

Behold, Your God Will Come (Isaiah 34–35)

“Who Warned You to Flee from the Wrath to Come?”

In Matthew 3, we are introduced to an enigmatic, wild-eyed prophet dressed in a garment of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He lived in the Judean desert on a diet of locusts and wild honey. His message was razor sharp and crystal clear—“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He had no delusions of grandeur; he knew exactly who he was and what he had been sent to do. “I am not the Christ,” he said. “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said” (Jn 1:20, 23). John was the last and greatest of the prophets, the one sent to prepare Israel for the imminent advent of the Messiah.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Mt 3:11–12)

One day, as John was preaching in the wilderness beyond the Jordan, his ministry was attended by an official delegation of Jewish leaders, both Pharisees and Sadducees. It is unclear from the text (ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ) whether Matthew means to say that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to *be baptized* by John or simply to observe John’s baptism.¹ Whatever the case, John must have sensed their insincerity, their hostility, for he stopped his preaching and addressed them directly, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Mt 3:7). The implication of John’s words is that it is an insincere repentance that is not motivated by the fear of God’s wrath. They had not been warned (or, at least, they had not received John’s warning) of the wrath to come; therefore, they could not

¹ MacArthur writes, “This group was coming for baptism, the Greek preposition *epi* (for) being used in a construction that clearly indicates purpose”; John MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 63. R. T. France, on the other hand, comments, “The description of them as ‘coming to his baptism’ rather than ‘being baptized’ like the crowds in v. 6 suggests such a surveillance role, and the reception they received from John (vv. 7–10) makes it unlikely that any of them actually were baptized”; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 110.

sincerely repent; therefore, John rejected their request for baptism. John then put his finger upon the root problem, anticipating their objections and pointing to the real object of their faith:

“Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Mt 3:8–10)

That question from John’s lips rang in my ears this week as I studied Isaiah 34–35. *Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* That is precisely what Isaiah has been doing throughout this section that runs from chapter 28–39 and takes place against the backdrop of the Assyrian invasion and the siege of Jerusalem. Isaiah has been warning the people of Israel to flee the wrath to come—not the wrath of the Assyrians, but the wrath of God. In fact, the first seven chapters of this section record six woes (28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1 [this last woe is directed toward Assyria]), interspersed with glorious promises of salvation (29:17–24; 30:18–33; 32:1–20; 33:1–24). Why? Why does Isaiah repeatedly move back and forth between judgment and salvation, pronouncements of woe and of favor? Because Isaiah aims at Israel’s sincere repentance, and sincere repentance is impossible apart from fear of God’s wrath and hope of God’s mercy. Before we jump into the narrative portions of this section of Isaiah (chapter 36–39), which tell the story of the destruction of the Assyrian army and the remainder of Hezekiah’s life and reign, we have one more round of this pattern of a pronouncement of judgment followed by a promise of salvation, of cursing followed by blessing. In this way, Isaiah 34–35 function as a summary of all that we have studied in Isaiah 28–33.²

My aim this morning is the same as Isaiah’s—I desire your sincere repentance and your steadfast faith in Christ. I intend to urge you to flee from the wrath to come, and to flee to the only safe refuge—namely, the God who has come to us in human flesh to save us from His own judgment and wrath. Again, I recite the comment by the great Anglican OT commentator J. Alec Motyer, a comment that encapsulates the main message of this portion of Isaiah, and indeed the

² “These two chapters (34 and 35) stand in the same relation to 28–33 as do 24–27 to the preceding chapters 13–23”; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Volume 2, Chapters 19–39 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 428.

main message of the gospel itself: “The only way to flee from God is to flee to [God].”³ At the end of this message, if asked, “Who warned you to flee from the wrath of God?” at the very least you will be able to say, “You did.” At best, you will have found refuge in Christ.

