenishing fresh water in the southern pool.

“Thirty and eight years” is regarded by some sources not as a specific duration but as a very long time, perhaps alluding to the wilderness period recorded in [Deuteronomy 2:14](#). In any case, the picture is one of hopelessness. Jesus’ question “Wilt thou be made whole?”—and his charge to stand up—effectively challenge despair and reverse the history of illness.

17 | [Psalms 18:32](#)

It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.

Translation

God is my protection.

He makes my way free from fault.

—International Children’s Bible®

from **Section 6**

18 | [Philippians 2:5](#)

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Paul has just exhorted the Christians at Philippi to be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (v. 2). One commentary notes: “This single mind-set means, not conformity in thought, but a concentration on the same single norm. . . . Readers are to act in the light of what and how they think about Christ.” He adds, “God’s participation is throughout, from the heart’s resolve to the final consummation.”

19 | [Luke 17:20, 21](#)

When he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Jews of Jesus' time eagerly awaited the arrival of the prophesied Messiah and debated extensively which signs would announce it. He was to be the successor to King David, the Savior who would bring liberation to Israel.

Jesus' reply points out that God's kingdom is not about political triumph. It is the indwelling divine power that frees all humanity from sin, sickness, and death.

20 | [Isaiah 55:1, 12](#)

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. . . . For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Translation

*If you are thirsty,
come and drink water!*

*If you don't have any money,
come, eat what you want!*

*Drink wine and milk
without paying a cent.*

.

*When you are set free,
you will celebrate
and travel home in peace.*

*Mountains and hills will sing
as you pass by,
and trees will clap.*

—Contemporary English Version

Read a related article, "[The race before us](https://jsh.christianscience.com/the-race-before-us)" by Brad Jones, at jsh.christianscience.com/the-race-before-us.

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