
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXVIII : JUDGEMENT AND SALVATION (34:1-35:10)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. The Crisis and the Messiah (1:1-12:6)
 - A. Introduction to the Entire Prophecy (1:1-31)
 - B. Early Messages of Isaiah (2:1-5:30)
 - C. Judah's True Hope: The Messianic King (6:1-12:6)
- II. The Theocracy and the Nations (13:1-39:8)
 - A. Judah and the World Power (13:1-27:13)
 - B. God's Sovereignty Manifested in Salvation and Judgement (24:1-27:13)
- III. True Deliverance is Found Not in Egypt but in the Lord (28:1-35:10)
 - A. The Lord's Purpose (28,29)
 - 1. Samaria Ripe for Judgement (28:1-29)
 - 2. The Iniquity of Jerusalem and the Announcement of Deliverance (29:1-24)
 - B. The Judean Alliance with Egypt (30,31)
 - 1. To Trust in Egypt is to be Deceived (30:1-33)
 - 2. Egypt is No Help, but the Lord will Protect Jerusalem (31:1-9)
 - C. The Certainty of the Coming Salvation (32,33)
 - 1. A Condition of True Blessedness Will Come (32:1-20)
 - 2. Oppression Will End and God's Kingdom Will Be Established (33:1-24)
 - D. God's Sovereignty Manifested in Judgement and Salvation (34,35)
 - 1. God's Sovereignty Manifested in Judgement (34:1-17)
 - 2. God's Sovereignty Manifested in Salvation (35:1-10)

The Results of Trusting God or the Nations (34:1-35:10)

“Chapters 34-35 present a striking contrast between a productive land turned into a desert (ch. 34) and a desert turning into a garden (ch. 35). As such they bring to a close the collection of teachings concerning the nations and God's sovereignty over them (chs. 13-35). *When all is said and done, the prophet says, the issues are clear and rather simple. Arrogant, self-important humanity cannot stand before God. In our attempts to be independent of him and to build the kingdom of Man on earth, we have sinned, and the word is the same for all: ‘The soul that sins shall die’ (Ezek 18:4,20). In a real sense, to sin is to forfeit one's life into the hands of God as a sacrifice (34:6,7). On the other hand, those who reject the blandishments of this earth with its temptations to make their own way, those who choose to wait for God, to put themselves in his hands, though that be in a desert, will discover a highway which leads to a glory not their own. Rather, it is something which is freely shared by the One to whom glory belongs. To align oneself with the nations of the earth is to choose a desert; to trust in God is to choose a garden.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

The Dessert: Judgement on the Nations (34:1-4)

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (NIV)

Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. (KJV)

Come near, ye nations, to hear, And ye peoples, give attention, Hear doth the earth and its fulness, The world, and all its productions. For wrath [is] to Jehovah against all the nations, And fury against all their host, He hath devoted them to destruction, He hath given them to slaughter. And their wounded are cast out, And their carcasses cause their stench to ascend, And melted have been mountains from their blood. And consumed have been all the host of the heavens, And rolled together as a book have been the heavens, And all their hosts do fade, As the fading of a leaf of a vine, And as the fading one of a fig-tree. (YLT)

OVERVIEW OF CHAP 34 — The powerful poem in 34:1-17 depicts the effects of God's wrath upon the nations (from Oswalt)

- vv. 1-4 the universal nature of judgement is pictured. Not even the heavens themselves will escape.
- vv. 5-8 particularize the statement by applying it to Edom, much as was done with Moab in 25:10-12. *The language here is of sacrifice, reminding the reader that unless someone provides a sacrifice for our sins, we must ourselves become that sacrifice. Ultimately it is only God himself who can offer that sacrifice for all (Rom 5:5-10; Isa 53)*
- vv. 9-17 continue the address to Edom as the typical nation, depicting the land as left utterly desolate, inhabited by nothing but desert wildlife. *This is the end of all human grasping for abundance: death and desolation. If the language is severe and harsh here, it is because of the seriousness of sin. The rebellion of a whole world against God is not a matter of a tap on the wrist, nor are its natural effects negligible.*

A UNIVERSAL PROCLAMATION, REPRESENTED INDIVIDUALLY AS EDM —

Several times in Isaiah the Lord calls to all on earth to hear His words. In the very beginning of the book, the Lord called the world together to be a witness to the rebellion of Israel (1:2). In similar manner the Lord calls to the nations in 41:1 and 45:20 to present their case before a holy God. Here however the call to the nations is for judgement, with the case already decided.

