

The Garden of God's Vengeance – Isaiah 35

Introduction – The contrast between Isaiah 34 and 35 is stark and brilliant, like deep darkness to overwhelming light, like night and day, like death and resurrection. In 34, the fertile land of Edom was turned to a desert; in 35, the desert is changed into a garden. In 34, we saw that Edom represented the nations and unbelieving Israel and brought the Lord's vengeance. In 35, it turns out that the vengeance of the Lord brings forth a garden of new life and the way for the ransomed to come to Zion with singing and great joy.

Gardens from Deserts (vv1-4) – Edom was slaughtered like a sacrificial victim (34:5-7); Israel will blossom like a rose. Joy and singing will be heard and the glory of the LORD will be seen (v2).

This chapter is speaking to a future glory in Isaiah's day, a hope which is to strengthen their faith as they go through trials. The writer of Hebrews quotes verse 3 in Heb 12:12-13 to encourage those believers who are experiencing the Lord's chastening (Heb 12:1-11). God was going to save Judah in Isaiah's day; God was going to save the new, believing Judah in the first century AD as well. In neither case was the first application limited to a hope in the beyond, after the final judgment. In both cases, the coming vengeance of the Lord was not something for believers to fear, but rather to rejoice in.

Waters of Life (vv5-7) – When this vengeance/salvation is brought forth, what shall be the sign of its appearing? Some of the signs are the works of healing (vv5-6). Another set of signs will be waters springing forth from deserts (vv6-7). But notice the connection of the healing to the gift of water: it is a causal connection. Eyes will be opened *“for”* waters break out in the wilderness.

Jesus quotes vv5-6 as he quells the doubts of John the Baptist who sends his messengers to ask of Jesus, *“are you the promised One?”* (Matt 11:2-5). Jesus is the Promised One because He is fulfilling Isaiah 35. And in the story of John the Baptist and Jesus, the preaching of the kingdom of heaven began with John preaching in *“the wilderness of Judea”* (Matt 3:1), where he baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Matt 3:13-17). Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, is that water of everlasting life that springs forth and covers the land with new life (John 4:13-14) reversing the curse and bringing healing to the nations (Rev 22:1-2).

Highway for the Ransomed (vv8-10) – These verses hearken back to the Exodus, they look forward to the return from exile, they point to the only Way to the Father, and they foreshadow the bringing together of all nations in Christ. Jesus makes clear that He is the only Way (John 14:6) and it is in that Way only that *“the redeemed shall walk, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return”* (Isaiah 35:9-10).

Of course there is a final application of this chapter at the final day. But just as God delivered Israel in the Exodus, just as Isaiah will see Assyria put down and Judah saved, and more importantly, just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, we can expect and live in the hope of ongoing manifestations, even growing and progressing manifestations, of these promises in this age. Jesus is going to save the world, the Spirit is going to fill the earth, and the nations are going to flow to mount Zion. And it is precisely in times like John found himself (in prison) or the Hebrew Christians (in persecution) that we are to find ourselves singing Isaiah 35 with faith, for *“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:1). The singing is to begin because of the promise and not only when the promise has arrived. Or, another way to look at it is that in Christ, the promise has arrived and is now working itself out in your life and the life of the world. And another way to look at it is that *“you have come to Mount Zion...to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant”* (Heb 12:22, 24) now, in time and space, in this service of worship.

Thoughts on Everlasting Joy and Singing – *“the desert shall rejoice,...the rose shall...rejoice even with joy and singing”* (vv1-2).

“The tongue of the dumb sing” (v6). *“The ransomed...shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads....sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”* (v10). The pictures are of the entire new creation caught up in everlasting, joyful song. Where is that everlasting joy on your head? Does it feel like its missing? The first thing to note is that the everlasting joy is the song of Jesus the Redeemer who is singing over you with great joy. It was for the joy set before Him that He died for you and now, while your experience of joy may wax and wane here, His is an everlasting joy and it is upon you. Second, when you come to Mount Zion in worship, you are joining an innumerable choir singing an everlasting song of praise that is not dependent on you, but on the One who is full of joy over you. Third, you are invited and summoned to enter into that joy, but you are not to find that joy down in your autonomous being. You are to find that joy up and out of you, over and above you, all around you in the works of God in His New Creation. You enter into that joy by faith regardless of your circumstances (2 Cor 12:8-10, Phil 4:4) and even because of those hard circumstances (Matt 5:10-12, James 1:2).

And all of this is just practicing. Joyful singing began at creation with the morning stars and the sons of God (Job 38:7). Joy is always a by-product of the presence of God in His world – and in our hearts (2 Pet 1:19, Rev 22:16). This song has taken on the body of the church, the redeemed. We are that song. We are His new song. *“Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory”* (Psalm 98:1). By faith in Christ, you are called to see that you are that song.