

The Glorious Future

Perfect Man and His Environment

I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. – Isaiah 41:18

A verse-by-verse study of Isaiah 35

Restitution, regeneration, and resurrection are three different words that describe the work and the glory of the Messianic kingdom, a theme that resonates from Genesis to Revelation.

Restitution (Acts 3:19-21) describes the restructuring of earth's new government, including the restoration of the entire earth to the conditions enjoyed in the Garden of Eden.

Regeneration (Matthew 19:28) depicts the bringing of all mankind from the grave, possessing life and health to the degree they had it before they died.

Resurrection (John 5:29) portrays how that new life, when brought to physical, mental, and moral perfection, can be maintained forever.

Isaiah 35 is one of many Old Testament prophecies that tell of the restorative process of both man and his earthly environment.

The Earth Rejoices – Isaiah 35:1,2

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.

It is questionable as to whether the phrase “for them” is spurious or not. It is not supported with any Hebrew word. However, in at least one ancient manuscript, the word *yesusum*, translated “rejoice,” has the Hebrew character **נ** *mem* appended that grammatically compels the “for them” clause. While such recognized translations as the ASV and RSV omit it; equally noted versions as Young's Literal, Leeser, and Rotherham include the concept, though in other words.

Assuming the phrase belongs, as does this author, the question naturally arises as to whom the pronoun “them” refers. Since this pronoun demands an antecedent, and since it appears in the first verse of a chapter, it suggests that Isaiah 35 is continuation of the prophecy of Isaiah 34.

The 34th chapter tells of God's retributive justice on Idumea (Edom). That chapter is composed of two subdivisions. Verses 1 to 8 depict God's vengeance on the **people** of Edom, particularly their leaders. Verses 9 to 17 treat his judgment on the **land** of Idumea.

In the latter section, the land becomes so barren and wasted that its sparse population of hardened desert nomads folds their tents and departs. Vacated by their human predators, the wild fowl and beasts became the sole inhabitants of what had been the formerly populated areas of Idumea.

This prophecy of destruction not only was to have its fulfillment in literal Edom, “The symbolic Edom of Isaiah's prophecy corresponds to the symbolic Babylon of Revelation, and of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel” (*The Battle of Armageddon*, p. 17).

Rather than bemoan these arid conditions, the wilderness and the solitary place (literally, desert) are spoken of as rejoicing. It is the same emotion a building contractor feels when the wrecking ball knocks down an older building to make room for a new structure.

While these barren locales are spoken of in a figurative sense, it will be no less true of the earth as mankind's everlasting home.

Today, much of the devastation of the earth and its assets are being caused by the selfishness and greed of a modern industrialized society. Smoke, carbon monoxide, and greenhouse gases all beat their blame for the globe's deteriorating environment. The insatiable hunger for oil, minerals, and forest products are more and more creating blight on planet earth. Were it not for the knowledge that this is but a transitional phase to an Edenic world, despair over these conditions would be inevitable. However, the knowledge of better days ahead causes the tears of despair to be replaced by songs of joy.

This transition may not be sudden and miraculous, but come as a result of seemingly natural causes. "God indicates that he has foreseen all the necessities of his plan, and will make ample provision for the needs of his creatures in what will seem a very natural way" (*The Divine Plan of the Ages*, p. 161). This process will not reach its completion until near the end of that kingdom.

The "it" of verse two is translated "the desert places of Jordan," as do four other manuscripts, with one using "the banks of Jordan" (Adam Clarke's *Commentary*). If so, there are four place names in this passage: "the deserts of Jordan" for irrigated land; Lebanon for abundant forestry; Carmel, noted for its fruit orchards; and Sharon, for its fertile pastureland. In their totality, they picture a thoroughly flourishing agrarian economy. The fact that none of these areas are in Edom, shows that the richness of Israel will spread beyond its borders. In fact, it will become worldwide.

Although coming through Israel, none of the greatness and glory of that kingdom shall be attributable to that nation, but all the glory and all the excellency shall redound to the praise of Jehovah.

Responsibility – Isaiah 35:3,4

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.

