

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
A Summation - Isaiah 34 & 35
November 25, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

Just as the “Little Apocalypse” (24-27) took a cosmic look at God’s judgment and summarized the previous chapters (13-23), so here, Isaiah takes a step back again and considers the judgment (chapter 34) and the blessings (chapter 35) of God. These two chapters summarize, in a sense, what Isaiah has been saying from chapter 28 to 33.

“The central theological statement is that God will ultimately uphold his people in Zion by executing his wrathful judgment on all the rebellious nations on the earth (34:1-2, 8)” (Smith, 571). Once God has judged all the nations, the only nation left standing will be God’s own - the Kingdom of His beloved Son.

A CALL TO THE NATIONS - 34:1-4:

Once again, Isaiah draws attention from the nations of the world, the neighbors of his people Israel: nations, peoples, earth, world. Consider the commands Isaiah gives the nations:

1. Come near *to hear* (obey);
2. Listen
3. Hear (obey)

“These paragraphs contain many imperative verbs that exhort the audience to change its worldview” (Smith, 578). In chapter 35, Isaiah is going to talk about the “Highway of Holiness.” Here, Isaiah is calling on all the nations to listen and learn about that highway that leads to holiness, that leads to righteousness, that leads to redemption. Yes, this highway is open to all the nations, all the peoples, the whole earth, the entire world.

Why should the nations hear, obey, and listen? “For” the Lord’s indignation is against the nations. His wrath (notice the synonym; another is found in verse 8) against their armies.

As a result of God’s indignation, wrath, and vengeance, the armies of the nations are destroyed (the past tense shows the completed action). God has handed them over to the slaughter. “Although the language used is military, describing the slaughter of the enemy on the field of battle, in the nature of the case the destruction is spiritual, accomplished by God’s sword” (Young, 430).

Verse 3 elaborates on that point: the slain are thrown out and their corpses give a stench and the mountains are drenched in blood.

As we saw back in 24-27, in the “Little Apocalypse,” here we have another apocalyptic image of God’s judgment - verse 4. I do not believe that this imagery is referring to some complete and utter destruction of the physical world. It is using cosmic language to portray God’s destruction of the world of the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Ammonites, the Arabians, the Israelites of the north, the Edomites, on whom Isaiah will focus his attention beginning in verse 5.

Other writers will use parallel imagery for the coming of God’s judgment - Ezekiel 32:7-8; Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:12-14.

We are going to see God’s holiness in chapter 35. The flipside of God’s holiness is God’s justice, His judgment: “If the Lord were not a holy God, and if his holiness were not a

positive force against sin and sinners, there would be no need for salvation (Rom. 1:16-18)" (Motyer, 240).

JUDGMENT AGAINST EDOM - 34:5-15:

God directs His attention to Edom, the ancient (and related) enemies of Israel. Edom's attitude toward Israel paralleled that of Esau's attitude toward Jacob. Yet, it is God's sword that is satiated, or satisfied to the full. Again, portrayed in past tense to emphasize it is sure to happen. "Behold," Isaiah draws the Israelites' attention to what follows - God's sword will descend on Edom in judgment. He has devoted them to destruction.

The "God as Warrior" (verses 6-7) motif has been seen as early as the song of deliverance by Miriam in Exodus 15. God's sword is filled with blood; sated with the fat of evildoers, portrayed here as animals used in sacrifice - lambs & goats and rams. "...to sin is to forfeit one's life into the hands of God as a sacrifice" (Oswalt, 606). Oswalt goes on (607): "The language here is of sacrifice, reminding the reader that unless someone provides a sacrifice for our sins, we must ourselves become that sacrifice."

This sacrifice was in Bozrah, was the capital of Edom. See also Obadiah 8-9. In fact, it was in the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians that "the bitter hostility of Edom became notorious" (Motyer, 241).

In keeping with the imagery of God's judgment pictured as sacrifices, in verse 7, Isaiah compares the evil to wild oxen, young bulls. Their land is soaked with blood and the fat from the sacrifice from the slaughter makes the dust of the ground greasy. As post-cross disciples of God, we ought to be able to see Jesus in this imagery. You and I know that Isaiah 53 is only a dozen chapters away.

Vengeance (verse 8) is what balances out the scales of justice. In imagery reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18), the streams of Edom will be turned into pitch and its dirt turned into brimstone and burning pitch.

This judgment, portrayed as fiery indignation from God, will not be quenched night or day (verse 10). Its smoke ascending forever, from generation to generation. So desolate will Edom become that no one will pass through her land. In fact, only wild animals fit for living in dry and deserted regions will dwell in that land: owl, hedgehog, another species of owl, raven. In verse 11, God has measured Edom and determined when, how, where, and to what extent He will punish her - the line of desolation and the plumb line of emptiness. The words "desolation" and "emptiness" are found in the creation of the world in Genesis 1:2, suggesting to us that God is going to *uncreate* the nation of Edom as if He were uncreating the entire world.

