



The Place of Rejoicing

by Karen Holland

Isaiah 12:2-3 *Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

Psalms 118:14 *The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.*

The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot Booths) a seven day festival - the Season of our Joy, is one of the three pilgrimage festivals God gave the children of Israel in the Bible (Lev 23, Deut 31:9-13, Neh 8:12-9:38). Historically, Sukkot commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as the Festival of Ingathering. During this festival every adult Jewish male was to appear in Jerusalem before the Lord (Ex. 23:14-17) bringing their offerings and firstlings to the Temple in Jerusalem. Each day during the Feast of Tabernacles, a special joyous ceremony took place in the Holy Temple, known as the Festival of the Water Pouring (Libation) where water was poured onto the altar. This Festival of the Water Pouring is closely linked to the above scripture and sheds light not only on past events in the Bible, but on events yet to come.

At the foothills of Mount Moriah, down below in the City of David, flows a natural spring called Siloam. This spring is ancient, and as it is located literally in the shadow of the Holy Temple, it has always had spiritual significance for Israel. It is the original source of Jerusalem's water.

During the Second Temple period, each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a procession of priests would go down to the Pool of Siloam accompanied by music and much rejoicing. When they arrived, a priest drew water out of the pool from a large golden pitcher that he had brought down with him from the Temple. During this water drawing Isaiah 12:3 would be recited!

Meanwhile, another priestly procession left the Temple and headed for the Kidron Valley, just east of the Temple. They went there to obtain fresh willow branches for their lulavs. A lulav is an arrangement of the four plant species which Israel is commanded to rejoice with at the feast in compliance with Leviticus 23:40. It is composed of the citron fruit (similar to a lemon) and branches of the date palm, myrtle, and willow.

After fulfilling their mission, both processions began their return journey to the Temple. First, the procession from the Kidron Valley entered the Temple waving their lulavs and striking the altar with them amidst much blowing on the trumpets. They formed a leafy canopy over the altar with their lulavs. All of the worshippers eagerly waited for the return of the procession from the Pool of Siloam. Announced by a three-fold blast on the trumpet, the priest with the golden pitcher entered through the Water Gate. The procession approached the altar where the daily (or regular) sacrifice proceeded.

The priest carrying the water from the Pool of Siloam is greeted by another priest, who holds in his hands a container of wine. Together they pour out the offering of water and wine on the altar. The Levitical musicians began to play music on their holy instruments, and everyone began singing through the Hallel Psalms 113-118. Psalms 118 is the climax of the Hallel. Amidst great rejoicing Psalm 118:25 was recited and sung in preparation of the Sukkot offering. The priests made a single circuit of the altar each day, but on the seventh, i.e. the last day of Sukkot, they encircled the altar seven times singing Psalm 118:25 and waving their lulavs! This seventh day, known as Hoshana Rabba or "the Great Hoshana," exemplifies Israel's need and reliance upon Jehovah. The word hoshana means "Save, I pray!" or "Save, now!"

What did this ceremony symbolize? Look at the wording and the close connection between Psalm 118:14 and Isaiah 12:2. This together with the fact that the priests recited Isaiah 12:3

while drawing water from the Pool of Siloam point to the Pool of Siloam symbolizing the "wells of salvation!"

Isaiah further identifies water being poured out with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Isa 44:3). This water pouring ceremony not only has historical significance, it is a very beautiful ceremony filled with meaningful symbolism and rich imagery which also looks forward. It looks forward to a future water pouring ceremony, one found in John 7.

On the seventh and final day of Sukkot, everyone was praising their Creator, singing the Hallel, and waving their lulavs. It was then – when the priests were encircling the altar seven times and the crowd of worshippers were repeatedly reciting Psalm 118:25, "*O LORD, do save, we beseech You*" – that someone stood up and cried aloud.

John 7:37-39 *On the last day, that great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

These statements made at this the last Water Pouring ceremony Jesus would ever physically attend (His arrest and execution took place the following Passover) were very significant. These statements identify Jesus with the Pool of Siloam and declare that He is the well of salvation. He is the answer to the plea of Psalm 118:25. He is the Messiah, whom God the Father has sent (Jn 7:29). Another neat coincidence is that the Hebrew word for "sent" is "shiloah." "The Pool of Sent," over the years, has been transliterated into "the Pool of Siloam." Think of this, "the sent," Jesus, declaring that He is the well of salvation during the pouring of the water from the "pool of sent!" He declared that He is the Messiah, the sent One from the Father. He also declares the promise of living waters, pointing to the Holy Spirit which was not yet given.

Looking back at the Water Pouring ceremony we can now see the promise of the Holy Spirit. The water poured out on the altar representing the Holy Spirit being poured out as living waters. This pouring out of the water was accompanied by great rejoicing and joyful celebration in the Holy Temple. This brings to mind the images from previous articles 'Sing to the Well' and 'Well of Living Waters.' Singing (or speaking) to the well (Num 21:16-18) was linked with striking the rock in order for abundant waters to flow. Christ is this Spiritual Rock (1 Cor 10:4). The Rock and those who believe in Him have a well of living water that flows forth (John 4:14, 7:38-39). Worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24) is tied to these images and can be seen in the Feast of the Tabernacles. This worship in spirit and truth, this singing joyfully to the well, draws out the water and allows it (the Holy Spirit) to be poured out - poured out in abundance! There is NO fuller joy!

Psalm 16:11 *You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.*

In fact this water drawing/ pouring was so joyful that it was said that *He who has not witnessed the place of rejoicing at the water-drawing huts (booths) has, throughout the whole of his life, witnessed no real rejoicing* A Jewish teaching that accompanies this saying teaches that the celebration that accompanied the water libation called *simchat bet ha-sho'evah* - the celebration of the place of the drawing of water draws the spirit of holiness. It teaches that the spirit of holiness rests upon a person only when his heart is filled with joy.

Why was the fulfillment of being joyous on Sukkot associated with the water pouring/ drawing? Why was this such a place of rejoicing?

Water drawn from the Pool of Siloam is spring water, very pure. It is drawn in joy, for this offering requires no effort on the part of the one bringing it. It requires no planting, no reaping, no pressing, no purifying, no filtering, no fermentation - no effort at all. This offering is pure,

free of all traces of pride, arrogance, and conceit. It is poured on the altar together with the wine offering, which requires planting, harvesting, pressing, refining, filtering, and fermentation. The wine and water are equal in the Lord's eyes. The fruit of your labor is equal to that untouched by effort, together these are offered with rejoicing and unconditional love. The water drawn from the Pool of Siloam represents God's unconditional love to us, His free gift of salvation, and His free gift of the water life (Rev 22:17).

Each time we sing, draw water from the well and come into His presence allowing the Holy Spirit to flow and be poured out, especially in a celebration like the Feast of Tabernacles, we look forward. The fullness of this joy is made even more beautiful by the fact that it is eternal. This festival looks forward to the great outpouring of God's Holy Spirit which is to come with the 1000 year reign of The Messiah. It is like a rehearsal looking forward to that day when the King of Kings rules his people from Jerusalem and each nation goes up to celebrate it (Zech 14:16). That will be a time and place of rejoicing like no other before it.

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