

Isaiah Chapter 35 Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
In Sharp Contrast to Devastating Judgment,
There Is Blessed Hope for the Future--
a Hope Depicted in Visionary, Sometimes Puzzling Terms

35.1¹ יִשְׁשׁוּם מִדְּבַר וְצִיָּה

¹But **Isaiah's** message does not end with this shocking, graphic proclamation of Divine judgment upon evil in **chapter 34**, this announcement of "YHWH's Day" of retribution, or with these terrifying words concerning destruction and return to chaos.

For, immediately following this terrifying message, in this passage, **Isaiah 35:1-10** the prophet for YHWH pictures the glorious future, filled with hope, that awaits the world, and those whom YHWH has redeemed.

According to this great God-given promise, YHWH God's good earth, barren and wasted, subjected to a Divine curse, and therefore the scene of devastation and destruction, will in the future return to its original beauty and fruitfulness. The curse of sin and evil will be removed, and God's good earth will again blossom forth into a luxurious, well-watered garden, where ringing joy and delight fill the hearts of the redeemed, who still have need of being strong and living by hope in God's coming.

The people who witness this wonderful recreation of their world will be witnesses of the "glory" and "splendor" of YHWH God, at work in human history.

Slotki states that **chapter 35** is "An oracle on the salvation and future happiness of Israel. Its position here presents a remarkable contrast with the desolation of Edom pictured in the preceding chapter." (P. 163)

Alexander comments on **chapter 35**: "A great and glorious change is here described under the figure of a desert clothed with luxuriant vegetation (**verses 1-2**). The people are encouraged with the prospect of this change, and with the promise of avenging judgments on their enemies (**verses 3-4**). The same change is then expressed, by a change of figure, as a healing of corporeal [bodily] infirmities (**verses 5-6**). The former figure is again resumed, and the wilderness described as free from all its wonted [customary] inconveniences, particularly those of barrenness and thirst, disappointment and illusion, pathlessness and beasts of prey (**verses 7-9**). The whole prediction winds up with a promise of redemption, restoration, and endless blessedness (**verse 10**).

"This chapter is regarded by Eichhorn, Bertholdt, and Rosenmueller, as entirely distinct from that before it [**chapter 34**]; by Hitzig as a separate composition of the same writer; but by most interpreters as a direct continuation of it...All these writers agree that it cannot be the work of Isaiah...

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“With respect to the subject of the chapter there is no less diversity of judgment. It has been explained with equal confidence as a description of the state of Judah under Hezekiah (Grotius), of the return from exile (Clericus), of the state of Judah after that event (Rosenmueller), of that state and the times of the **New Testament** together (J.H. Michaelis), of the calling of the Gentiles (Cocceius), of the Christian dispensation (Luther, Calvin), of the state of the church after the fall of antichrist (Vitranga), of the state of Palestine at some future period (J. D. Michaelis), and of a future state of blessedness (Gill). These arbitrary hypotheses refute each other...

“The best description of the chapter is that given by Augusti in the title to his version of it, where he represents it as the description of a happy condition of the church after a period of suffering.

“This is no doubt its true import, and when thus explained, it may be considered as including various particulars, none of which can be regarded as its specific or exclusive subject...

Gesenius says this prophecy was of course never fulfilled; but so far is this from being true, that it has rather been fulfilled again and again. Without any change of its essential meaning, it may be applied to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, to the vocation [summons, Divine call] of the Gentiles, to the whole Christian dispensation, to the course of every individual believer, and to the blessedness of heaven.

“The ground of this manifold application is not that the language of the passage is unmeaning or indefinite, but that there is a real and designed analogy between the various changes mentioned which brings them all within the natural scope of the same inspired description.” (Pp. 33-34)

Motyer entitles **chapter 35** “Coming home to Zion.”

He comments that “This is the visionary climax of the final ‘woe’ (**chapters 33-35**) and, in particular, the specific counterpart of the matching third ‘woe’ (**29:15-24**). The unobtrusive initial reference to redemption (**29:22**) becomes the pinnacle of the whole sequence (**35:9-10**)...

“**Verse 6c** resumes the ‘desert / wilderness’ theme of **verse 1**, and in this sense the poem falls into two halves. In **verses 1-6b** there are those who need a stiffening of their resolve (**verses 3-4**) and, typically of Isaiah, they are urged towards this by the sure hope set before them...

“In **verses 6c-10** the pilgrims are assured of a safe road and a joyful arrival.” (Pp. 272-73)

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Oswalt entitles **chapter 35** "The Garden."

He comments that "In what Skinner calls 'a brilliant contrast,' this chapter stands over against **chapter 34**. There the luxuriant land of Edom [has there ever been a 'luxuriant' land of Edom? Is there anything said about Edom's formerly being a 'garden'? We think not!] was turned to a desert. Here the desert is changed into a garden...

"What desert is changed is not defined. Some take it to be Judah, while others understand it to refer to the Syrian desert across which the returning exiles would have to travel. But it is more likely that no particular place is intended. Rather, just as Edom in **chapter 34** represented the nations in general, so here the desert represents the total world...Whereas trusting the nations results in a desert, trusting God results in a garden.

"Several studies have demonstrated a considerable congruency between the ideas and phrasings of this chapter and those of **chapters 40-66**. This similarity has led to a great deal of speculation concerning the origins of this chapter. However those questions are answered, the issue of the author's intent remains. Was he speaking about a literal return from exile, a millennial kingdom, a spiritual condition to which these statements bear a typological reference, etc.?...

"Two things may be said in response. First...it is improper to attempt to make poetry fit into a wholly cognitive mode [we certainly agree with this, but say, It is improper to attempt to make the prophetic message, originating in dreams and visions, and filled with puzzling enigmas, fit into a wholly cognitive mode]...Second, the poem may well be referring to [a number of alternatives]...

"We cannot say with absolute certainty how all of this will work out in fact. But this we know: to walk with God is to walk in security, in blessing, in glory, and in joy [but do we really know this? How do you think Job would respond to this statement? What about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and later? We think Oswalt has over-stated what it is like to walk with God!]...

"The poem divides itself into three paragraphs. The first, **verses 1-4**, is introductory in that it makes the promise of the desert's blossoming and offers encouragement to the faint-hearted. **Verses 5-7** elaborate on the promise with the declaration of salvation. Two figures are used: the infirm being healed, and water bursting forth in the desert. **Verses 8-10** speak of the highway upon which the ransomed may come to God." (Pp. 621-22)

Kaiser entitles **chapter 35** "The Journey of the Redeemed to Zion."

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He comments that “Against the gloomy background of **chapter 34**, with its proclamation of the destruction of mankind [Edom], the collapse of the cosmic order and the extermination of the Edomites in the course of Yahweh’s bloody sacrificial feast, the marks of which are stamped upon the land for ever, the apocalyptic poet now gives us a glowing picture of the future transformation of the wilderness into a richly watered, thickly forested country, through which a holy highway leads to Zion as a processional way on which the redeemed return home rejoicing...

“Behind the opening sentences the themes from the prophecy of **Deutero-Isaiah** are clearly recognizable and show for whom the desert is being so magnificently adorned. There are undertones and allusions from the **Psalms** and... **Trito-Isaiah**...But characteristic changes and developments...leave no doubt that this chapter is not a corrupted prophecy of **Deutero-Isaiah**, but a later imitation, probably separated from its original by centuries....

“The prophecy is neither of the liberation of captives nor of the conversion and instruction of those who have strayed, but is about bodily restoration [the actual healing of human ailments in the time of salvation]...