I entitled this sermon, “Behold, your God will come,” a title drawn from Isaiah 35:3–4:

*Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!”
Behold, your God will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.” (35:3–4)*

Our God will come. He will come in vengeance for His enemies, and He will come with salvation for His people. Those two works of God—judgment and salvation—summarize the main points of Isaiah 34 and 35, respectively. Both chapters look ahead to the coming of God: Isaiah 34 to His coming in judgment upon the nations, and Isaiah 35 to His coming in salvation for His elect. Both chapters are universal and eschatological in scope and must be interpreted in light of the two advents of Christ. For when God comes to judge, He comes in the person of His Son:

“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...” (Jn 5:22)

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”
(Mt 25:31–32)*

And when God comes to save, He comes in the person of His Son:

³ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 235.

“And there is salvation in no one else [than Jesus (v. 11)], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1 Tm 2:5)

And as we know what Isaiah did not—namely, that Christ comes not once, but twice—we must interpret both the judgment and the salvation proclaimed in these chapters in that already/not yet manner to which we have become accustomed throughout our study of Isaiah.

God Will Come to Judge the Nations

In Isaiah 34, the prophet gives us a glimpse of the coming darkness that will descend upon the earth when God comes to judge the nations. In v. 1, he calls upon all nations and all peoples to give heed to his warning:

*Draw near, O nations, to hear,
and give attention, O peoples!
Let the earth hear, and all that fills it;
the world, and all that comes from it. (34:1)*

I would have simply passed this verse by as merely an introduction to the oracle (as most commentators do), had not Andrew Davis in his excellent commentary on Isaiah pointed out the mercy contained in its lines. Davis writes,

This chapter begins with God summoning the whole earth to warn everyone about the universality of his coming wrath (v. 1). This is sheer grace from a holy God; he is not obligated to give such warnings, but he gives them for the salvation of his chosen people from every nation. The elect will heed these warnings and flee to Christ; the reprobate will scoff and blow them off.⁴

⁴ Andrew M. Davis, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Isaiah* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 192.

That is true. The judgment of God described in the coming verses is certain, and it is justified by the world's sin and rebellion. It would come, and it would be just, whether or not God warned the nations and peoples of the earth. But He has. And how you respond to His warning reveals whether or not you are among the elect who will be saved, or the reprobate who will be condemned. Listen with care; hear and heed this gracious warning.

In what follows we may discern five truths regarding the coming judgment. First, in vv. 2–4 Isaiah defines the *objects* of the LORD's wrath.

*For the LORD is enraged against all the nations,
and furious against all their host;
he has devoted them to destruction,
has given them over for slaughter.
Their slain shall be cast out,
and the stench of their corpses shall rise;
the mountains shall flow with their blood.
All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and their skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall fall,
as leaves fall from the vine,
like leaves falling from the fig tree. (34:2–4)*

Who are the objects of God's wrath and judgment? I think Isaiah highlights two distinct objects.

First, God's wrath will be poured out upon the nations. Which ones? All of them. His is "enraged" (קָצַף) against all the nations; He is "furious" (חָמָה) against all their host, meaning their population. In other words, His wrath is not merely directed against the corporate whole, but against the individual sinner. Motyer writes, "Ultimately, the adage about hating the sin and loving the sinner breaks down. Sinners pay the price of their sin; the Lord exacts it."⁵ If you are outside of Christ this morning, God is enraged against you; He is furious with you. Let that truth land upon you. The God who called the cosmos into existence, and sustains creation by the word of His power, is seething with anger towards you. He has "devoted you to destruction" (הַחֲרִימָה),

⁵ Motyer, 270.

the same word used throughout the book of Joshua for what the Israelites were commanded to do to the Canaanites whom they defeated in battle—they were to utterly destroy them as an offering to God to satisfy His justice. God has given you over to “slaughter” (טבח), and He will not stop until the rotting corpses of His enemies cover the mountains and their blood flows down and fills the valleys (Rv 14:17–20; 19:17–21). Does such imagery shock you? It is intended to. It is intended to rouse you from the sinful slumber that lies upon all mankind, a slumber that leads you to imagine a God who is not holy, a God without wrath, a false and imaginary God.