“This chapter is remarkable for its combination of the general and the particular, the universal

and the local. It reminds us of the Greek word *hekastos* ('each one individually') used in so many descriptions of judgment in the NT." [Grogan, *Isaiah*] "Edom here is what Moab was in ch. 24-27. By the side of Babylon, the empire of the world, whose policy of conquest led to its enslaving Israel, it represents the world in its hostility to Israel as the people of Jehovah. For Edom was Israel's brother-nation, and hated Israel as the chosen people. In this its unbrotherly, hereditary hatred, it represented the sum-total of all the enemies and persecutors of the church of Jehovah. The special side-piece to ch. 34 is Isa 63:1-6." [K&D, *Isaiah*]

AN ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE — "We feel that we are carried entirely away from the stage of history. There is no longer that foreshortening, by which the prophet's perspective was characterized before the fall of Assyria. The tangible shapes of the historical present, by which we have been hitherto surrounded, are now spiritualized into something perfectly ideal. *We are transported directly into the midst of the last things; and the eschatological vision is less restricted, has greater mystical depth, belongs more to another sphere, and has altogether more of a New Testament character.... In ch. 40-66 the process of assimilation is fully at work, and there is consequently no book of the Old Testament which has gone so thoroughly into New Testament depths, as this second part of the collection of Isaiah's prophecies, which commences with a prediction of the parousia of Jehovah, and ends with the creation of the new heaven and new earth. Ch. 34 and 35 are, as it were, the first preparatory chords.*" [K&D, *Isaiah*]

PRONOUNCEMENT OF TOTAL DESTRUCTION — As the Lord pronounces His outpouring of wrath, it is said in a manner to imply *total annihilation*. The NIV margin at v. 2 makes this a comment on the phrase 'totally destroy': "The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them; also in verse 5." Note the translations: '*He hath devoted them to destruction, He hath given them to slaughter.*' (YLT) '*he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter.*' (KJV) '*He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter.*' (NIV). "*This is the idea that no spoils of battle belongs to any human victor, but must belong totally to God. Typically this meant that the spoils must be completely destroyed to prevent any human misappropriation. In the Hebrew setting at least two implications are significant: spoils are devoted to God to show that God alone has won a battle (Jericho); when a nation has deliberately blocked the flow of God's love to the world, it forfeits itself into God's hand (Amalek).*" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE SHAME OF OPEN SLAUGHTER — "*Added to the shame of defeat and slaughter is that of exposure of the dead. Not only for the ancient world but for the modern one as well, there is something especially horrifying and revolting about a rotting corpse.* Perhaps it is the terrible indignity of something which was recently able to think and dream. Or perhaps it is too strong a reminder of our own imminent decay. At any rate, there is a strong instinct in us to dispose of the dead quickly. When we do not do so, it is either because of the necessity of too many bodies or as a specific act of contempt." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GREAT, HORRIFIC BLOODSHED — Isaiah uses a graphic picture to illustrate the large carnage; literally '*the mountains will be dissolved with blood*' (Oswalt), '*and mountains melt with their blood*' (K&D), '*the mountains will be soaked with their blood.*' (NIV). The sense is rivers of blood will flow down the hillsides in such large quantities that it will be as rainfall washing away the countryside.

COSMIC JUDGEMENT — "*Verse 4 transports us suddenly from earth to the heavens. The ultimate character of this judgment is made clear when we see that it encompasses the entire*

cosmos, a reminder of the description in 24:21-23. This kind of language is taken up by the apocalyptic passages of the NT (e.g., Matt 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10, and esp. Rev 6:13-14). The way Isaiah illustrates this truth of cosmic judgment from situations familiar to his readers heightens the impression of God's absolute control over all things (cf. 40:12)." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