“Thus **verses 8-9** may have had in mind not only, like **40:3**, a highway for the future return home of the prisoners of Babylon, now the eastern diaspora, but also of a processional way meant for permanent use and reserved solely for those who are pure, i.e. principally at least for the Jews, who even as small groups of pilgrims would not need to fear the wild beasts.” (Pp. 361-62)

Kaiser entitles **verses 1-6a** “The gifts of the coming God.”

He comments that “**Deutero-Isaiah** contains more than one prophecy of joy and of the transformation of the desert into a well-watered forest...

“The present apocalyptic writer also prophesies the joy which will come upon the desert and the wilderness (compare **Isaiah 42:11**; **Psalms 107:35**; **Isaiah 41:19**; and also **51:3**) when it is set free from its fruitless existence [no, from its destruction as depicted in **chapter 34!**]...The desert will now be covered with trees, and with flowers...

“The Jews who are now fainthearted and doubt God’s power and its ultimate revelation will nevertheless see what is promised to all men in **40:5**, the revelation of the God Whom the apocalyptic poet, identifying himself with his hearers, can describe as ‘our God.’” (P. 363)

Slotki comments on **verses 1-2**: “Judea, devastated by the Assyrian hordes and deserted like a wilderness, will be transformed into a land of smiling fields and gardens...The wilderness...parched land...desert [are] the ravaged and desolate

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land of Judah.” (P. 163) But is Slotki right in saying the land meant is Judea? We think instead of the devastated land of Edom that has been depicted in **chapter 34**.

Watts comments on **verses 1-2** that “The effect of Yahweh’s judgment over Edom is felt most immediately by those parts of Judah nearest the borders. They are called here Wilderness (מִדְבָּר, **midbar**), Dry Land (צִיָּה) and Arabah (עֲרָבָה). The three names refer to the rift of Jordan, especially south of the Dead Sea toward the Gulf of Aqabah...

“The land was essentially fruitful, if only water were available, and was certainly strategically located to control trade routes to the Gulf of Aqabah and to Arabia...These regions are to be most directly affected by Edom’s devastation. They can now develop without the constant threat which Edom has exercised in the area.” (Pp. 14-15)

Yes... and we rejoice that today Israel’s desalination plant to the south of Tel Aviv, and another desalination plant owned by both Jordan and Israel, holds the promise of bringing pure water to this region!

Motyer comments on **verses 1-2b** that “The theme of this opening stanza is spontaneous transformation: words of growth and blossoming, along with those of joy and song. Isaiah is living in exodus-terms. The people of God are a pilgrim-people. Once before the desert yielded water for their need (**Exodus 17**) and doubtless momentarily blossomed, but the day is coming when the final pilgrimage will be made through a transformed desert. The motif of a transformed world speaks as ever of the end of sin’s reign and the reversal of the Lord’s curse (**Genesis 3:17ff.**)...

“To the prophet it seems as if the burgeoning wilderness, at long last released from bondage (**Romans 8:22-23**), is actually shouting its welcome, exulting (literally) ‘with exultation indeed and loud singing.’” (P. 273)

Alexander translates **verse 1**: “*Desert and waste shall rejoice (for) them...And the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.*”

He comments that “The desert has been variously explained to mean Idumea [Edom], Judea, the Jewish Church, the Christian Church, the Gentile world, and the wilderness separating Palestine from Babylon.” (P. 34)

Oswalt comments on **verse 1**: “The picture changes: in **chapter 34** Edom has become a gloomy wilderness full of unclean animals. But suddenly the wilderness is a place of rejoicing, filled with blooming flowers. One can only ask what has happened...

“The answer is God...Joy is always a by-product of the presence of God in His world [tell that to Job, and to the lamb being devoured by a lion in God’s world, **Job 38-41!** Tell that to Jesus on the cross!]. When we, through our lack of trust, hold Him at

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וּתְגַל עֲרֵבָה

וּתְפָרַח כְּחַבְצֵלֶת:

Desert and dry land will exult,
and (Jordan's) plain will rejoice,
and it budded forth like the crocus.²

35.2³ פָּרַח תְּפָרַח וּתְגַל

אֶף גִּילַת וְרִינָן

כְּבוֹד הַלְּבָנוֹן נִתְּן-לָהּ

הַדֶּר הַכַּרְמֶל וְהַשָּׂרוֹן

הַמָּה יִרְאוּ כְבוֹד-יְהוָה

הַדֶּר אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

It will certainly bud forth and it will rejoice;
even (with) rejoicing and ringing cries;

¹(...continued)

arm's length, the end result is desolation. It is only when we turn to Him, recognizing the uselessness of all other help, that we can perceive His coming to us (**verse 4**) and find joy in becoming complete with Him." (P. 622)

²Slotki's translation of חַבְצֵלֶת, **chabhatstseleth** is "rose," but he notes that "Others define the Hebrew word as 'lily' or 'autumn crocus.'" (P. 163)

³Alexander comments on, and then translates with commentary, **verse 2**: "The same idea of complete and joyful change is again expressed by the same figure, but with greater fulness, the desert being here described as putting on and wearing the appearance of the spots most noted for luxuriant vegetation. (*It shall*) blossom, it shall blossom and rejoice; yea, (with) joy and shouting; or, yea, joy and shouting (there shall be). The glory of Lebanon is given unto it (the desert), the beauty of Carmel and of Sharon. They (who witness this great change) shall see the glory of Jehovah, the beauty of our God." (P. 34)

glorious radiance of the Lebanon was given⁴ to it,
splendor of the Carmel and the Sharon,⁵
these will see⁶ YHWH's glorious radiance,
splendor of our God.⁷

⁴Alexander states that “The future translation of נָתַן, **nittan**, ‘was given’ by Calvin and **King James** is gratuitous [unwarranted] and arbitrary. The preterite [‘past’] form points out the true relation of the cause to its effect. It *shall rejoice* because the glory of Lebanon *has been given* to it.” (P. 35)

⁵Compare **Isaiah 29:17; 32:15** and **33:9** for these mentions of Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon.

Oswalt comments that “Lebanon with its spreading cedars and Mount Carmel with the rich plain of Sharon at its foot were symbols of abundance. Now, Isaiah says, if you want to understand the abundance of God’s promises, you will have to imagine a desert turning into one of those regions. That is the kind of thing God can do, especially with the human heart.” (P. 622)

⁶Where the Hebrew text has הֵמָּנָה יִרְאוּ, “these / they shall see,” with no clear statement as to who “these / they” are, the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has the more definite statement, καὶ ὁ λαός μου ὄψεται τὴν δόξαν κυρίου καὶ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ θεοῦ, “and *the people of Mine* shall see the glory of (the) Lord and the height exaltation of the God.” The Aramaic Targum has “the house of Israel shall see...”

But we think that in the biblical text הֵמָּנָה, “these / they” is referring to the once desolate places, the dry land and the desert, which will now see the glory of YHWH, and the Greek translation and the Aramaic Targum are reading “the people of Mine” and “the house of Israel” into the text. What do you think?

⁷Motyer holds that the last four lines of **verse 2** form a new stanza with a change of emphasis. “In the first stanza the desert rejoiced to display its new nature; in the second we learn that all this glory is a gift. The same words are used of the erstwhile [‘former’] desert and of the Lord (glory, splendor), suggesting that He has shared Himself with His world and that nothing now hinders the full display of the glory of the Lord in the works of the Lord. The former desert will have the beauty of long-standing natural fertility (Lebanon), of ordered cultivation (Carmel) and of innate attractiveness (Sharon)...

“But they, the unidentified human element in the renewed world, will be preoccupied with a different vision: the glory and splendor of the Lord.” (Pp. 273-74) See the preceding footnote.

