

**International Sunday School Lesson**  
**Study Notes**  
**November 30, 2014**

**Lesson Text: Isaiah 52:1-2, 7-12**  
**Lesson Title: Let Zion Rejoice**

**Introduction**

The city of Jerusalem often referred to as Zion in the Bible, occupies a position in the center of the world. The prophet Ezekiel wrote, *“Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her (Ezekiel 5:5).* When you carefully examine Ezekiel’s words it seems as if all eyes are on Jerusalem. It was that way in biblical times and it is still that way today. Jerusalem is mentioned in the Bible over 800 times. There are also 465 verses in the Old Testament and 24 verses in the New Testament that speak of the future of Jerusalem. What happens in Jerusalem is key to what is happening in the present and will happen in the future.

The name *Jerusalem* means “City of Peace,” though it has known little or nothing of peace in its 3,000 plus years of history. A host of nations have occupied her land, invaded her soil and destroyed her temple and homes. Historians differ as to the exact amount of times Jerusalem has been besieged but some place the number as high as thirty or more. Add to that the fact that she has at times been her own worst enemy and you have a formula for disaster.

In spite all of that history against her, the Bible promises a bright future for Jerusalem. There is no guarantee in the Bible that the city of Washington, Atlanta, New York, San Francisco or any other city in the world has a future. But the Bible does promise a future for Jerusalem.

Our lesson text in Isaiah 52 is part of Isaiah’s message of hope to the Jews being held in Babylonian captivity. The prophet Isaiah focused on hope and encouragement in Isaiah 40-55. According to Isaiah 40:9, Jerusalem or Zion, was predicted to be the focal point of the message of hope for the people. God had a plan to redeem the nations and restore His chosen people to the land. Although God’s people were in exile, the words of Isaiah gave them reason to rejoice.

**Rejoice Zion: Put On Your Garments (Isaiah 52:1-2)**

This section of Isaiah 52 is an admonition to the people to wake up, put on the righteous garments, shake off the dust of mourning and take a seat where she

belonged. For too long Israel had been enslaved and oppressed. It is time for her to be established as the joy of all the earth (Isaiah 61:4-11).

### Verse 1

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. “

Isaiah 51 presented the city of Jerusalem as a drunken woman staggering about, trying to get back on her feet. “Zion” wasn’t drunk from wine, she was drunk from God’s anger over her sin (Isaiah 51:17). As tragic as that picture is of God’s people, chapter 51 closes with encouraging words, *“Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again (Isaiah 51:22).*

“Zion” and “Jerusalem” are literal geographical places in the land of Israel. “Zion” is actually the high point in the city of Jerusalem. “Zion” and “Jerusalem” are also metaphors for God’s chosen people. The prophet Isaiah addresses God’s people in the opening words of chapter 52 with a command for “Zion” to “awake.” The word “awake” means “rise, stir up, open the eyes.” In Isaiah 51:9, the people had accused God of inactivity on His part and said to Him, *“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?”* The Lord turns the tables on the people and uses the same word “awake” to call the people to alertness.

Israel was without question God’s redeemed people but she had never fully fulfilled God’s plan in that regard. It is time for her now to “put on strength.” It is not enough for her to just put away her sin, she must also put on her glorious garments. Literally, God wants Jerusalem to “put on her power and boldness” like you would put on a coat or a garment. The word “beautiful” means “splendor, glory.”

Jerusalem is called the “holy city.” To be “holy” means “to be set apart to God.” God wants the holy city of Jerusalem to put on display the reality of who she is. She is God’s peculiar treasure and His chosen people. She is different than the unbelieving nations around her in morality and righteousness.

The words “For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” is a prophecy not yet fulfilled. “Egypt had enslaved God’s people, Assyria had oppressed them, and Babylon had taken them captive, but now that was ended. Of course, the ultimate fulfillment of this promise will occur when the Messiah returns, delivers Jerusalem from her enemies, and establishes Mt. Zion as the joy of all the earth.” (Bible Exposition

Commentary, BE Series-Old Testament-The Bible Exposition Commentary–The Prophets.)

