

"A highway will be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way, and fools will not wander on it!" (Isaiah 35:8)

Two weeks ago, we saw how Isaiah continued the theme of God's judgment for sin and His "wrath against the nations." And he called for all the nations and all the people of the world to draw near to hear and to realize that there was coming a day when God would judge the nations! When "the armies of the world would be utterly destroyed, when the mountains would be drenched with blood, and when the host of heaven would be worn away, and the sky rolled back as a scroll"! The coming "day of the Lord," or the time known as the Tribulation period! (But would people of the world listen?)

Edom was singled out as representative of the rest of the nations of the world, whose overthrow would be reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when human leaders would be no more, and where only thorns and thistles, and wild animals of all types, would occupy the land!

Remember how Motyer noted that "it is the Lord who determines when the story comes to an end...and that while these passages of God's wrath are hard to take, the Scripture is clear"! "Read the book of the Lord," Isaiah says, and see for yourself how all that God has to say has (or will) come to pass!

Our lesson on Isaiah 34 didn't have a particularly happy ending, but we said to wait for the good news that Isaiah had for us in chapter 35! And that set us up for our lesson Tuesday night!

And what a contrast it was, and will be! God who will one day turn the world into a barren desert (in chapter 34) will, at a later day, transform it into a beautiful garden! The curse will be turned into a blessing! Verse 1 says "the wilderness and the desert will be glad, and Arabah will rejoice and blossom profusely, like a crocus" (and the Garden of Eden)!

References to rejoicing and gladness begin and end this passage, bracketing its contents, and forming what Constable calls "an inclusio"! Baxter puts it this way: "In chapter 34 we are plunged into the 'great tribulation' at the end of the present age, and then brought through to the lovely climax of the Millennium, in chapter 35"!

Isaiah sees things getting worse before they get better! And it seems like we're actually seeing this happening before our very eyes as things in our world seem to be worsening almost daily, just as Isaiah prophesied! (Interestingly, Kevin Clark, one of our fellow MOBsters, has been actively tracking world events, "through a Biblical lens"--something he says God "has put on his heart"--and concludes that "events predicted over 2,000 years ago, including in Matthew 24, are lining up exactly as predicted"! And quickly! It seems "the world is falling apart," he notes, but "it's actually falling into place"! Our God is sovereign over all!)

Isaiah 35 looks beyond the seemingly imminent Tribulation to the coming Messianic reign when everything will be transformed by God for the better--far better than we could ever imagine, beginning with nature itself! (Talk about a "reset"!)

Wiersbe writes that all of nature eagerly looks forward to the coming of the Lord, for "it (somehow) knows that it will be set free from the curse of the fall (in Genesis 3:17-19), and share the glory of the kingdom"!

The apostle Paul picks up on this, in Romans 8:19-22, where he notes how "the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childhood together until now...but eagerly awaits the time when it will be set free from its slavery to corruption in the freedom of the glory of the children of God"!

The time is coming! Isaiah says, in verse 2 that the regions of Lebanon and Carmel and Sharon--three of the most fruitful places in the land--will see a newfound fruitfulness as they "see the glory and majesty of our God"! And notes, in Isaiah 55:12-13, that "the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees will clap their hand..."! (We can only imagine!)

And so, Isaiah says to those who are left (in verses 3-5) to "encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble, and say to those with anxious hearts to take courage and fear not, (because) the Lord is coming to save them"!

"Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped...the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy...and waters will break forth in the wilderness..." And on and on!

Interesting that Jesus would cite this very prophesy (in Luke 7:18-23) to encourage John the Baptist who was in prison and beginning to doubt, to assure him that He was in fact the promised Messiah--giving him, and us, a preview of what would happen in a coming age!

In verse 8, Isaiah prophesies that also, in that day, "a highway will be there...and it will be called the Highway of Holiness...for those who walk that way"! For the "redeemed"! The "ransomed of the Lord" who will "return and come with joyful shouting to Zion"! (Note the "everlasting joy" and "gladness"--to establish the "inclusio" of Isaiah!)

Interesting that Jesus would say (in John 14: 6) that "I am the way, the truth and the life...and that no one comes to the Father but through Me"! Also that Christianity was first known as "the Way"! And that Saul (in Acts 9) would be confronted by Christ as he was on his way to arrest anyone he found "belonging to the Way"!

And speaking of "redemption"! Galatians 3:13 says that "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles (like us!), so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith!"

And the Psalmist (in Psalm 107:2) says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary!" (We sang the song: "Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it; redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Redeemed by His infinite mercy, His child and forever I am! Redeemed, redeemed...! And on we sang!)

What a glorious chapter! Isaiah 35! Where Isaiah prophesies that everything (beginning with nature itself) and everyone (who believes, and "walks the way") will be "ransomed" and "redeemed"!

The desert "will be glad and rejoice and blossom...and all the redeemed will come with everlasting gladness and joyful shouting to Zion"!

Now that's what you'd call a real "inclusio"!

Men, rejoice and be glad! And spread the good news!

Lowell