⁸Watts comments on **verses 3-7** that “The second group to be affected by Edom’s fall are the pilgrims on their way to Zion. They had to pass through territory around Jerusalem that was controlled by Edom [we doubt that this was the case with the majority of pilgrims, who would come from the north and west], which cannot have been a pleasant experience. This is no longer necessary. They encourage each other in these verses...

“*Feeble hands, faltering knees, fearful hearts, the blind, deaf and lame* all fit the picture of pilgrimage processions on their way to the Holy City which would certainly have included the infirm, the ill, and the impaired.” (P. 15)

But are these verses being addressed to “pilgrims on their way to Zion”? The text does not make this explicit in **verses 3-7**, but such an idea is found in **verses 8-10**.

Slotki comments on **verses 3-4**: “The prophet addresses his disciples or the elders and leaders of the people, exhorting them to pass on his message of assurance to the doubters, the impatient and the despondent...With the language of **verse 3**, compare **Job 4:3-4**.” (P. 164)

3 הִנֵּה יִסְרַת רַבִּים
 וַיְדַמּוּ יְדֵי רַפּוֹת תְּחַזְּקֵן:
 Look—you corrected / disciplined many people,
 and weakened hands you strengthen.

4 כּוֹשֵׁל יִקְיִמוּן מִלֵּיךְ
 וּבְרַכְבִּים כְּרַעוֹת תְּאַמְצֵן:
 One who is stumbling, your words cause to rise up,
 and knees that are trembling, you strengthen.

Motyer comments on **verses 3-4** in **Isaiah 35**, that “Imperatives without stated subjects...introduce this beautifully balanced section consisting of two sets of four lines...

“The implication of the stanza is that the people of God are still in the period of waiting and need encouraging...The proffered encouragement is the hope that is set before them: *your God will come*. It is a call to the fortitude of faith, not grim determination but believing determination. They already possess within themselves all they need to face the demands of the time; they are called not to receive a new blessing but to strengthen what is already theirs...

“Joshua’s verbs...’to be strong’ and...’to be resolute’ (**Joshua 1:6**) are apt. Isaiah’s readers are encouraged to adopt Joshua, with the promised land before him, as a model...

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וּבְרָכִים כְּשִׁלּוֹת אֲמָצוֹ:

Strengthen weak / slack hands,
and shaking knees, make firm!

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“The first move of reassurance is simply to ‘Behold your God,’ the God Who is still prepared to be ‘yours,’ notwithstanding all your weaknesses. The second move is to recognize that He will put everything right: *vengeance*...for ‘wrong suffered’...and *retribution*...for ‘wrong done’...Thirdly, He comes to effect salvation, full deliverance.” (P. 274)

Kaiser states that “**Verses 3 and 4** attempt a reconstruction of **Isaiah 40:1-2**... The introduction to the promise of salvation, with its call to be brave and not to fear, does not possess any...direct parallel in **Deutero-Isaiah**, but seems to be reminiscent of **Deuteronomy 31:6; 10:25** and **2 Chronicles 32:7**...‘Behold your God!’ is a quotation from **Isaiah 40:9**, while ‘vengeance comes’ is reminiscent of **Isaiah 43:8a**...The word **יָבוֹא**, **yabho**), ‘He will come,’ may be a kind of keyword recalling **Isaiah 40:10**.” (Pp. 363-64) Perhaps... but there is no certainty in this.

Alexander comments on and translates **verse 3**: “With the prospect of this glorious change the people are commanded to encourage themselves and one another. *Strengthen hands (now) sinking, and knees (now) tottering make firm*...The participial forms represent the hands as actually hanging down, relaxed, or weakened, and the knees as actually giving way...In itself the language of this verse is applicable either to self-encouragement or to the consolation of others...

“There is no reason why the words should not be taken in their widest sense, as meaning, let despondency be exchanged for hope. That self-encouragement is not excluded, may be learned from [the author of the **Book of Hebrews**] use of the words in that sense (**Hebrews 12:12**). That mutual encouragement is not excluded is sufficiently apparent from the following verse...

“As a general exhortation, they are applicable to these and to many other situations, none of which can be regarded as the exclusive subject of the promise. The figures here used are the same with those employed in **Isaiah 13:7**, and in **Job 4:3-4**...

“The image presented is that of ‘persons who can scarcely lift up their hands or stand upon their legs’ (Gill). The Greek translation supposes the command to be addressed to the hands themselves [ἰσχύσατε χεῖρες ἀνείμηναι καὶ γόνατα παραλελυμένα, “Be strong, you weak hands and feeble knees!].” (Pp. 35-36)

35.4⁹ אָמְרוּ לְנִמְהָרֵי-לֵב

תִּזְקְוּ אֶל-תִּירְאוֹ

הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

נִקְם יָבֹא

בְּמֹל אֱלֹהִים

הוּא יְבֹא וַיִּשַׁעְכֶם:

Speak to those who are anxious of heart,¹⁰

Be strong, do not be afraid!

⁹Alexander comments on and translates **verse 4**: “This verse shows how the command in the one before it is to be obeyed, by suggesting, as topics of mutual encouragement, the vindicatory justice of God, and His certain interposition in behalf of His people. *Say ye to the hasty of heart* (i.e. the impatient, those who cannot wait for the fulfillment of God’s promise), *Be firm, fear not; behold your God* (as if already present or in sight); *vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; He (Himself) is coming, and will save you...*”

“The connecting link between His vengeance and their safety is the destruction of their enemies...”

“נִמְהָרֵי, **nimhar**, as a passive participle, corresponds, in form and sense, to the English *hurried*...[It means] impatient of delay in the execution of God’s promises...This includes the ideas of despondency and unbelieving fear, while at the same time it adheres to the strict sense of the Hebrew word...The true construction...makes *behold your God* an exclamation, and *vengeance* the subject of the verb...Not only His vengeance but Himself is coming...”

“While Barnes denies that the phrase your God refers to the Messiah, Calovius alleges that the name of Jesus is expressly mentioned, being included in the verb **ישע**. The words are really a promise of deliverance to God’s people, and include, as the most important part of the contents, the unspeakable gift of Christ and His salvation.” (Pp. 36-37)

But Christian interpreters are too inclined to read Jesus Christ into texts in the **Hebrew Bible** where they are not in fact found, as happens here in this text.

¹⁰Slotki suggests the translation “panic-stricken in mind.” (P. 164)

Look—our God!

Vengeance will come--

God's recompense;

He will come¹¹ and He will save you people!

35.5¹² אֵל תִּפְקְחֵנָה עֵינֵי עוֹרִים

¹¹Oswalt comments that *He comes* is a powerful statement throughout Scripture, up to and including **Malachi 3:1**,

Look at Me—sending My messenger / Malachi;
and he will clear a way before Me.
And suddenly He will come to His temple,
the Lord whom you (plural) are seeking,
and (the) messenger of the covenant (in) whom you are delighting.
Look—(He is) coming—said YHWH of Armies!

“To the heart which cries ‘He is too far away, I cannot reach Him,’ the answer is, ‘You do not have to reach Him; He comes to you.’ So God has been coming to us across the millennia.” (P. 623)

¹²Slotki comments on **verses 5-7**: “Defects will be removed from both the land and its inhabitants, and the people now physically fit and healthy will enjoy the prosperity of the land.” (P. 164)

Oswalt comments on **verses 5-7** that they “expand on **verses 1-4** by giving two figures of salvation: healing of infirmities and the breaking forth of water in the desert... The thought that God can give abundant life to the lifeless is well expressed through these figures...