The command in these two verses is best understood in the context of Isaiah 34 and 35 being one continuous prophecy. Many, in Isaiah's time, were anxious of the threat posed to their security by their Edomite neighbors. The prophet here bids those with faith to encourage those who were fearful that the defeat of their enemies, predicted in chapter 34, was certain of fulfillment and that it would be followed with unprecedented blessings.

The blessings in the next two verses did not come at that time. This suggests that the literal fulfillment was only partial and that there would be a larger future fulfillment,

Pastor Russell makes just such an application on Reprint page 247. "This transition period following the Gospel age and preceding the Millennial age is often mentioned as 'a time of trouble,' or 'day of vengeance' designed to punish evil doers and to prepare the world for the blessed reign of righteousness under 'The Prince of Peace.'"

And thus we anticipate a spiritual fulfillment of the slaughter in Idumea, the great time of trouble of Daniel 12:1, to precede and introduce the kingdom of Messiah, which will bring all the blessings of chapter 35.

The term "recompense" suggests a carefully measured out punishment, an exact equivalent for the sins of Edom. The same term is used of Babylon in Jeremiah 51:6, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the LORD'S vengeance; he will render unto her a recompense."

The thought of equivalence is brought out in Revelation 18:6, "Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double." The words translated "double" in this text are *diploo* and *diploous* (Strong's 1362 and 1363), from which we derive our English word "duplicate." Like its Hebrew equivalent *mishneh*, context must determine whether it means an equal portion or twice as much. We suggest that in the Revelation context it carries the meaning of an equal portion.

Physical Rehabilitation – Isaiah 35:5-7

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

This oft-quoted passage is an almost poetic description of the physical rehabilitation promised to man in Messiah's kingdom. It is reminiscent of the young man Elihu's words about this future kingdom to the afflicted Job: "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth" (Job 33:25). These scriptures imply that when mankind is raised from the grave, they will not be instantaneously perfect in mind and body, but will steadily progress toward that condition.

When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire as to whether or not he was the Messiah. Rather than answer directly, he referred to his miracles. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matthew 11:5). It is almost as though he was referring to this prophecy and showing John's disciples that, by his miracles, he was identifying himself with the predicted Messiah. He also did the miracle of making the dumb speak (Matthew 9:33; 12:22).

Although Jesus did all of these miracles and more, cleansing lepers and raising the dead, they lasted only temporarily until the beneficiaries died. Thus they served only as illustration of the far greater and permanent works of his kingdom. Then, not only will their physical facilities be restored, but also their spiritual counterparts. These are "the greater works" he predicted his followers they would have a part in (John 14:12).

Speaking of this deeper fulfillment to Isaiah's prophecy, Pastor Russell writes on Reprint page 2110: "If the physical and temporary releases from sickness and death at our Lord's first advent were grand blessings, how much more grand and how much more blessed will be the "greater works than these," which we, as his glorified Church, in association with him shall be privileged to perform during the Millennial age. How much greater is the work of opening the eyes of the understanding than of opening the physical eyes; how much greater the work of healing the lameness of character than of healing the lameness physical how much grander the giving of an ear to hear the truth and to understand and to appreciate it, than the opening of the natural ear, to natural sounds; how much greater the work of loosing the tongue of the world, to speak forth the praises of him who has delivered them, than of merely loosing the tongue of the dumb to speak of natural things; how much more stupendous the work of giving eternal life to as many of the world of mankind as will accept it under the terms of the New Covenant than was the work of giving for a few years the lives of Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain, and the daughter of Jairus."

In Isaiah's prophecy, the cause of these kingdom miracles is attributed to water breaking out in the desert and turning it from a "habitation of dragons" to a place where "reeds and rushes" flourish. This will undoubtedly have a literal fulfillment, providing millions of inhabitable and

arable area for the teeming millions coming out from their graves. The world's thirty largest deserts alone comprise 7,850,000 square miles of space.¹

The question is sometimes asked as to whether the earth has room for all of those who have died in addition to its present burgeoning population of over six billion. Since it took 4,000 years to reach a population of 200 million and the one billion mark was not reached until 1804, it seems liberal to assume a total population of no more than 36 billion since the Garden of Eden. This gives a population density of 288 per square kilometer, about the same as present-day Israel.^{2,3}

The rivers, streams, and pools, therefore, appear to be figurative of the waters of truth, of which it is prophesied that they shall "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14). The Hebrew word rendered "parched ground" (*sharab*, Strong's 8273) literally means "glowing sand" or a "mirage." As such, it is a fitting symbol of mankind who are scripturally described as "the sand of the sea" (Genesis 32:12). Truth, which previously had only been seen as a mirage, would now be real and readily available.