Second, God’s wrath will be poured out upon the angels. The phrase “all the host of heaven” (כל-צבא השמים) does double-duty in the Hebrew Bible, referring either to the celestial bodies (sun, moon, stars) or to the angelic powers, especially the evil angelic powers. I suspect both are in view in v. 4. The first use—“All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll”—seems to refer to the celestial bodies and the dissolution of the old creation, while the second use—“all their host shall fall, as leaves from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree”—may point to the angelic powers of whom the celestial bodies were symbols.⁶ If so, then Is 34:4 would echo Is 24:21 and 27:1:

*On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven,
and the kings of the earth, on the earth. (24:21)*

*In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the
fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the
sea. (27:1; cf. 14:12–20)*

The point is that God’s wrath is directed toward all who have rebelled against him, both man and angel. And this righteous wrath will be satisfied.

⁶ “These words may speak of Satan’s demonic army being routed by God’s angelic army and hurled down or of the total destruction of the present universe, including the stars, in order to make way for the new heaven and new earth”; Davis, 192. Motyer writes, “This [the judgment of the heavenly powers] may be in mind here, but only the fabric of the heavens is mentioned and the thought may be simply that the whole universe has been caught up in human corruption and will be subject to due judgment”; Motyer, 270. Gary Smith notes, “These heavenly ‘hosts’ (NIV ‘stars’) could refer to (a) the physical stars and planets that will become dim; (b) the destruction of the pagan gods that were represented by these heavenly hosts; (c) an army of heavenly beings; or possible (d) all of the above factors are included in one holistic view of the celestial world”; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, NAC 15A (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 572n280.

The second truth about God's coming judgment revealed in Isaiah 34 regards the *instrument* of the LORD's wrath. Look at vv. 5–7:

*For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
 behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom,
 upon the people I have devoted to destruction.
The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood;
 it is gorged with fat,
 with the blood of lambs and goats,
 with the fat of the kidneys of rams.
For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah,
 a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
Wild oxen shall fall with them,
 and young steers with the mighty bulls.
Their land shall drink its fill of blood,
 and their soil shall be gorged with fat. (34:5–7)*

The instrument of the LORD's judgment is said to be his "sword" (cf. Is 27:1). I don't want to press the imagery too far; the main point of these verses is clear enough, continuing the thought of God's thorough and decisive judgment upon the wicked, and the image of the destruction of sinners as a sacrifice to God. Also, do not get hung up on the introduction of Edom (Bozrah was the capital of Edom); the scope is still universal, for Edom is a frequent symbol in Scripture for the reprobates of the earth, the enemies of God and His people (Ezk 35:1–15; Mal 1:2–5; Rom 9:13), stemming from Esau's hatred of Jacob (Gn 27:41), continuing throughout the Davidic monarchy (1 Sm 14:47; 2 Sm 8:13–14; 1 Kgs 11:15; 2 Kgs 8:20–22; Am 1:11–12; Ps 60:8–10; 83:5–6), and culminating in their notorious behavior during the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (Ps 137:7; Ob 10–14).⁷ Still, Isaiah emphasizes the "sword" (חֶרֶב) of the LORD. This is obviously a symbol; the LORD is a spirit, having no hand or arm with which to wield a sword. So what does it symbolize? It symbolizes God's word of judgment, the only instrument He needs to effect His

⁷ Motyer, 268–69.

purpose. The same God who said, “Let there be light” and there was, will say, “Let my enemies be slain” and they are dead. This truth is graphically portrayed in Revelation 19,

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Rv 19:11–16)

And in 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul says of the doom of the man of sin,

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (2 Thes 2:8)

The sword of the LORD is His word of judgment, and it is living and active, creating what it commands.

The third truth concerning God’s coming judgment regards the *devastation* of the LORD’s wrath (8–15). Continuing to use Edom as a symbol of the reprobate, Edom’s devastation pictures the devastation that awaits the unconverted sinner on the day of judgment.