This is in contrast to God's picture of the new Jerusalem, the city of the Messiah, which will be measured using justice as the measuring line and righteousness as the level (28:17).

Edom will have no one available to be her leader or her king (verse 12). There will be no military defense as thorns will come up in her fortified towers and nettles and thistles in her fortified cities (verse 13). These defenses will also be dwelling places for jackals and ostriches (verse 14), desert creatures, wolves, the hairy goat, the night creatures - these will be all that finds a resting place in Edom once God finishes with her. The tree snake and the hawks will dwell there as well (vs 15).

YOU CAN COUNT ON IT! - 34:16-17:

Isaiah calls on both Israel and Edom and the nations, for that matter, to seek from the book of Jehovah God to see what He is going to do and consider the fulfillment of what Isaiah is predicting. Nothing that Jehovah God says will fall to the ground. "His mouth has commanded, and His Spirit has gathered them."

God has cast lots to distinguish whom He will save and whom He will destroy; His hand has divided them by lines. Those whom God will save will possess their inheritance forever. From generation to generation, they will dwell in their possession.

GOD WILL SHOW HIS SALVATION IN NATURE - 35:1-2:

In looking at the positive side of God's nature, in this chapter, Isaiah continues with this "desert" theme he has used in chapter 34 but here, he portrays the desert as being revived and brought to life. This chapter is, in the words of Motyer (243), "one of the most beautiful poems ever written," based on the exodus. Perhaps the Israelites felt like *they* were the ones living in a desert, not Edom. But those who "mourn" will be "comforted."

Verse 1 - The desert and the wilderness will be glad. Clearly inanimate objects cannot be glad. The desert and wilderness are metaphors for God's people, for the remnant, the faithful. The "Arabah" (desert) will rejoice and blossom. In fact, verse 2, it will blossom profusely (inf. abs.). It will rejoice with rejoicing and shouting with joy. Lebanon will enjoy this new found peace and security, as will Carmel and Sharon. They will all see the glory of the Lord and the majesty of God, just as Isaiah did back in chapter 6! "Joy is always a by-product of the presence of God in his world" (Oswalt, 622).

They just need to imitate Isaiah's humility: "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5).

Let me suggest to you as well that in the sermon on the mount, when Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth," (Matt. 5:5), this is the "earth" He's talking about - a dwelling place made available through the Spirit of God, made available by the blood of Jesus, a spiritual dwelling place of gladness, rejoicing, and shouting for joy. A literal, physical earth that fulfills this description is just not biblical.

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GOD WILL ENCOURAGE THE WEARY - 35:3-6a:

Isaiah calls on his people, the faithful Jews, the remnant, to encourage those who are exhausted (literally, with slack hands) and strengthen the feeble (literally with shaking knees).

Isaiah calls on his people to "say" to those with an anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God *is coming* with vengeance. The recompense of God will come; But He will save you." Vengeance "takes account of the wrong suffered by his [God's] people; retribution repays the wrong done to his people" (Motyer, 245).

At that point, God will open the eyes of the blind and unstop the ears of the deaf. The lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. In the context of Isaiah, we should first, I believe, understand this imagery to refer to those who were spiritually blind and spiritually deaf. Now, they will see. But we will see another fulfillment of this imagery in the coming of the Messiah who will literally open the eyes of the blind and open the ears of the deaf and make the lame to walk. Compare 11:5 for a summary of the work of Jesus in this regard.

The man born blind in John 9 makes a clear parallel between being physically blind and spiritually blind. The man healed of his physical blindness is able to spiritually see Jesus as the Son of God. The Pharisees who could physically see were, in contrast, spiritually blind.

GOD WILL RENOVATE THE LAND- 35:6b-10:

This blessing from the Lord is pictured in verse 6b as water for a dry land and that imagery is continued in verse 7. The scorched land will become a pool. The thirsty ground will become springs of water. In the place that had been a feeding ground for jackals, it will become populated again, a "resting place." "Once again poetic imagery resists reduction to mere literalism. The point is that God's coming to his people (35:4) has its purpose in the people coming to him in holy lives for worship and fellowship (2:2-4; 4:2-6; 25:6-9; 66:18-23)" (Oswalt, 625).

Also, remember back in chapter 33 when Isaiah talked punishing Judah if she followed through with her alliance with Egypt, if she followed through with her trust in man that God said traveling would cease. "The highways are desolate, the traveler has ceased," 33:8 says.