IS THIS JUDGEMENT LITERAL? — *"The judgment foretold by Isaiah also belongs to the last things; for it takes place in connection with the simultaneous destruction of the present heaven and the present earth.... To be rolled up — a term applied to the cylindrical book-scroll. The heaven, that is to say, the present system of the universe, breaks up into atoms, and is rolled up like a book that has been read through; and the stars fall down as a withered leaf falls from a vine, when it is moved by even the lightest breeze, or like the withered leaves shaken from the fig-tree. The expressions are so strong, that they cannot be understood in any other sense than as relating to the end of the world (Isa 65:17; 66:22; compare Matt 24:29).... And it is not only a doctrine of Isaiah himself, but a biblical doctrine universally, that God will destroy the present world as soon as the measure of the sin which culminates in unbelief, and in the persecution of the congregation of the faithful, shall be really full."* [K&D, *Isaiah*] If one refused to take this literally, an alternative interpretation would possibly be to the pantheon of gods which the stars represented in the minds of the ancient hearers. So the judgement of God would effect not only the nations but their heavenly patrons as well.

Judgement on Edom as a type of the nations: Edom, a sacrifice (34:5-8)

My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. The sword of the LORD is bathed in blood, it is covered with fat — the blood of lambs and goats, fat from the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in Edom. And the wild oxen will fall with them, the bull calves and the great bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood, and the dust will be soaked with fat. For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause. (NIV)

For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea. And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. (KJV)

For soaked in the heavens was My sword, Lo, on Edom it cometh down, On the people of My curse for judgment. A sword [is] to Jehovah — it hath been full of blood, It hath been made fat with fatness, With blood of lambs and he-goats. With fat of kidneys of rams, For a sacrifice [is] to Jehovah in Bozrah, And a great slaughter in the land of Edom. And come down have reems with them, And bullocks with bulls, And soaked hath been their land from blood, And their dust from fatness is made fat. (For a day of vengeance [is] to Jehovah, A year of recompences for Zion's strife,) (YLT)

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF THE GENERAL JUDGEMENT TO COME — *"After the general introduction in vv. 1-4, the prophet now moves to a concrete example of his topic. This is why this passage is not included in the section of oracles against the nations (chs. 13-23): it is not speaking of Edom by itself, but of that nation and its fate as representative of all nations and their fates.... The use of example to drive home a general point is a frequent feature in the*

book (3:16-4:1; 5:1-7; 14:4-21; 20:1-6; 30:6,7)." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] "A hearer who failed to feel the force of the contrast presented in v. 5 would have to be quite without imagination. God is here the universal Judge, his judgments on the grand scale including even the very heavens (v. 5). Then, with great suddenness, the sword of judgment falls on one of the smallest states in the biblical world, Edom. Edom was a traditional enemy of Israel, and so what we have here probably represents God's judgment on all her foes." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

WHY EDM? — Throughout the OT, from Genesis (Gen 25:23) to Malachi (Mal 1:2,3) Edom is used as the antithesis to Israel. Even more than the Amalekites, Edom is noted for attempting to block what the Lord was doing through Israel (e.g. Num 20:14-21), even active participants in the destruction of Jerusalem by allying with the Babylonians (Obad 11-14; Ezek 35:1-15). *"Thus Edom was typical of those nations which insisted upon their own ways in opposition to those of God. Thus Isaiah says, 'You can choose Edom's way or God's way, but these are the results.'"* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE WORLD AS A BLOOD SACRIFICE TO GOD — *"Verses 5-8 depicts one aspect of Edom's, and the world's, fate — a sacrifice to God. The language of these verses is unnerving because of its frankly gory tone.* However, at least three things need to be kept in mind when interpreting this passage: (1) there were no rules of warfare and the writer was wishing that God would balance the scales, giving the nations what they had given to Judah (v 8); (2) Western tastes are not those of most of the world. Compared to some of the Ugaritic materials, the language is restrained, for there is no divine glee in indiscriminate slaughter; (3) life is a gift, not a right, and its continuation is finally dependent upon appropriate relation to a Being whose nature is to ours as fire is to stubble. *Either some provision must be made for us all who have refused that appropriate relation or the result is destruction — not wreaked by a spiteful Master Ogre, but as the logical effect of our situation."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens* (NIV) – literally 'to drink to the full, filled up, satiated, or (with an intoxicating drink) to be drunk'; the figure is that the divine sword has done all it can do to the heavenly host (the pantheon of national gods) and will now fall on the nations themselves. K&D: *'For my sword has become intoxicated in the heaven'.* *"Just as in ch. 63 Jehovah is represented as a treader of the wine-press, and the nations as the grapes; so here He is represented as offering sacrifice, and the nations as the animals offered.... Jehovah does not appear here in person as judge, as He does there, but His sword appears; just as in Gen 3:24, the 'sword which turned every way' is mentioned as an independent power standing by the side of the cherub. The sword is His executioner, which has no sooner drunk deeply of wrath in heaven, i.e., in the immediate sphere of the Deity, than it comes down in wild intoxication upon Edom, the people of the ban of Jehovah, i.e., the people upon whom He has laid the ban, and there, as His instrument of punishment, fills itself with blood, and fattens itself with fat."* [K&D, *Isaiah*]