“That this prophecy was at least partly fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ may be seen in the way in which he appropriated these figures for himself.” (Pp. 623-24)
See:

Luke 7:18-23, where Jesus is depicted as saying to the people sent from John the Baptist, inquiring whether or not he was the coming one,

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard:
the blind receive their sight,
the lame walk, lepers are cleansed,
and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up,
the poor have good news preached to them. (Compare **Matthew 11:2-6**, and **Mark 7:31-37**)

Not once in these three passages is there a reference to **Isaiah 35** being quoted. **Isaiah 35** predicts God's coming, but says nothing concerning the Messiah. It states

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that when God comes, the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Jesus is depicted as enabling the blind to see, and as enabling the deaf to hear, but that is the only basis on which these passages can be said to be a fulfillment of **Isaiah 35**—and we think that if the Gospel writers thought this was a fulfillment of **Isaiah 35**, they would have made it explicit—as they so often do.

Motyer comments on **verses 5-6b** that “This fourth (middle) stanza is marked by a double *Then*. The weaknesses of the present (**verse 3**) will be gone and what is now hope (**verse 4**) will be experience.” (P. 274)

Oswalt likewise states that “*Then* emphasizes the future aspect of the promise.” He adds that “the blind and the deaf have been used frequently to speak of a spiritual condition as well as a physical one (**Isaiah 6:10; 28:7; 29:9-10, 18; 30:20-21; 32:3-4**),” and notes that “the [Aramaic] Targum makes this explicit by reading ‘the eyes of the house of Israel which were blind to law...and their ears which were as deaf in receiving the words of the prophets.’” (P. 624)

Slotki comments on **verse 5** that “This and the next verse may be interpreted literally or figuratively. For the latter, compare **Isaiah 29:18; 32:3-4**.” (P. 164)

Alexander comments on and translates **verses 5-6**: “The change in the condition of the people is now represented by another figure, the removal of corporeal infirmities. *Then* (when God has thus come) *shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap (or bound) as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall shout (for joy), because waters have burst forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert...*

“The miraculous removal of disease and the miraculous irrigation of the desert are intended to express one and the same thing. The essential idea in both cases is that of sudden and extraordinary change...

“Many of the older writers [maintain] that Isaiah here explicitly foretells the miracles of Christ. Calovius asserts that Christ Himself has so interpreted the passage in **Matthew 11:5** and **Luke 7:22**. But, as Henderson justly says, there is no proof whatever that Christ refers John the Baptist to this prophecy...but simply appeals to his miracles in proof of his Messiahship: the language is similar, but the subjects different...

“To the question, whether this prediction is in no sense applicable to our Savior’s miracles, we may reply with Calvin, that although they are not directly mentioned, they were really an emblem and example of the great change that is here described. So, too, the spiritual cures effected by the gospel, although not specifically signified by these words, are included in the glorious revolution which they do denote...

(continued...)

וְאָזְנֵי חֵרְשִׁים תִּפְתָּחֶנָּה:

Then (the) eyes of blind people will be opened,¹³
and ears of deaf people will be unstopped.

¹²(...continued)

“The simple meaning of the passage is, that the Divine interposition which had just been promised should produce as wonderful a change on the condition of mankind, as if the blind were to receive their sight, the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and deserts to be fertilized and blossom as the rose...

“It is far more natural to understand the healing as descriptive of the change itself, which must therefore be much more extensive than the restoration of the Jews from Babylon.” (Pp. 87-88)

Kaiser comments on **verse 5**: “With **verse 5** the instruction to the messengers, with its promise of salvation, seems to be concluded, and the apocalyptic author is once again speaking in his own person...

“In **Isaiah 42:7** and **Psalms 146:8** the blind may be regarded, under the influence of the previous verse, as the prisoners set free from their prisons, and when the idea is extended to the deaf, we may follow **42:18-19; 43:8** (compare **29:18; 32:3**) in regarding them as Jews set free by virtue of the revelation of Yahweh in a new historical act from their error and scepticism...

“There is rejoicing at the beginning and rejoicing at the end of the first train of thought. It is not implicitly stated that this is joy in Yahweh, but by analogy with **42:10-13** this may be assumed.” (P. 364)

¹³Watts urges his readers to “Note the contrast between blind eyes opened and the commission given [to Isaiah] in **Isaiah 6:9-10**.” (P. 15)

9 And He said,
Go! And you shall say to this people:
Listen, you people, listening--
and you will not understand;
and see, you people, seeing--
and you will not know!
10 Make fat this people's heart;
and make heavy its ears;
and its eyes, smear [over]--
for fear that it should see with its eyes,
and with its ears should hear,
and its heart / mind should understand--
and it will turn around--
and He will heal it!

35.6¹⁴ אִזְ יִדְלַג כְּאַיִל פִּסֵּחַ
 וְתָרוּן לְשׁוֹן אֵלֶם
 כִּי־נִבְקְעוּ בַמִּדְבָּר מַיִם
 וַיִּחְלִימוּ בְעַרְבָה:

Then a lame person will leap like a deer,¹⁵

¹⁴Kaiser entitles **verses 6b-10** “The return of the redeemed.”

He comments that “Once again the poet directs our attention into the desert in order to give an explicit assurance that it will be full of water, full of springs, pools and streams, and has therefore lost its terrors for the traveler. Behind **verse 6b** we can recognize **Isaiah 42:20** and **48:2**...while behind **verse 7a** lies **Isaiah 41:18**...and **49:10**...

“Whereas Edom has become the meeting place of jackals, the former desert has been changed into a well-watered countryside...In the future there will be a highway here (compare **Isaiah 40:3**; and also **43:19**; **49:11**; **62:10**; **19:23** and **11:16**)...

“This highway will be called Holy Way, and will therefore lead to the sanctuary. But at first he does not mention where it leads, in order to prepare gradually the idea of the pilgrims returning home along this highway and traveling towards Zion. No impure person, no one excluded from the cult [if this is what is meant, it is a rejection of **Isaiah 56:3-8**!], or whether a Jew or a non-Jew, may use this highway, and no fool who has perverse views about the actions of God (compare **Job 5:2ff.**; **Proverbs 10:21**) may use it...

“But there must first be an answer to the objections of fearful or cautious minds, that the journey of pilgrims along this highway, in spite of its streams of water, pools and springs, would be much too dangerous because of the lions and other beasts of prey. The poet assures them that these animals will not be found there...

“Now at last he can lift the veil and make known the true purpose of all the preparations: along this highway will travel the redeemed of Yahweh (compare **Isaiah 51:10b**)...

“Instead of the cloak which covers the face of those who mourn (compare **2 Samuel 19:5** and **Isaiah 25:7-8**) there is now joy upon their heads, a joy which can never be taken from them (compare **Isaiah 61:7b**).” (Pp. 364-65)

¹⁵Oswalt comments that “the lame will leap like a deer has a particular fulfillment in Peter’s healing of the lame man in the temple (**Acts 3:8**).” (P. 624)

and the tongue of the mute will give a ringing cry.

Because waters broke forth in the desert,¹⁶

and torrent-valleys in the (Jordan) Plain.¹⁷

35.7¹⁸ וְהָיָה הַשָּׂרָב לְאֵיִם

¹⁶Oswalt comments that “The theme of streams in the desert is a particular favorite of **chapters 40-55**, where the stress is upon the second ‘Exodus’ and its similarities with the first (see **Exodus 17:5-7; Psalm 78:15-16; Isaiah 41:17, 18; 43:19-20; 44:3-4; 48:21; 49:10; 51:3**. Compare also **Isaiah 32:15**)...

“Furthermore, in a land as dry as Israel, water is a special symbol of life and salvation.” (P. 624) Yes!