*For the LORD has a day of vengeance,
a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch,
and her soil into sulfur;
her land shall become burning pitch.
Night and day it shall not be quenched;
its smoke shall go up forever.*

*From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
 none shall ever pass through it forever and ever.
 But the hawk and the porcupine shall possess it,
 the owl and the raven shall dwell in it.
 He shall stretch the line of confusion over it,
 and the plumb line of emptiness.
 Its nobles—there is no one there to call it a kingdom,
 and all its princes shall be nothing.
 Thorns shall grow over its strongholds,
 nettles and thistles in its fortresses.
 It shall be the haunt of jackals,
 an abode for ostriches.
 And wild animals shall meet with hyenas;
 the wild goat shall cry to his fellow;
 indeed, there the night bird settles
 and finds for herself a place.
 There the owl nests and lays
 and hatches and gathers her young in her shadow;
 indeed, there the hawks are gathered,
 each one with her mate. (34:8–15)*

It is quite the picture, is it not? When the day of God’s vengeance arrives, and His recompense is poured forth, Edom (the reprobate world) will be left a barren wasteland, a veritable hellscape of burning sulfur. The imagery of vv. 9–10 is picked up in Revelation 14:

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest,

day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.” (Rv 14:9–11)

Not only is it a barren and burning hellscape, but it is uninhabitable except by unclean birds and wild animals. What is perhaps most interesting in this description is the use of language from Genesis 1–3. In v. 11, Isaiah says that God “shall stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plumb line of emptiness.” “Confusion” (תהו) and “emptiness” (בהו) are the same words translated in Genesis 1:2 as “formless” and “void,” words descriptive of the earth before God’s blessing it with order and beauty. It is a picture of total desolation, as though God will sentence Edom (the reprobate world) to an existence of utter depravation devoid of everything good, true, and beautiful, a world of chaos and scalding mist. In v. 13, Isaiah says, “Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses.” The ruins of human civilization will be overgrown with the curse—“thorns” (סירי) and “thistles” (קמוש) are precisely what God said the earth would yield to sinners in Genesis 3:18.⁸ It does not take too much imagination to see in these verses a vivid description of hell—the eternal abode of the damned.

Fourth, we find the *certainty* of the LORD’s wrath depicted in vv. 16–17.

Seek and read from the book of the LORD:

Not one of these shall be missing;

none shall be without her mate.

For the mouth of the LORD has commanded,

and his Spirit has gathered them.

He has cast the lot for them;

his hand has portioned it out to them with the line;

they shall possess it forever;

from generation to generation they shall dwell in it. (34:16–17)

The specific promise of these verses is that God has given the land of Edom (the reprobate world) over to the unclean birds and wild animals of vv. 11–15. The more striking feature of

⁸ “In effect, God is saying he will speak Edom out of orderly creation; total desolation will be her lot”; Davis, 193.

these verses is the certainty with which Isaiah speaks. “Go read the book,” Isaiah says. “For it will happen just as it says.” Why? “Because the mouth of the LORD has commanded, and his Spirit shall bring it to pass.” In other words, the coming judgment is as certain as the faithfulness of God to His word and the power of the Spirit to bring that word to pass. And as God is utterly faithful to His word (in that it is impossible for God to lie [Heb 6:18]), and as the Spirit is omnipotent in bringing the word of God to pass, there is 0% percent chance of the judgment not happening, and happening precisely as God has said. So, rather than banking your eternal destiny upon God’s word failing, it would be infinitely more wise to heed His warning and repent.

Which brings us to the last truth to glean from this passage—the *cause* of the LORD’s wrath. Why is God enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host (v. 2)? The cause of God’s wrath and fury is not explicitly stated in Isaiah 34, but it is implied. Look at v. 8:

*For the LORD has a day of vengeance,
a year of recompense for the cause of Zion. (34:8)*

Those two words, “vengeance” (נָקָם) and “recompense” (שְׁלוּמִים), imply that an offense has been committed. And indeed, that is precisely what has occurred. God is not angry without cause; He is not throwing some cosmic temper tantrum because He did not get His way. He is offended because His creatures, to whom He has given life and breath and everything (Acts 17:25), whom He created for His glory (Is 43:7) and to whom He has offered the eternal and infinite joy of His fellowship (Ps 16:11), have rejected Him, rebelled against Him, and in His place have worshiped themselves and the idols their hands have made (Rom 1:18–23). This is what has called forth God’s fierce wrath; this is what merits—nay, demands—God’s furious vengeance. You have offended your God, and He is furiously angry with you. And until you see His wrath as just, His vengeance as merited, you will never take its coming seriously.