A PEOPLE DEDICATED TO THE LORD ... IN JUDGEMENT! — NIV's translation *'see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed'* is literally *'Lo, on Edom it cometh down, On the people of My curse for judgment'* (YLT), *'behold, upon Edom it shall fall, upon my devoted people, for judgement'* (Oswalt). The reference is to the fact God has claimed them for Himself alone. *"This is the issue which must face every human being: we do belong to God and we will belong to him; it is only up to us how we shall belong."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

ALL SIN REQUIRES A SACRIFICE, EITHER THE SINNER OR A SUBSTITUTE — Verses 6,7 speaks of the coming judgement in terms of a sacrifice. The OT makes it plain sin is a matter of life and death, even sin committed unaware (Lev 4:1-12). *"Thus in a real sense, all sin*

must end in a sacrifice, either of the sinner or of one in place of the sinner.” [Oswalt, Isaiah] Bozrah – the Edomite capital; probably identified with modern Buseirah, located about 20 miles SE of the Dead Sea. Wild oxen ... bulls with rams – probably a reference of the leaders as well as the common people.

ONE REASON FOR JUDGEMENT IS THE WORLD ATTACKS GOD’S PEOPLE — Not only has the world denied the rule of God over them but they have also attacked His people. “*For it is the day of the LORD’S vengeance – A time when Yahweh will take vengeance. ‘The year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion’ – The time when he will recompense, that is, punish those who have had a controversy with Zion.*” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

Judgement on Edom as a type of the nations: Edom, a desolation (34:9-17)

<i>Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again. The desert owl and screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away. Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls. Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest. The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her</i>	<i>And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever. But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there</i>	<i>And turned have been her streams to pitch, And her dust to brimstone, And her land hath become burning pitch. By night and by day she is not quenched, To the age go up doth her smoke, From generation to generation she is waste, For ever and ever, none is passing into her. And possess her do pelican and hedge-hog, And owl and raven dwell in her, And He hath stretched out over her A line of vacancy, and stones of emptiness. [To] the kingdom her freemen they call, But there are none there, And all her princes are at an end. And gone up her palaces have thorns, Nettle and bramble [are] in her fortresses, And it hath been a habitation of dragons, A court for daughters of an ostrich. And met have Ziim with Aiim, And the goat for its companion calleth, Only there rested hath the night-owl, And hath found for herself a place of rest. There made her nest hath the bittern, Yea, she layeth, and hath hatched, And hath gathered under her shadow, Only there gathered have been vultures,</i>
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wings; there also the falcons shall the vultures also be Each with its companion. Seek will gather, each with its gathered, every one with her out of the book of Jehovah, mate. Look in the scroll of mate. Seek ye out of the book of and read, One of these hath the LORD and read: None of the LORD, and read: no one of not been lacking, None hath these will be missing, not one these shall fail, none shall want missed its companion, For My will lack her mate. For it is her mate: for my mouth it hath mouth — it hath commanded, his mouth that has given the commanded, and his spirit it And His spirit — He hath order, and his Spirit will hath gathered them. And he gathered them. And He hath gather them together. He hath cast the lot for them, and cast for them a lot, And His allots their portions; his his hand hath divided it unto hand hath apportioned [it] to measure. They will possess it them by line: they shall possess to them by line, Unto the age they forever and dwell there from it for ever, from generation to possess it, To all generations generation to generation. shall they dwell they dwell in it! (YLT) generation to generation. therein. (KJV)