What is promised here for Jerusalem is a final separation from the world. Isaiah was referring to the future Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom, for the earthly Jerusalem was invaded again by the “uncircumcised and the unclean.” Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C. and Titus in 70 A.D. invaded earthly Jerusalem. Isaiah is talking about the people of God whose home is a spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 12:22).

The holy city of Jerusalem will one day be eternally beautiful and free from anything that defiles her (Revelation 21:27). Christ will redeem not only Jerusalem but all of this physical universe that is today groaning under the curse of sin (Romans 8:22).

### Verse 2

“Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

In addition to “awaking” herself and “putting on” her “beautiful garments,” Jerusalem is to “shake herself from the dust, and sit down.” “Dust” on a person is sometimes a sign of mourning (Job 2:12). To “shake thyself from the dust” means that Jerusalem is to no longer mourn over her sin and condition. “Sit down” is a reference to getting up out of the dust of mourning and ascend to a lofty seat. Once clothed in her beautiful garment it would no longer be right to sit in the dust.

“Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck” is a reference to the Babylonian captivity. “Loose” means “to break forth, to set free.”

### **Rejoice Zion: The Lord’s Salvation Has Come (Isaiah 52:7-10)**

This section of Isaiah 52 is a brief summary of Isaiah 40:1-21. The message of the prophet in chapter 40-52 is that God will return to Zion as king. Isaiah pictures this return in the language of a military victory and the news of that victory brought to the cities inhabitants by a running messenger.

Although Israel rejoiced at the return from Babylon in 536 B.C., the jubilation Isaiah is wrote about in this section will be when Israel's Messiah returns to Zion to reign.

### Verse 7

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”

It is indeed a “beautiful” sight when a messenger brings “good tidings” from the field of battle. “The feet of him that bringeth good tidings” refers to a messenger returning to the city with a message of peace. “Beautiful” means “pleasant.” Certainly Isaiah does not mean that a runner or messenger would literally have “beautiful feet.” Obviously a runner’s feet would be covered with dirt and cuts and bruises from the impact of the run. The “beauty” is in the message of “peace” that he carries.

The runner brings good news Isaiah calls “salvation.” The word “salvation” means “deliverance.” What this all means for Zion is this: “Thy God reigneth!” “Thy God reigneth” will literally be fulfilled when Christ will reign personally over His kingdom (Psalm 93:1).

#### Verse 8

“Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.”

Isaiah tells the people that the “watchmen” or the city guards on the wall will “lift up their voice” and “sing” or shout when they hear the good news that “the LORD” is returning to “Zion.” The words “for they shall see eye to eye” is a Hebrew expression which is speaking about two people being so close together that they can look into each other’s eyes. The point is that these “watchmen” will see the Lord return to Zion as clearly as they can see each other eye to eye.

Remember, the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon. All the cities of Judah had been destroyed and the land was devastated. The city of Jerusalem itself lay in ruins. So, when Isaiah commanded the people to wake up, dress up, sit up, and listen to the watchmen’s proclamation of the good news, the Jews scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire must have experienced a great anticipation rising in their hearts.

#### Verse 9

“Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.”

The good news of salvation and the Lord reigning in Zion will result in the breaking forth of “joy” and “song.” Joy and singing are a characteristic of God’s “redeemed” people (Isaiah 49:13). It is interesting when you consider the contrasts in this verse. You have “joy and singing” and you have the “waste places of Jerusalem.” The “waste places of Jerusalem” is a reference to the

ruins of Jerusalem. The “waste places” that bear the effects of sin and foreign occupation and destruction are called upon to “break forth into joy.”

Why are the “waste places” commanded to “sing?” First, “the LORD hath comforted his people.” God had “comforted” His people by providing deliverance for them and salvation. Only forgiveness of sin can bring true comfort to God’s people. Second, “he hath redeemed Jerusalem.” Israel belongs to God because of the price paid for her deliverance and salvation.