¹⁷Motyer comments on **verses 6c** [the third line of **verse 6**]-7, stating that “The implication is that the same new life which renews nature has flowed also into the Lord’s people...Here Isaiah describes transformation (*water in the desert*); reversal (places that absorbed moisture, *burning sand* and *thirsty ground*, now provide it in *pool* and *springs*).” (P. 274)

¹⁸Alexander comments on and translates **verse 7**: “The idea of a complete and joyful change is still expressed by the transformation of a desert, and the consequent removal of its inconveniences, among which the prophet here particularly mentions the tantalizing illusions to which travelers in the wilderness are subject. *And the mirage shall become a pool* (or the sand like a water lake, the seeming lake a real one), *and the thirsty land springs of water, (even) in the haunt of wolves, their lair, a court (or field) for reed and rush...*

“The word שָׂרָב, **sharabh** [defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as ‘burning heat’ or ‘parched ground’; by **Holladay** as ‘parching heat’]...denotes the illusive appearance caused by unequal refraction in the lower strata of the atmosphere, and often witnessed both at sea and land, called in English *looming*...and in French *mirage*...In the deserts of Arabia and Africa, the appearance presented is precisely that of an extensive sheet of water, tending not only to mislead the traveler, but to aggravate his thirst by disappointment...It is thus referred to in the **Koran (24.39)**: ‘And as for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage...in the desert; the thirsty reckons it for water, till when he come he finds it nothing’...

“The explanation [of the verse] as a poetical description of a complete and joyful change, excludes...the allegorical interpretation of the pools as meaning schools, and the fountains teachers (Vitranga), the dragon’s den the heathen world (Schmidius), the dragons themselves persecutors, pagan emperors and papal powers (Gill), the reeds and rushes persons eminent in spiritual knowledge, authority, and influence (Cocceius). All these particulars may be included in the change described, but none of them can be regarded as specifically much less as exclusively intended.” (Pp. 39-40)

(continued...)

וְצִמְאוֹן לְמִבְוֵי מַיִם
 בְּנוֹה תַנִּים רִבְצָה חֲצִיר
 לְקִנְיָהּ וְגִמְאָה:

And the parched / burning hot ground will become the marsh;
 and thirsty ground fountains of water;
 in a dwelling-place of jackals, her (a jackal's) resting-place green grass,

¹⁸(...continued)

The only other place in the **Hebrew Bible** where the noun שָׂרָב, **sharabh** occurs is at **Isaiah 49:10**,

לֹא יִרְעָבוּ וְלֹא יִצְמְאוּ
 וְלֹא-יִכָּם שָׂרָב וְשֶׁמֶשׁ
 כִּי-מֵרַחֵם יְנַהֵגֵם
 וְעַל-מִבְוֵי מַיִם יְנַהֵלֵם:

They will not hunger, and they will not thirst,
 and burning heat and sun will not strike them;
 because the One having compassion on them will lead them,
 and beside fountains of water He will guide (synonym) them!

In **49:10**, the noun שָׂרָב, **sharabh** is paired with the noun שֶׁמֶשׁ, **shemesh**, “sun,” both of which are depicted as “striking” people.” And we think that “mirages” do not “strike people.” We have translated it by “burning heat” in **49:10**, and here in **35:7** by “parched / burning hot ground.”

Oswalt comments that “The parched ground (שָׂרָב, **sharabh**) was frequently translated as ‘mirage’ in the latter part of the nineteenth century on the basis of an Arabic etymology. But while that translation will fit admirably here, it will not work in **Isaiah 49:10**, the only other occurrence of שָׂרָב, **sharabh** in biblical Hebrew. As a result, ‘mirage’ has been dropped from modern translations.” (P. 624)

However, Slotki still states that an alternative translation is “‘The mirage shall become a (real) lake,’ the Arabic for ‘mirage’ corresponding with the Hebrew word used here.” (P. 165)

for reed(s) and rush(es).¹⁹

35.8²⁰ וְהָיָה-שָׁם מִסְלֹוֹל וְדֶרֶךְ

¹⁹Translations of **verse 7** vary:

King James, “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.”

Tanakh, “Torrid earth shall become a pool; Parched land, fountains of water; The home of jackals, a pasture; The abode of *ostriches*, reeds and rushes.”

New Revised Standard, “the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.”

New International, “The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.”

New Jerusalem, “the parched ground will become a marsh and the thirsty land springs of water; the lairs where the jackals used to live will become plots of reed and papyrus.”

Rahlfs, καὶ ἡ ἄνυδρος ἔσται εἰς ἔλη καὶ εἰς τὴν διψῶσαν γῆν πηγὴ ὕδατος ἔσται ἐκεῖ εὐφροσύνη ὀρνέων ἔπαυλις καλάμου καὶ ἔλη, “And the waterless (place) will be for a marsh-meadow; and in the thirsting earth / land, a spring of water will be there—gladness of birds, residence of reed and marsh-meadow.”

Motyer comments that “*Where jackals once lay...is* (literally) ‘in the home of jackals—its den!—grass as well as reeds and rushes!’, i.e. the reversal of a settled and inhospitable situation.” (P. 274)

Oswalt states that “*the haunt of jackals* seems to be another direct connection with **chapter 34** (compare **verse 13**)...There the place will become a wilderness where jackals live; here the rocky crags which those animals normally inhabit have become a splashy meadow.” (P. 624)

²⁰Slotki comments on **verses 8-10** that “A highway, safe from all dangers and holy, will lead to Zion for the joyful return of the redeemed of the Lord...It shall be for...the redeemed exiles returning to Zion...**Verse 10** is repeated in **Isaiah 51:11**.” (P. 165)

Alexander comments on and translates **verse 8**: “The desert shall cease not only to be barren but also to be pathless or impassable by reason of sand. *And there shall be there a highway and a way; and there shall not pass through (or over) it an unclean (thing or person); and it shall be for them (alone).*” See **Job 12:24**,

(continued...)

²⁰(...continued)

מִסִּיר לֵב רֵאשֵׁי עַמְּהָאָרֶץ
וַיִּתְּעֵם בְּתַהוֹ
לְא־דֶרֶךְ:

taking away (the) heart of heads of the earth's people,
and causes them to go astray into waste-land,
not (the right / a) way.

Also see **Jeremiah 18:15**,

כִּי־שָׁכַחְנִי עַמִּי
לְשׂוּא יִקְטְרוּ
וַיִּכְשְׁלוּם בְּדַרְכֵיהֶם
שְׁבִילֵי עוֹלָם
לִלְכַת נְתִיבוֹת
דֶּרֶךְ לֹא סֻלְּלוּ:

Because My people forgot Me!

To the emptiness / vanity they offer sacrificial smoke,
and they caused them to stumble in their ways–
paths (synonym) of long-distant-time–
to walk in pathways (synonym),
a way not built up!

“[To both of these passages] we have here a contrast. The comparison suggested is between a faint track in the sand and a solid artificial causeway...

“The way meant is explained by Forerius to be Christ, faith, and the sacraments; by Gill, a way cast up by sovereign grace, which is raised above the mire and dirt of sin, and carries over it and from it. Grotius, as usual, goes to the opposite extreme of making it denote the way to the temple...Musculus understands it as ensuring to the exiled Jews a free return to their own country. But even this return seems to be only one of many particulars included in the promise of a general change and restoration, which is really the thing denoted by this whole series of prophetic figures.” (P. 40)

Motyer comments that “Through this attractive, nourishing landscape runs a highway. Where it goes we are not yet told, only who may go on it.” (P. 274)

What do you think is the “highway and the way” through the desert?

(continued...)