(NIV)

ETERNAL DESTRUCTION — v9,10 Isaiah speaks of the destruction in terms which remind us of Sodom and Gomorrah, describing the land as a perpetual wasteland of burning pitch and brimstone. *Verse 10's primary emphasis is upon the perpetuity of the destruction. Each line begins with a stronger phrase to denote endlessness. "The everlasting punishment which would fall upon it is depicted in figures and colours, suggested by the proximity of Edom to the Dead Sea, and the volcanic character of this mountainous country. The unquenchable fire (for which compare Isa 66:24), and the eternally ascending smoke (cf., Rev 19:3), prove that the end of all things is referred to. The prophet meant primarily, no doubt, that the punishment announced would fall upon the land of Edom, and within its geographical boundaries; but this particular punishment represented the punishment of all nations, and all men who were Edomitish in their feelings and conduct towards the congregation of Jehovah."* [K&D, Isaiah] "No idea of ruin could be more sublime; no idea of the vengeance of God more terrible. This image has been copied by John to describe the future woes of the wicked (Rev 14:11), and of mystical Babylon (Rev 18:9,18; 19:2,3)." [Barnes, Notes on OT]

WASTELAND INHABITED BY WILD CREATURES — v11-15 The picture of these verses is one of an uninhabited wasteland which has become the habitat of animals. *"Precise identification of these creatures matters little, for the general thrust of the prophet's thought is clear. Edom will become a desolate place, fit only for creatures of the wild.... Just as nomads rejoice to find terrain that has been abandoned by its inhabitants, so the birds and beasts of the wilderness will move into the land whose people have suffered God's judgment."* [Grogan, Isaiah] 'God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation' (NIV), 'And He hath stretched out over her A line of vacancy, and stones of emptiness' (YLT) have an ironic tone about them since the line and plumb bob are tools of construction, not destruction. *"The level and the measure are commonly employed for the purpose of building up; but here Jehovah is represented as using these for the purpose of pulling down, inasmuch as He carries out this negative reverse of building with the same rigorous exactness as that with which a builder carries out his well-considered plan, and throws Edom back into a state of desolation and desert, resembling the disordered and shapeless chaos of creation."* [K&D, Isaiah] Verses 12,13 speaks of the downfall of the palaces and fortresses of the land, becoming a habitat of animals and weeds once vacant. *"The construction specifies that it is not merely that the land goes up in thorns, but in particular the busiest and most important places."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

DEMONIC ACTIVITY? — Verse 14 is interpreted by some as demonic figures. Oswalt says this is possible but considering the verses immediately before and after this verse speaks of regular animals, he interprets these words in the same manner. The Hebrew word *satyr* (*he-goat* – Oswalt; *satyr* – KJV; *goat* – YLT; *wild goats* – NIV) is used of a (goat-shaped?) idol in Lev 17:7; 2 Chron 11:15. The Hebrew word *lilit* (*night-bird* – Oswalt; *screech owl* – KJV; *night-owl* – YLT; *night creatures* – NIV) is the name applied to a well-known female night demon in late Jewish tales (cp Tobit 3:8). That this verse refers to spiritual wickedness is as old as the LXX which translates ‘*the wild beasts of the desert*’ as *daimonia*, ‘*demons*’. “*Liiliith*, lit., the creature of the night, was a female demon of the popular mythology; according to the legends, it was a malicious fairy that was especially hurtful to children, like some of the fairies of our own fairy tales. There is life in Edom still; but what a caricature of that which once was there! In the very spot where the princes of Edom used to proclaim the new king, satyrs now invite one another to dance (Isa 13:21); and there kings and princes once slept in their palaces and country houses, the liiliith, which is most at home in horrible places, finds, as though after a prolonged search, the most convenient and most comfortable resting-place.” [K&D, *Isaiah*] “*The screech-owl* – Margin, ‘*Night-monster*.’ The word ... properly denotes a night-spectre — a creature of Jewish superstition. The rabbis describe it in the form of a female elegantly dressed that lay in wait for children at night — either to carry them off, or to murder them.” [Barnes, Notes on OT]