May Isaiah 34 awaken you to the terrifying reality of God’s judgment. You are the *object* of His wrath, upon whom God will unleash the *instrument* of His wrath—namely, the “terrible, swift sword” of His omnipotent word. His wrath will bring utter *desolation*—you will be condemned to a burning, desolate hellscape devoid of all that is good, true, and beautiful. There is no chance that you will escape, for His judgment is as *certain* as His word and His Spirit. And

the *cause* of all this is your rebellion against His sovereign rule and your rejection of His glorious presence. Beloved, hearken to my words this morning—flee from the wrath to come!

God Will Come to Save His Elect

But how shall you flee? Where shall you go? The answer comes bursting forth out of the darkness and smoke and gloom of Isaiah 34 like a ray of sunshine. As the clouds part and the mist is burned away, there, shining in the sun, is the God who saves. Remember, the only way to flee from God, is to flee to God.

*Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!” (35:3–4a)*

Has this description of God’s wrath and this depiction of hell caused your hands to tremble, your knees to shake, anxiety to overwhelm your heart? Be strong; fear not! Why?

*“Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God,
He will come and save you.” (35:4bc)*

How could this be, when we have already established that we have so offended God that He is enraged and furious with us, and will exact His vengeance and just recompense? Let’s conclude this morning with a study of Isaiah 35, looking at the *redemption* of the *elect*, the *renewal* of the *creation*, and the *return* of the *ransomed*.

First, let’s return to vv. 3–4, which form the core of this chapter and describe the *redemption* of the *elect*.

*Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.*

*Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God,
He will come and save you.” (35:3–4)*

What is it that makes our hands weak and our knees feeble and our hearts anxious? If we have been paying attention at all to Isaiah 34, it is the wrath of God coming in vengeance and recompense upon the unrighteous, among whom we are all accounted. As it is written,

*“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.” (Rom 3:10–12)*

*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. . . . For our God is a
consuming fire. (Heb 10:31; 12:29)*

Fear, terror, dread... these are entirely appropriate emotions to feel in light of what has just been proclaimed. So how is it that Isaiah can say, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, and with the recompense of God?” The thought of God coming with vengeance and recompense does not relieve the anxiety of sinners. Furthermore, how can Isaiah say that God will come with vengeance and recompense, and then turn around and declare, “He will come and save you?” For a sinner, vengeance and mercy are antithetical and contradictory; I cannot receive both.

Once again, as we have so often found in Isaiah, we have come to the core of the gospel, foreshadowed seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. The core of the gospel is substitution. The only way for God to come with vengeance *and* with salvation for sinners is if

He puts forth a substitute to bear His wrath, upon whom He will exact His vengeance, in order that He may turn and show mercy to us. And where might we find such a substitute? Where might we find a representative who will bear our sin, take our punishment, that we might be justified in the sight of God? We need look no further than Isaiah 53, where, speaking of the Servant of the LORD, the Messianic figure prophesied throughout the second half of Isaiah (40–66), Isaiah says,

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (53:4–6)*

Do you see it? God came with vengeance upon sinners; He exacted His just recompense for their sins—but not from them... from *Him*. The eternal Son of God became incarnate as the Son of Man. The Righteous One stood in the place of the unrighteous ones. And God the Father came in vengeance and wrath, and at the cross He exacted His just recompense from Christ.

*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief; (53:10a)*

In this way, the justice of God was satisfied, the glory of God was vindicated, and the mercy of God is poured out upon sinners who are justified in His sight as they are united to Christ by faith.

*By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities. (53:11b)*

*Because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors. (53:12bc)*

In this way Jesus Christ accomplished the redemption of the elect, by becoming their substitute in the judgment of God. He received God's vengeance; we receive God's mercy. Therefore, when the day of vengeance comes, we have nothing to fear, for God has no vengeance left for those who are united to Christ by faith. So if you find yourself in fear and trembling this morning, with weak hands and feeble knees and an anxious heart, I say to you, Flee from the wrath of God to the Son of God. For the mercy of God sent the Son of God to bear the wrath of God, that the enemies of God might become the children of God. And how does one receive this salvation? Again, Isaiah has not left us without instruction.