וְדֶרֶךְ הַקִּדְשׁ יִקְרָא לָהּ
 לֹא-יַעֲבֹרְנָהּ טָמֵא
 וְהוּא-לְמוֹ הַלֶּךְ דֶּרֶךְ
 וְאֵיילִים לֹא יִתְעוּ:

And a highway and the way will be there;²¹
 and it will be called Way of the Set-apartness.²²

²⁰(...continued)

We think that for Isaiah, centuries before the coming of Christ, the “highway and the way” must refer to the way of faith in YHWH, of trusting YHWH rather than human alliances, no matter how powerful or threatening; and we think that even with the coming of Christ, it means the same thing. It is the kind of humble faith and trust in God which Jesus practiced and taught.

Oswalt comments that “**Verses 8-10** give the climax of the poem using the particular image of the highway upon which the redeemed march to Zion. It is not clear

whether this is construed as a highway from the countries of exile (compare **Isaiah 11:12, 16**) upon which the returnees can come to Jerusalem, or whether it is a festal way upon which holy pilgrims can go up to Zion. The very uncertainty suggests that it is probably both and more...The point is that God’s coming to His people (**Isaiah 35:4**) has its purpose in the people coming to Him in holy lives for worship and fellowship (**2:2-4; 4:2-6; 25:6-9; 66:18-23**).” (P. 625)

²¹Watts comments that “The theme of pilgrimage is encountered again with the promise that a highway is there. The motif appears in **Isaiah 11:16** and **62:10** as a means for the return of the remnant from foreign lands. In **40:3** it is a highway through the wilderness that Yahweh will travel. Here in **35:8** that highway is *there*, that is, in the Arabah which was until recently controlled by Edom...

“This theme fits the broader motif of pilgrimage to Zion which was first presented in **Isaiah 2:2-4**. A major barrier to the achievement of the goal of making Zion open to pilgrims has been removed.” (Pp. 15-16)

Yes...but we think Watts is greatly overstating the land of Edom as a “major barrier” to pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. What do you think? Jews displaced in Assyria and Babylon in the east would come by routes through the fertile crescent, descending into Israel and Jerusalem from the north, not from the south.

²²Where our Hebrew text has:

(continued...)

An unclean person will not pass over it.²³

²²(...continued)

וְהָיָה שָׁם מִסְלֵל וְדֶרֶךְ
וְדֶרֶךְ הַקְּדוֹשׁ יִקְרָא לָהּ

And it will be there, a cast-up highway and the way,
and a way of the set-apartness / holiness will be called / said to it.

1QIs^a has:

It will be there, there, a cast-up highway (spelled מִסְלֵל, **masulel**),
and a way of the set-apartness / holiness they will call to it.
(Omitting our Hebrew text's "and the way.")

Rahlfs has:

ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁδὸς καθαρὰ
καὶ ὁδὸς ἁγία κληθήσεται

There will be a clean / pure way / road / way;
and "Road / Way of set-apart / holy people" it will be called.
(Also omitting our Hebrew text's "and the way.")

²³Alexander states that this line "is paraphrased by Grotius as meaning that no Syrian, Assyrian, Ethiopian, or Egyptian, shall be seen there. Hitzig explains it as an exclusion of the heathen generally, and pronounces it *a trace of later Judaism*. Knobel goes even further, and describes it as an effusion of *national hatred*...

"The obvious meaning of the words is that the people of Jehovah shall themselves be holy [our 'set-apart']...This is in fact the meaning even of those Scriptures which exclude from Zion (or the sanctuary) the Canaanite (**Zechariah 14:21**), the uncircumcised (**Ezekiel 44:9**), and the stranger (**Joel 4:17**)." (Pp. 40-41)

What do you think? Do you agree with Alexander? We do not think the meaning is "obvious," and understand how interpreters can understand the passage in terms of exclusive Judaism, such as had its powerful advocates in Ezra and Nehemiah, with their demand for the exclusion of foreigner wives and their children. But, occurring in the **Book of Isaiah**, which in **chapters 40-66** takes such a strong stance against narrow exclusivism, it is unlikely that this is its meaning—and so we tend to agree with Alexander.

Motyer states that "Unclean is singular, meaning 'any unclean person.' The word טָמֵא, **tame**) refers to impurities catered for [provided with everything necessary] in the sacrifices. Those disqualified from using the *highway* were, therefore, self-disqualified through failure to use the means of grace." (P. 275)

(continued...)

And he who is walking (the) way²⁴
and foolish people will not go astray.²⁵

²³(...continued)

That is, Motyer understands “the unclean person” to be the person who has not made the proper sacrifices in the temple-worship. We think this is too narrow a definition, and that “unclean” can be applied much more broadly than simply those lacking the proper animal sacrifices.

But these differences in understanding make it obvious that the prophetic message is not clear and easily understood—but rather, originating in Divinely given dreams and visions, contains obscurities, puzzling enigmas. Do you agree? Or do you think that those who interpret this passage differently from you are just being biased, and stubborn?

²⁴Translations of this line vary:

King James, “but it *shall be* for those:”

Tanakh, “But it shall be for them.”

New Revised Standard, “but it shall be for God's people;”

New International, “it will be for those who walk on that Way.”

New Jerusalem, “He will be the one to use this road;”

Rahfs, οἱ δὲ διεσπαρμένοι πορεύσονται ἐπ’ αὐτῆς, “but then the ones having been scattered / dispersed will go / travel upon it.”

Oswalt, “It is for those who walk the way.”

Oswalt comments that if his translation is correct, “it means that the way is holy because this is the character of those who walk there, not because of some intrinsic quality it has in itself.” (P. 625)

Why do you think all these differing translations have been given? If the prophetic message is clear, and easily understood, why do not the translators all translate it the same?

²⁵This line is also given varying translations:

King James, “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.”

Tanakh, “ No traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.” **New Revised Standard**, same;

New International, “wicked fools will not go about on it.”

New Jerusalem, “the fool will not stray along it.”

Rahfs, καὶ οὐ μὴ πλανηθῶσιν, “and they [the dispersed] shall certainly not be led astray.”

Watts comments on **verse 8** that “The highway is to be called *The Holy Road*, reserved for pilgrims...The [**Book of Isaiah**] is written before the reform of Ezra applied the laws of ‘clean and unclean’ so stringently. The meaning here should be sought in

(continued...)

²⁵(...continued)

distinguishing ordinary commercial and military traffic on the highway and that of pilgrims, *the ones who walk The Way*. These are those of faith who journey to Zion. The contrast is with fools who just wander about, not between [those who, according to the Levitical laws were considered] ‘clean Jews’ and the heathen.” (P. 16)

But Ezra and Nehemiah could interpret this passage in their quite different way, as demanding exclusion of foreigners, those who were not full-blooded Jews!

Alexander states that the meaning of “*the travelers and the fools*, is, the travelers, not excepting such as are ignorant or foolish...Henderson understands the whole clause as a promise, that the Jewish exiles, *however defective some of them might be in intellectual energy*, should not fail of reaching Zion. Hendewerk comes nearer to the full sense of the words, which he explains to mean that only moral impurity, not ignorance or weakness, should exclude men from this highway...

“But the words, in their primary and strict sense, are descriptive, not of the travelers, but of the way itself, which should not be a faint or dubious tack [zig-zag?] through shifting sands, but a highway so distinctly marked [and, we add, ‘raised up’] that even the most ignorant and inexperienced could not miss it.” (P. 41)

What do you think? Do you agree with Alexander?

Motyer seems to agree with Alexander, stating that ““Whoever walks that Way—even simpletons could not / will not stray!”