“Comfort” and “redemption,” these are the reasons the nation can “break forth into joy” and “sing together.” When the Lord returns and establishes His kingdom upon this earth, the righteous who have trusted in Him for salvation will sing joyfully because He has comforted and redeemed. Believers today can sing because we already know the comfort of Christ’s salvation and the riches of His redeeming work.

#### Verse 10

“The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

The “holy arm” of the “LORD” is a reference to God’s power to save. Isaiah paints a picture as if God has rolled up His sleeve and shown “all the nations; and all the ends of the earth” His “salvation.” To “see the salvation of God” is to behold with astonishment the wonderful work of God in delivering for Himself a people.

The “bare arm” metaphor is taken from an ancient warrior’s stance, as he throws back his upper garment from his right shoulder, in readiness for battle. For the captives in Babylon, this picture would be encouraging when you consider the fact that the mighty power of God seemed to be idle.

This picture of God bearing His arm was not new to Israel. In Exodus 6:6, the Bible says, *“Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.”* In Exodus 15:6, the Bible says, *“Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.”*

#### **Rejoice: It’s Safe to Go Home (Isaiah 52:11-12)**

This section of Isaiah 52 looks at the setting free of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity. They are bidden to go out from their captivity and go home.

#### Verse 11

“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.”

“Depart ye” is a command to leave Babylon. Because the Israelites had been in Babylon for a long time it made leaving difficult for some. Under Cyrus there was only about 50,000 who returned, but the final fulfillment in view here is in the future. The words “out from thence” is a reference to the land of exile. These words also indicated that Isaiah was somewhere other than Babylon when he wrote these words or he would have written, “go out from here.” Most likely he was in Jerusalem.

“Touch no unclean thing” means that as a comforted and redeemed people, the Israelites must not defile themselves in any manner. As they leave captivity they are not to take with them anything from Babylon, especially the Babylonish gods, as they did when they left Egypt.

Those who “bear the vessels of the LORD” is a reference to the priests and Levites, who duty it was to carry the vessels of the temple (Jeremiah 27:18). King Nebuchadnezzar had carried the sacred vessels from Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:18). The “vessels” they are to carry out with them are “the vessels of the LORD” used in the temple sacrifice and ministry.

While verse 11 had an immediate fulfillment in the captives leaving Babylon and returning to Jerusalem, it also has a future fulfillment. The believing remnant of God’s people will be called away from this world and gathered together in the new millennial Jerusalem. From all the ends of the earth believers from every generation will depart from the Babylon’s of their past and enter into the fullness of God’s great salvation in Jesus Christ.

### Verse 12

“For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward.”

“For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight” means that the final gathering of God’s people will be different from the flight from Exodus. When the Israelites left Egypt they left in “haste” (Exodus 12:11). Their departure from Babylon back home would not be rushed. They would have time to prepare for the return.

“The LORD will go before you” means God will be leading them out and back home. The “God of Israel will be your rereward.” God would be their “rear guard.” The word “rereward” literally means “gather up,” of “to bring up the rear.” Since the Lord will be leading them, “go before you” and brining up the rear, Israel had nothing to fear.

## **Conclusion**

It must have been trying and challenging for the captives in Babylon to believe deliverance would ever come. It is hard to rejoice when you can't see the future or understand how God will fulfill His promises. So, where was their reasons for rejoicing?

Their rejoicing was based on the promises of God's Word. Although they were a long way from home and in a bad situation, they had words of comfort and deliverance from Isaiah. If Israel would wake up, put on her garments of beauty, accept the fact that God would provide salvation and deliverance, and by faith head for home, she could experience the very best God had in store for her.

Likewise, Christians are a chosen generation and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). But we sometimes have our Babylon's and find ourselves in what seems to be hopeless situations. It is time for Christians to wake up, dress up in our garments of righteousness and live at God's redeemed people. The good news is that Jesus Christ has come and brought salvation for whosoever will believe upon His name. May our joy cause us to shout and sing, "Christ lives." And, may we also shout, "Because Christ lives, all men can live."

Amen.