The "dragon," symbolically represents Satan (Revelation 20:1-3). Where he used to lie in wait, or "couch down," as in Young's Literal translation, now become places for "reeds and rushes." Here the Septuagint seems to carry the thought by rendering it "a joy of birds, habitations and marshes."

The Highway of Holiness – Isaiah 35:8-10

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Highways have always been an important part of the infrastructure of any kingdom, from the Aztecs of Central America to the Mongols in the Orient. They have not only been the avenues of commerce but have also served as communication links with neighboring countries,

One of the themes in Isaiah's prophecy is the illustration of a highway. He treats this highway in five separate chapters:

Isaiah 11:16: "And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt."

Isaiah 19:23,24: "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land:"

Isaiah 35:8: "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

Isaiah 40:3: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Isaiah 62:10: "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

The first two of these texts show a highway connecting Egypt with Assyria. There was such a highway in Isaiah's day. It was called the Via Maris, or "the way of the sea," and is so referred to

in Isaiah 9:1. This road traversed along the Mediterranean Sea and turned Eastward from the Israeli seaport of Capernaum. From there it went through the Jezreel valley before ascending the narrow mountain pass at Megiddo before continuing on to Syria and Assyria.

The setting of both of the Isaiah texts, however, appears in prophecies of Messiah's kingdom. Thus the literal highway is only pictorial of a communication route in that kingdom. It is hard to imagine two more diverse cultures than those of Egypt, highly developed and refined, and the more barbaric Assyrians. This may well show how this symbolic highway will establish communication links between the most diverse of peoples.

As Israel lay halfway between the two countries, so, as Isaiah 19:24 says, they will be the means of establishing this new cross-cultural understanding, even "a blessing in the midst of the land." It may also be significant that the crucial crossing point was at Megiddo, for this new lines of communication will only be established after the Battle of Armagedon.

The last two of the texts above illustrate the role of Israel in establishing this highway. It is in a prophecy of Israel that they are told to gather out the stones, stumbling stones, in the construction of this spiritual road. Their past experiences and failures will aptly prepare them for a special work in the kingdom work of bringing mankind to holiness. The standard they will hold up will be the standard of perfection gained and maintained by strict adherence to divine law.

Commenting on Isaiah 40:3, Adam Clarke writes: "The idea is taken from the practice of eastern monarchs, who, whenever they entered upon an expedition or took a journey, especially through desert and unpractised countries, sent harbingers before them to prepare all things for their passage, and pioneers to open the passes, to level the ways, and to remove all impediments."

Isaiah 40:1-11 forms a message of comfort to the Jewish people after they have gone through "a double for all their sins (Isaiah 40:1). Their ancient history well prepares them for this important role in the future. In Jeremiah 50:8, using a different metaphor, we read: "Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he goats before the flocks."

In our text in Isaiah 35:8, this thoroughfare is called "the highway of holiness." It will be a road that progresses from unholiness to holiness. It is also called "a way" as well as "a highway." Professor Strong, in his Concordance, says of this word *derek* (number 1870), that it has the figurative meaning of "a course of life or mode of action." This road is to teach the walkers thereon, the whole world of mankind, a new course, how to obtain holiness in their lives.

Although the road is build for the unclean, they will not pass over its entire length, but will be cut off from life when their intransigence becomes manifest (Isaiah 65:20). However if the walker perseveres, will be shown how not to err and thus lose the opportunity for everlasting life.

Satan, who previously had gone about as "a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), will not be there because he will be completely restrained (Revelation 20:1-3). No ravenous beasts of fierce temptations will be there, as righteousness shall prevail.

Those who traverse this route will be the redeemed, "the ransomed of the LORD." They shall return to the land of the living (Psalm 90:1) and come to Israel (Isaiah 2:2,3), singing as they come. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

With such a glorious prospect before us, how can we not help but pray, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth, as it is done in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_density
3. See “The Divine Plan of the Ages,” pages 161-163