Oswalt comments that “*No fools shall stumble* has been understood in two differing ways. On the one hand, it is taken [to mean] that the highway will be so smooth that even a simpleton could walk there (So Young: ‘wayfarers, though fools, shall not stumble’). However, the word translated ‘fool’ means not merely a simpleton but that morally perverse person who knowingly chooses the opposite to God’s truth [אֲרִיָּיִם, *ewiyliym*]. Thus the sense is the same as ‘no one unclean shall pass over it.” (P. 625)

And Oswalt comments that “In a direct contrast with **Isaiah 34:10**, this **verse 8** asserts that in God’s country, as opposed to Man’s, communication and travel are easy.” (P. 625)

But we ask, Where is anything said about “communication” in this chapter?

And again we observe the obscurity of the prophetic message, which leads to these differing views as to its meaning. But aside from these differing interpretations, there can be no doubt that the prophetic message is a message of hope for the future. YHWH will provide a way for His people!

²⁶Motyer comments on **verses 9-10**: “In contrast with the previous stanza (**verse 8**) with its concentration on what is there, the final stanza opens with what is not: there is nothing to threaten...

“**Verse 10** is quoted at **Isaiah 51:11**. *They will enter Zion* is ‘and they will come to Zion; traveling (**verses 8-9**) gives way to arriving. *Singing* / ‘loud singing’ / ‘ringing cries’ / ‘shouts of joy’ (**verses 2b, 6b**) *will overtake them*...The translation could equally be ‘they overtake gladness and joy,’ as if what was always just ahead of them, is now at last caught and possessed. The departure of *sorrow and sighing*, the negative counterpart of the arrival of *joy*, secures an experience of unbroken and unbreakable happiness.” (P. 275)

Alexander comments on, and translates **verse 9**: “The wilderness, though no longer barren or pathless, might still be the resort of beasts of prey. The promised highway might itself be exposed to their incursions. But immunity from this inconvenience [we would say ‘deathly threat’] is here promised. There shall not be there a lion, and a ravenous beast shall not ascend it, nor be found there; and (there) shall walk redeemed (ones)...

“For a similar promise, in a still more figurative dress, see **Hosea 2:20**^{Heb} / **18**^{Eng},

וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
עִם-חַיֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה וְעִם-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְרֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה
וְקִשְׁתׁ וְחַרְבׁ וְמִלְחָמָה אֶשְׁבֹּר מִן-הָאָרֶץ
וְהַשְּׂכֵבִתִּים לִבְטָח:

And I will cut for them a covenant in that day,
with the field’s wild beast(s), and with the heavens’ bird(s), and creeping
things of the ground;
and bow and sword and war I will break in pieces from the earth / land;
and I will cause them to lie down securely!

“and for a description of the desert as the home of deadly animals, **Isaiah 30:6a**,

מִשָּׂא בְהֵמוֹת נֶגֶב
בְּאֶרֶץ צָרָה וְצוּקָה
לְבִיא וְלִישׁ
מִהֶם אֶפְעָה וְשָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף

Utterance / oracle (for the) beasts of (the) Negebh / South:
In a land of distress and pressure,
lioness and lion—

from (among) them viper and flying fiery serpent...” (P. 42)

(continued...)

וּפְרִיץ חַיּוֹת בְּלִיעֵלָנָה

לֹא תִמְצָא שָׁם

וְהַלְכוּ גְאוּלִים:

A lion will not be there;

and a violent beast not go up²⁷ on it--²⁸

it will not be found there--

²⁶(...continued)

Oswalt comments that “**Verse 9** continues the contrast with **chapter 34**. There the wild animals took over what had been man’s. Here, although the highway passes through lush watered regions where wildlife might be expected to abound, none of it will be of the ferocious sort.” (P. 626)

²⁷Alexander observes that “The phrase ascend it [our ‘go up on it’], i.e. from the level of the sands, through which the road is supposed to be cast up.” (P. 42)

The verb סָלַל, **salal**, ‘lift up,’ ‘cast up’ is used for ‘casting up a way / highway,’ and the noun used here, מַסְלֵל, **maslul**, means a ‘highway,’ or ‘way cast up,’ made prominent and passable. This is its only occurrence in the **Hebrew Bible**.

Motyer notes that “Though the form מַסְלֵל (highway) is not found elsewhere it has the same meaning as the more familiar מְסִלָּה, **mesillah** (a road built on a raised causeway and therefore visible and unmistakable).” (P. 275) We think that this is probably correct, but see no way of being sure.

²⁸Alexander explains that the “lion” and the “violent beast” are “applied by the [Aramaic] Targum to persecuting kings and rulers, by Jarchi to Nebuchadnezzar in particular, by Junius to the enemies of the church, and by Augusti to the avenger of blood...

“But they are rather intended to complete the great prophetic picture of a total change in the condition of the desert, under which general idea we may then include a great variety of suitable particulars, without, however, making any one of them the exclusive subject of the prophecy.” (P. 42)

We think the attempt to apply these animals to specific people is misleading and useless. But still, when we realize that the prophetic message is obscure, and characterized by puzzling enigmas, is it not tempting to try and interpret its elements in some such way? What do you think?

and those given freedom / redeemed²⁹ will walk (on it).³⁰

²⁹Watts comments that גָּאֵל, 'redeem' is a term used of Yahweh's acts toward Israel in Egypt (**Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Psalms 74:2; 77:16; 106:10** and **Isaiah 63:9**). But the term comes to have a religious meaning which suggests that God has freed the redeemed from the consequences of their sins." (P. 16)

Does Watts mean that the term used with reference to Israel's freedom from Egypt captivity had no "religious" meaning? Surely that would be wrong!

Alexander holds that its original and proper sense is "bought back, i.e. out of the bondage into which they [the Jewish exiles] had been *sold*. Most other writers give it the more general meaning of *freed* or *delivered*." (P. 42)

Of course, there was no literal "selling" of Israel into Babylonian captivity, just as there was no literal "selling" of Israel into Egyptian captivity.

Oswalt comments that "redeemed is a very significant term in the second part of the **Book of Isaiah**: גָּאֵל, ga'al and its derivatives occur twenty-one times, and פְּדָה, padhah, 'ransom,' twice...

"The occurrence of the concept [of redemption] here has been used as evidence that **chapters 34** and **35** were written by Deutero-Isaiah. However, that is not necessarily the case." (P. 626)

It is impressive that according to our count, the root גָּאֵל, ga'al occurs 25 times in the **Book of Isaiah**, here in **35:9** and then all the other 24 times in **chapters 41-66**.

The root פְּדָה, padhah, occurs only four times in the **Book of Isaiah**, in the following places: **1:27; 29:22; 35:10** and only once in **chapters 40-66**, at **51:11**.

³⁰Watts comments on **verse 9** that "The pilgrims making their way through the fruitful Arabah (compare **Psalm 84:7**^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng}) can also be assured of safety from *fearful beasts*... *Then*, that is, after God's act of retribution has straightened things out, and *there*, in the place where things were wrong before, the way to Zion will be open and safe...

"For now the *redeemed* walk there. גְּאוּלִּיִּם, ge'uliyim 'redeemed' appears here in the [**Book of Isaiah**] for the first time instead of *the remnant* of Israel of Judah. Yahweh is frequently pictured as the גֹּאֵל, goel 'Redeemer' ['Next of Kin'] in the following chapters (**41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16** and **63:16**).

(continued...)

³⁰(...continued)

“The use of the term here signals a change in the basic idea of Israel’s / Judah’s hope. No longer is this hope for a restoration of a part of the old order. From here on to **chapter 66** it takes the form of God’s redeemed elect in His new order. The *then* and the *there* that signal a new and different time and place also envision participants made eligible, not because they are a part of the past people of Israel or Zion, but because they are part of God’s new redemption...