But now that the King has come and brought blessings to the land, a new highway is open. A highway not to Egypt nor to Assyria (vs 8), but a highway that leads to holiness. The word "holy" is found 60 times in Isaiah, almost once per chapter. "Holiness" is found only here. A highway will stretch through this new land, blessed by the God of heaven and it will be a highway that leads to holiness.

There are 10 verses in Isaiah that mention a "highway." The word "way" is used even more frequently - 46 times. Some occasions of "highway" (cf. 7:3) are literal roads, like one on which Isaiah met King Ahaz. The next reference sees a highway leading from Assyria (11:16) which will be a highway on which Egyptians will join the Assyrians in worship *alongside* the Jews (19:23). In 49:11-12, as God foresees the gathering of people into His spiritual kingdom, He says, "I will make all My mountains a road, and My highways will be raised up. Behold, these will come from afar; and lo, these will come from the north and the west."

Finally, in 62:10, Isaiah calls on Israel to engage in a type of evangelism: "Go through, go through the gates, Clear the way for the people; Build up, build up the highway, Remove the stones, lift up a standard over the peoples. Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, "Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him."

That "standard," according to Isaiah 11:10, is the root of Jesse for "the peoples," a "sign" (NASB) to which the "nations" will resort. That standard, the root of Jesse, will bring rest to all people as they receive glory from the God of heaven. I suggest it is in the light of Isaiah's imagery of this highway (as well as Malachi's elaboration in 3:1) that gives us Jesus' statement that He is the "Way," the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Consequently, the church of Christ came to be called the "Way" in the book of Acts (9:2; 19:2, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The church, then, is the "Highway of Holiness" because it is washed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Remember the evildoers and those who work iniquity Isaiah criticized back in 1:4? They can't go. The unclean cannot travel on the highway of holiness. The last time the word "unclean" was used in Isaiah, it was in 6:5 where Isaiah pictures himself as of "unclean lips." These are not men who are unclean because they ate unclean animals; this is a description of their spiritual lives. The highway of holiness will be for him who walks on the way of holiness, who follows the way of holiness. Isaiah will tell us in just a few chapters, chapter 40, that someone is

going to come to prepare that way. He will clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness. He will make smooth in the desert a highway for our God (40:3). Matthew (3:3), Mark (1:3); Luke (3:4-6); John (1:23) and Jesus Himself are unanimous that the one who would prepare that way is John the baptizer. Without a doubt, John came to prepare the way for Jesus. Please observe then, from 40:3, that "Lord" (or "Jehovah") is synonymous with "God." If, then, Jesus is the "Lord" for whom John prepared the way, then Jesus is also "God."

Also about that way, no fools will wander on it (35:8). No lion or other vicious beast will be there. Only the "redeemed" will be there. This is only the third time the word "redeemed" is used by Isaiah. The first time is back in 1:27 when Isaiah says "Zion will be redeemed with justice and her repentant ones with righteousness." Observe there that "redeemed" ones is parallel with "repentant ones." If Israel (or we) will be redeemed, Israel (we) must repent. "Repent" is not an important *word* for Isaiah, only being used twice (30:15), but the concept is clearly Isaianic.

We also notice from 1:27 that "justice" and "righteousness" are parallel ideas. Man will be redeemed through a justice act of God, through a righteous act of God. All of this points to the sacrifice of the righteous Son of God. No wonder Romans has the greatest concentration of quotations from Isaiah of any NT book. In Isaiah, the word "redeem" comes to be used quite frequently from here on. It is used twice before now. But from here on, Isaiah will use the word 22 more times. The verb "redeem," carries the idea of taking over the needs of someone else. In the physical sense, taking over the physical needs of someone, best illustrated in the account of Boaz and Ruth. Spiritually, of course, it carries the of God, through Jesus Christ, accepting the need of dying for sins of mankind.

As in verse 10 of chapter 35: "The ransomed of the Lord will return and come with joyful shouting to Zion." If I were teaching a college class, one of the topics of a research paper would be: "How Does Isaiah Use the Expression 'Zion' in His Prophecies?" It seems to me we have another reference to that spiritual Zion, the mountain of the house of the Lord we saw at the very beginning in 2:1-4. Here, the redeemed come to Zion "with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." Why? Because they are redeemed. Because they are on the Highway of Holiness.

Remember back in 25:8, in the middle of the "Little Apocalypse," Isaiah gives a song of praise for God's favor. In that song, Isaiah writes: God "will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken." Those are the same sentiments we have here in 35:10. This is a picture - both, it seems to me - are pictures of life lived in the Messiah, in the spiritual world made available by His blood but ultimately fulfilled in heaven.

FINAL NOTES

- God wants man to follow His plans.
- Complacency will not suffice.
- Man must give his ultimate allegiance to God.
- God has exciting days ahead of man.

Next week:
Hezekiah's Reign - Isaiah 36-39