

WHEN THE DESERT BLOSSOMS
Isaiah 35

Intro: I have mentioned repeatedly in our study of Isaiah's prophecy that the first section deals with judgment. This includes chapters 1 through 35--the chapter we are to consider now.

The judgment begins with Judah for her many sins against God, but then it becomes world-wide in its scope. In chapters 13 to 23 we saw the judgments which were announced against Judah's neighbors, but then in chapters 24 through 27 the judgments are seen to be world-wide.

After dealing briefly with Judah in 5 woes from chapter 28-32, we have a sixth woe in chapter 33, which many feel is against the Assyrians (although Assyria is not mentioned). It is definitely against the Gentiles, and leads the way into the two concluding chapters of this section, 34, 35, where "the day of the Lord's vengeance" (34:8) is clearly in view, ultimately leading to the fulfillment of God's blessings to the nation Israel.

Two things can be said of the judgments in Isaiah's prophecy:

- 1) Some have been fulfilled.
- 2) Others have not.

It seems very obvious that the blessings anticipated are millennial blessings which constitute a major part of Israel's hope as a nation.

Judah was to be judged for her many sins.

The nations were to be judged for their sins, but also for their treatment of Israel (or Judah). This was brought out early in Isaiah's prophecy. See Isa. 10:5-19.

The judgment of the nations is in Isa. 34; the blessing of God upon His people follows in Isa. 35.

Nothing like the judgments of chapter 34 has ever taken place. "Edom" (v. 5) is singled out because she was especially vicious in her opposition of Israel, but the judgments go far beyond her.

Now it is important for us to see the prophecies which were made in Isaiah's day, with what they meant to him, and to the people of Judah. But it is also important to see the lessons and the encouragements which these chapters have for us today.

I. THE MESSAGE TO JUDAH.

- A. The ultimate overthrow of all of Judah's enemies (Isa. 34).

But the emphasis in the chapter is that this overthrow will not be by some friendly Gentile power, such as the Egyptians in whom they were inclined to trust, but by the LORD! See Isa. 34:2, 6, 8, 16, 17.

Thus, Isaiah was turning their hearts to the Lord--or seeking to do so.

It is a picture of utter desolation.

B. The consequences for Judah (Isa. 35).

1. God's promises fulfilled (Isa. 35:1, 2).
2. Parenthetical, for Isaiah, the preacher (Isa. 35:3, 4.)
3. The outcome (Isa. 35:5-10).
 - a. Upon the people (vv. 5-6a).
 - b. Upon the land (vv. 6b-7).
 - c. The highway of holiness (vv. 8-10).

Here we see the moral purification of the people which nothing shall change, followed by the regathering of the people to Zion "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall feel away."

Thus we see how the judgments of God are designed to bring about the fulfillment of God's purposes for His people.

II. THE MESSAGE FOR TODAY.

- A. The certainty that God will ultimately fulfill all of His purposes regardless of how strongly they may be opposed.
- B. The folly of trusting in men--ourselves or in anyone else.
- C. The certainty of God's promises.

This is where we are to get our strength, and these are designed to make us trust in the Lord. See Isa. 35:3, 4 following the promises given in vv. 1, 2.

For "the desert" to "rejoice, and blossom like the rose" calls for a miraculous transformation of a desert, which

certainly means that God will work a miracle in the earth.

D. Finally, the joy connected with holiness, with a holy walk (Isa. 35:8-10).

Concl: Spurgeon says on this passage:

Twice has Israel come back from captivity: once when the tribes came out of Egypt, and the Lord led them through the wilderness; and again when they returned from banishment in Babylon, and the Lord restored them to their land. A third return some of us believe still awaits the chosen people. In the day when the grace of God shall change the hearts of Israel, the seed of Abraham shall again return into the land which God gave to their fathers by a covenant of salt. I think our text looks forward to a future age when the reproach shall be rolled away from Palestine, and her deserts shall be made to blossom as the rose. Of these future glories we say but little, for little is known by the most of us. The prophecy is, however sufficiently clear to make us expect that the Lord will make a way for the return of his ancient people, and will restore unto them the joy of his salvation (Vol. 32, p. 409).

We are speaking of two future periods: the Great Tribulation, and the Millennium. In the first the Lord will bring judgments upon the earth such as the world has never seen; in the second, blessings beyond anything that has ever been experienced by those who live on the earth.

None of this has yet taken place. All attempts to make the present-day return of the Jews to Israel a fulfillment of this prophecy, are, I believe, a misinterpretation of Scripture. We formerly heard much about this, but now when people are actually leaving Israel, many prophetic teachers are strangely silent on the subject.

The return predicted will be a miraculous return, affected by the Lord. And it will be preceded by such a time of trouble that there will be no question as to the fulfillment.