CONCLUSION: THIS DESTRUCTION IS JUDGEMENT FROM THE LORD — Verse 16,17 concludes not only this section but also the entire poem. The emphasis is upon the completeness of the destruction: *the Lord decreed the wild animals to inhabit the deserted areas and none will be missing from that plan. How much more so will the hand of the Lord be upon the lands that will be destroyed in the first place.*

The Garden (35:1-10)

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE DESERT AND THE GARDEN — “In what Skinner calls ‘a brilliant contrast,’ this chapter stands over against ch. 34. There the luxuriant land of Edom was turned to a desert. Here the desert is changed into a garden. What desert is changed is not defined ... [It is] likely that no particular place is intended. Rather, *just as Edom in ch. 34 represented the nations in general, so here the desert represents the total world: physical, social, and spiritual, which, human arrogance having destroyed, God in his grace can make to bloom. Whereas trusting the nations results in a desert, trusting God results in a garden.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “*Exalted passages of Scripture often suffer at the hands of their readers because they tend not to be read in their contexts. The reader of Rom 8 would profit much from noting the immense change of atmosphere that takes place at the opening of chapter 9. So here the beauty of chapter 35 is enhanced if anything by contrast with the picture of wild desolation that ends chapter 34.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] The poem divides itself into three paragraphs, producing an effect which moves from the general to the particular with the most particular promise being joyous fellowship with God:

- vv. 1-4 an introduction which promises the desert’s blossoming and offers encouragement to the faint-hearted
- vv. 5-7 elaborate on the promise with a declaration of salvation, using two figures: the infirm being healed and water bursting forth in the desert
- vv. 8-10 speaks of the highway the ransomed may use to come to God

The Garden — The Promise (35:1-4)

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.” (NIV)

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and 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. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. (KJV)

They joy from the wilderness and dry place, And rejoice doth the desert, and flourish as the rose, Flourishing it doth flourish, and rejoice, Yea, [with] joy and singing, The honour of Lebanon hath been given to it, The beauty of Carmel and Sharon, They — they see the honour of Jehovah, The majesty of our God. Strengthen ye the feeble hands, Yea, the stumbling knees strengthen. Say to the hastened of heart, ‘Be strong, Fear not, lo, your God; vengeance cometh, The recompence of God, He Himself doth come and save you.’ (YLT)

THE CAUSE OF THE DESERT CHANGING — “With something of the same suddenness as in 8:22,23, the picture changes: in ch. 34 Edom has become a gloomy wilderness full of unclean animals. But suddenly the wilderness is a place of rejoicing, filled with blooming flowers. One can only ask what has happened. The author keeps his readers in suspense until he gives a partial answer in v. 2 and then a fuller one in v. 4. The answer is God.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE SHARING OF GOD’S GLORY — “The prophet does not say that the wilderness will burst into bloom with the crocus but like it (v. 2). Probably he has in mind the transformation that comes over a land when winter ends and spring, with its characteristic flowers, suddenly comes with the advent of a few warm days. The whole face of the earth is changed. So will it be with the desert. Lebanon’s glory is found of course in its wonderful cedars, while Carmel and the plain of Sharon that runs south from it were also covered with trees and other plant life. *In the Bible the glory of God is often manifested in history, but here it is seen in nature. The beauty and splendor of transformed nature will be seen to be a reflection of the beauty and splendor of the Creator and Redeemer (cf. 40:5).*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “*Throughout the book the theme of glory is present. God wants to share his glory with his creation, but any attempt by the creatures to produce their own glory will end in disaster. Thus it is appropriate in this segment (chs. 34 and 35), which sums up the two ways — God or the nations — that this theme should appear. If we will give God his glory, then he will give his to us.*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH ARISES FROM HOPE IN GOD — Verse 3 gives drooping, feeble hands and shaking knees as a figure of helplessness induced by fear. ‘What is one to do as we’re confronted by powerful, ruthless nations?’ **But God’s word is a word of encouragement.** “The prophet returns briefly to his age and the fear that gripped the hearts of so many of his people in the face of the external threat (see esp. 7:2-9). Fear in the heart (v. 4) affects

the ability of hands to work for God and of feet to walk in his ways (v. 3). The command is reminiscent of the often-repeated command of God to Joshua to be strong and very courageous (Deut 31:6-7, 23; Josh 1:6-7, 9, 18).” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

