

WEEK 05

ISAIAH 34-35

God will completely vindicate the faithful, and the redeemed will enter his Kingdom with great joy and gladness.

Preface

In the previous weeks, we learned about God's judgment for those who are unjust, faithless, and proud. Last week, we learned that God condemns spiritual hypocrisy.

This week, Isaiah 34-35 brings a message of hope to those who are faithful, assuring them that God will deliver vengeance upon His enemies and grant complete victory to the redeemed.

Context: Isaiah 28-33 contains a series of woes. Isaiah rebuked the kingdom of Judah for seeking help from Egypt and other allies instead of relying on God. He urged them to turn back to God for deliverance and protection. He then described a future era of peace and prosperity under the reign of a righteous king. Finally, in chapter 33, Isaiah prophesied the downfall of the Assyrian empire, assuring the people of Judah that God would deliver them.

History: These oracles speak to a situation in Judah when the Assyrians were invading the land. This event was likely to have taken place in 705-701 BC. At that time, the leaders of Jerusalem were quite complacent and yearned for additional protection through political treaties with Egypt. Though Edom is specifically mentioned in these chapters, Edom is likely used as a symbol to represent all the other countries.

Observation

1. What do you notice about the description of the sword in Isa. 34:6?

Leaders' note: There is a description of great violence, but also an allusion to the sacrificial system (blood of lambs and goats). Isaiah prophesies that this is the payment for sin.

2. What is the result of believing in the promise of Isa. 35:4?

Leaders' note: eyes opened, ears unstopped, lame will leap and tongues will shout. Streams in the wilderness, grass, and reeds in the desert. There is a complete restoration of the world.

Interpretation

1. What does God's vengeance on Edom teach us about the consequences for those who go against God and God's people?

Leaders' note: God's judgment will be done in His timing (v.8). Edom is often used as the representative of all nations that hated the Jews. Throughout history, Edom had a burning hatred towards Israel. Edom, a nation descended from Esau, had their capital in Bozrah and lived in the mountains of what is now Jordan.

2. Is the imagery described in Isa. 34:11-15 a prophecy of judgment or peace?

Leaders' note: The imagery described is a prophecy of judgment and desolation. Edom will be so completely decimated that the desert creatures will begin residing there.

3. How does trusting in divine retribution, help us walk the Way of Holiness (Isa 35:4-8)?

4. What do you think the “Highway of Holiness” (Isa. 35:8) means? Are we on it now and can we fall off of it?

Leaders' note: This is a significant image as it relates to Isaiah and John the Baptist. Isaiah 40:3-5 prophesies about one who will “make straight a highway for our God.”

Application

1. In what ways has placing trust in God’s justice and retribution supported you in navigating challenging circumstances where you have been wronged by others?

2. Did you ever struggle in those moments where you have been wronged? What made it hard for you to trust in His retribution?

3. What are proactive measures you can take to prevent yourselves from taking “justice” in your own hands?

Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Intercessory Prayer

This week we are reminded that God is the ultimate judge, and we can rest in His promise to vindicate the faithful in His own timing. Nevertheless, in reality, we frequently feel hurt and burdened by the injustices in society and situations where we are wronged by others. This week, bring your burdens to God through intercessory prayers. There is power in naming and releasing your disappointments within a community.

Practical Instructions:

1. **Reflect on the Scripture and listen to the Holy Spirit:** Begin by meditating on Isaiah 35:4 individually and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us areas where we have experienced injustice.
2. **Share in small groups and practice active listening:** Ask open-ended questions and listen closely, so that our prayers can go deeper than just repeating what is shared by others. Remember that our goal is not to solve the problems at hand but to lift them to God and ask Him for help to comfort and guide us.
3. **Spend some time in silence before praying out loud:** Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us how we can pray for each other.
4. **Pray out loud:** Try to include in our prayer any Bible verses or characters of God that come to our mind during the time of silence.