*For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel,
"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." (30:15a)*

The only way to flee from God is to God. Return to Him, and rest in the redeeming work of His Son. In quietness and trust shall be your strength and your salvation.

Verses 3–4 are the hinge on which the judgment and horror of Isaiah 34 become the salvation and joy of Isaiah 35. The rest of Isaiah 35 describes the result of this substitution that lies at the core of the gospel. Verses 1–7 describe the *renewal of creation*. In these verses we find the reversal of the description of the cursed land described in Isaiah 34.

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;*

*it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God. (35:1–2)*

Whereas the unredeemed wicked will inherit a barren, burning hellscape (34:8–10), the redeemed of the LORD will inherit a renewed creation so full and abundant that creation itself resounds with joyful song. This renewed creation will possess “the beauty of long-standing natural fertility (*Lebanon*), of ordered cultivation (*Carmel*) and of innate attractiveness (*Sharon*),” writes Motyer.⁹ But at the center of this renewed creation, the pinnacle of its enjoyment, is the visible “glory” (כבוד) and “majesty” (הדר) of God.

In vv. 5–7, we find that the renewal of creation extends even to the bodies of the redeemed. Here is an OT foretaste of the resurrection of the body.¹⁰

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes. (35:5–7)*

⁹ Motyer, 273.

¹⁰ “Here is the Old Testament background to the New Testament doctrine of the redemption of the body”; Motyer, 274.

You cannot separate the renewal of creation from the resurrection of the body. It was man's sin that plunged creation into bondage to corruption, and it will be man's redemption that trigger's creation's renewal.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.
(Rom 8:19–24a)

Finally, in vv. 8–10 Isaiah predicts the *returned* of the *ransomed*.

*And a highway shall 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;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (35:8–10)*

Here it is essential to remind ourselves of the already/not yet nature of Isaiah's eschatological promises. While all of Isaiah 34–35 should be interpreted this way, as both judgment and salvation are already experienced in part but not yet experienced in full, it is perhaps most crucial here at the end of Isaiah 35. For in vv. 8–10, Isaiah pictures a pilgrimage to Zion, a pilgrimage that is begun in this present age and culminates at the dawning of the age to come. Let's note four important truths about this pilgrimage.

First, is a pilgrimage that *commences* with *justification*. Who walks this highway called the Way of Holiness? “The unclean shall not pass over it” (v. 8). But Isaiah says in Isaiah 64:6,

*We have all become like one unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. (64:6)*

If we are all unclean, then who passes along this highway? Look at v. 9: “The redeemed shall walk there.” Those who have been redeemed from their uncleanness; those who have exchanged the filthy rags of their unrighteousness for the pure and spotless garment of Christ's righteousness. Only the justified make this pilgrimage.

Second, it is a pilgrimage that *continues* in *sanctification*. This highway is called the Way of Holiness, and those “who walk on the way” tread the path of holiness. In other words, those who walk in unrighteousness and rebellion as the general tenor and decisive characteristic of their life are not on this highway, and will not find their way to Zion. This is a Highway of Holiness, and only the holy—positionally, by justification; progressively, by sanctification—walk it.¹¹

Third, it is a pilgrimage that *consists* in *preservation*. Even the fools are protected by the power of God from wandering out of the way, and the lions and ravenous beasts (cf. 1 Pt 5:8) are not permitted upon this highway. This speaks to the preservation of the saints, the eternal security of those in Christ.

Fourth, it is a pilgrimage that *culminates* in *glorification*. Verse 10 is a picture of the “ransomed of the LORD,” the redeemed for whom Christ died, as they are raised and glorified and enter within the gates of the glorified city, into the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and the new earth. And there they obtain everlasting joy in a land where sorrow and sighing are no more.

¹¹ Davis, 200.