PEACE ON EARTH WILL ONLY COME AFTER SIN IS JUDGED — “The link between chapter 34 and chapter 35 is emphasized, not only by the contrasting pictures of topographical desolation and blessing, but also by the use of *naqam* (‘vengeance’) in both 34:8 and here in v. 4. *Some have found the reference here to divine retributive vengeance a somewhat discordant note in such a context. Biblical realism, however, requires that peace be the result of righteousness (cf. 11:4-9; 32:16-18), and righteousness demands the punishment of sin. Only when God has judged the enemies of his people can his salvation in all its fullness be theirs.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

The Garden — The Declaration of Salvation (35:5-7)

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. (NIV)

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 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: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. (KJV)

Then opened are eyes of the blind, And ears of the deaf are unstopped, Then leap as a hart doth the lame, And sing doth the tongue of the dumb, For broken up in a wilderness have been waters, And streams in a desert. And the mirage hath become a pond, And the thirsty land fountains of waters, In the habitation of dragons, Its place of couching down, a court for reed and rush. (YLT)

HAS THIS BEEN FULFILLED? — “In view of the frequent references to spiritual blindness and deafness in passages like 6:9-10 and 29:9-12, and the promise that one day spiritual sight and hearing will be restored to the people (29:18), we are at once inclined to interpret v. 5 — and in harmony with it v. 6 — in spiritual terms. We must, however, note that Luke 7:18-23 appears to allude to this chapter; and in it our fiord takes the language literally and physically. In fact, we may be able to understand it at more than one level, for physical and spiritual sight and hearing have a symbolic relationship; and God’s ultimate kingdom in which his people will have glorified bodies and a perfected spirituality will be characterized by both.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “The bodily defects mentioned here there is no reason for regarding as figurative representations of spiritual defects. The healing of bodily defects, however, is merely the outer side of what is actually effected by the coming of Jehovah (for the other side, comp. Isa 32:3-4). And so, also, the change of the desert into a field abounding with water is not a mere poetical ornament; for in the last times, the era of redemption, nature itself will really share in the glory which proceeds from the manifested God to His redeemed.” [K&D, *Isaiah*] “That this prophecy was at least partly fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ may be seen in the way in which he appropriated these figures for himself (Luke 7:22; Mark 7:37).” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

The Garden — The Highway to God (35:8-10)

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. (NIV)

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. 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. (KJV)

And a highway hath been there, and a way, And the 'way of holiness' is called to it, Not pass over it doth the unclean, And He Himself [is] by them, Whoso is going in the way — even fools err not. No lion is there, yea, a destructive beast Ascendeth it not, it is not found there, And walked have the redeemed, And the ransomed of Jehovah return, And have entered Zion with singing. And joy age-during on their head, Joy and gladness they attain, And fled away have sorrow and sighing! (YLT)

A LAND OF PURITY — “In direct contrast with 34:10, this verse asserts that in God’s country, as opposed to Man’s, communication and travel is easy. Sin divides but true holiness unites. This is not the spurious holiness which totes up its achievements (66:3-5), but that genuine Godlikeness which is the result of an experience of cleansing like Isaiah’s (ch. 6). There the cleansing was received by Isaiah alone, but in the last days many from the entire nation will receive it.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *‘The unclean will not journey on it ... wicked fools will not go about on it’ – fool is not a simpleton but a morally perverse person who knowingly oppose God’s truth. “This is the apex of the eschatological vision: a day when the people of God can be set free from their own sins and the sins of others, when they can come home to their God and be fully restored to his image, when a lifelong struggle to avoid grief and pain will be ended in their being overwhelmed by gladness and joy. This is the hope of biblical faith. To be sure, there are foretastes in this life, foreshadowings of what is to come. Furthermore, there is a sense in which it is true that virtue is its own reward. But if the faith is shorn of its eschatological promises, what remains is but a shell. If God is God at all, then we may believe all his promises.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]*

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.’

— Isaiah 35:3,4 NIV