“But this does not lie in some distant future. It is introduced by God’s action against Edom which is presented in **chapter 34**. The new time of redemption is contemporary with that in which the [Book of Isaiah] is first read and heard.” (P. 16)

That would mean that at least in the post-exilic centuries, when the **Book of Isaiah** was being read by the Israelites, the time of salvation / redemption had already arrived. Compare **Isaiah 40:1-2**,

- 1 נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי
 יֹאמֶר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
 Comfort! Comfort My people,
 says your (plural) God!
- 2 דַּבְּרוּ עַל-לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם׃
 וּקְרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ
 כִּי מִלָּאָה צָבָאָהָּ
 כִּי נִרְצָה עֹנָהָּ
 כִּי לִקְחָהּ מִיַּד יְהוָה כַּפְּלָיִם
 בְּכָל-חַטָּאתֶיהָ:
 Speak to Jerusalem’s heart,
 and cry out to her--
 that her warfare is complete,
 that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,
 that she received from YHWH’s hand double (punishment)
 for all her sins!

³¹Alexander comments on, and translates **verse 10**: “The whole series of promises is here summed up in that of restoration and complete redemption. *And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion with shouting, and everlasting joy upon their head; gladness and joy shall overtake (them), and sorrow and sighing shall flee away...*

(continued...)

וּבֵּאוּ צִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה
וּשְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם עַל־רֵאשֵׁם
שִׁשׁוֹן וּשְׂמֵחָה יִשְׁיִגּוּ
וְנִסּוּ יִגּוֹן וְאַנְחָה:

³¹(...continued)

“Zion is mentioned as the journey’s end; they shall not only move towards it but attain it...

“The figures of this verse are applied to the return from exile by the [Aramaic] Targum (*from the midst of their captivity*)...and Junius applies it in a wider sense to the reception of converts into the church. Calvin extends it to the whole course of life and to its close. The Talmud applies it to the world to come, and Gill says that ‘the highway before described not only leads to Zion, the church below, but to the Zion above, to the heavenly glory; and all the redeemed, all that walk in this way, shall come thither; at death their souls return to God that gave them, and in the resurrection their bodies shall return from their dusty beds and appear before God in Zion’...

“The allusions to the Babylonian exile are correctly explained by Barnes upon the principle that minor and temporal deliverances were not only emblems of the great salvation, but preparatory to it.” (P. 43)

Oswalt comments that **verse 10** “is quoted in **51:11** and sometimes taken to have been derived from that context...

“This is the apex [peak, summit] of the eschatological vision: a day when the people of God can be set free from their own sins and the sins of others, when they can come home to their God and be fully restored to His image [where is anything said in this passage about ‘being fully restored to God’s image?], when a lifelong struggle to avoid grief and pain will be ended in their being overwhelmed by gladness and joy. This is the hope of biblical faith.” (P. 626)

He compares **Psalm 23:6**, “Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life.” But that is quite a different thing from an “eschatological hope”! Rather it is the conviction that goodness and mercy shall be actually in pursuit of the person whom YHWH shepherds, here and now, in this life! Of course, the **Psalm** goes on to speak of what will happen to the psalmist when he passes through the valley of the shadow of death—he believes that he will dwell in the house of YHWH to long-lasting time. That hope is eschatological, not the first one.

And YHWH's ransomed ones³² will return,
and they will come (to) Zion with ringing shouts;
and long-lasting joy upon their heads;
they will overtake rejoicing and joy;
and sorrow and groaning will flee away.³³

³²Watts comments that “Yahweh’s ransomed ones (פְּדוּיֵי יְהוָה, *phedhuyey YHWH*) translates a parallel term...Like *redeem*, *ransom* (פְּדוּה) becomes a fixed religious term, and is so used here, to designate those whom Yahweh has released from the bondage due them for their sins...

“Redemption and ransoming in the [**Book of Isaiah**] pictures a salvation from the judgment curse enunciated in **6:9-13**, in **chapter 24**, and in other places, and which has been so amply fulfilled in the six generations portrayed by the [**Book of Isaiah**] up to this time...The goal for the redeemed and ransomed pilgrims is *Zion*.” (Pp. 16-17)

³³Watts comments that “The chapter ends with words which would be appropriate for a blessing on the pilgrims, wishing joy and gladness to replace all sorrow and sighing and that these may have an everlasting effect on them...

“The judgment against Edom is a sign that the change has begun. Israelite and Jew alike may hope for a safe and joyful pilgrimage to Zion in the knowledge that redemption and ransom [are] to be found in their God.” (P. 17)

Watts explains **chapter 35** by stating “That Yahweh should hold a great judgment against the nations for all that they had done to Judah and Jerusalem is no surprise, although deuteronomic and prophetic preaching insisted that it all happened because of Israel’s sins. The surprise comes from the silence concerning Babylon. She was the chief aggressor and instigator of it all. But no word is spoken about her at this point. Instead the Divine wrath is directed toward Judah’s eastern neighbor, Edom, those traditional descendants of Esau...

The scene presumes an exilic setting, undoubtedly well-known to early readers, in which Edom and other neighbors persecute helpless Jewish people in many ways. They expropriate the best land from local residents in Palestine. They collect tolls from commerce on the highways. And they make pilgrimage to Jerusalem dangerous if not virtually impossible. Such pressures added to Judah’s memory of Edom’s perfidy in collaborating with Nebuchadnezzar in the sack of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.

“The first part of the scene portrays the nations summoned to a great courtroom in the manner of the emperors. Yahweh is present, His herald and His aides speak for Him, but He Himself speaks the central message of **verse 5**. He announces the judgment on Edom in the setting of imperial rights that belong to Yahweh, Lord of all

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

nations. He claims the right of ban with wrath and terrible fury on nations and armies that displease Him (**verse 2**), the right of the sword (**verse 6**) or of armed retaliation, the right of a sacrifice (**verse 6c**) in Bozrah, Edom's capital, and the right to a day of retribution (**verse 8**)...

"The actions against Edom apparently include armed incursion and the devastation of her population followed by 'natural catastrophes' not unlike those of Sodom and Gomorrah which leave the entire territory desolate and abandoned...

"The judgment on Edom clears the way for the fulfillment of the vision of **Isaiah 2:1-4**...The destruction of Edom becomes the center of God's action against the nations alongside that against Babylon (**chapter 47**)." (Pp. 17-18)

Oswalt states that "With this verse the segment encompassed by **chapters 13-35** reaches its climactic conclusion...

"**Chapters 7-12** posed a question: "Is God Sovereign of the nations?" Can God deliver from Assyria? Or is He just one more of the Gods, waiting to be gobbled up by a bigger God? In short, can God be trusted?

Chapters 13-35 have sought to answer that question in four main sections: **chapters 13-23; 24-27; 28-33** and **chapters 34-35**...

"In the first [**13-23**], God's Lordship over each of the nations is asserted...

"In the second [**24-27**], it is shown tht God is not merely the Reactor to the nations, but is in fact the sovereign Actor on the world's stage...

"In the third [**28-33**], the superiority of God's counsel over that of the merely human leaders is shown...

'Finally, the last two chapters [**34-35**] show the ultimate results of the two courses of action, with **chapter 35** ending at exactly the same point as **chapters 11-12**, with the promise that God can, and will, redeem. He may be trusted...

"However, the issue remains: is this merely abstraction or can it become concrete reality? Ahaz had proved that the nations cannot be trusted. But what of God? Can His trustworthiness be demonstrated or only asserted? Must His promises for the distant future be clung to blindly or can an earnest of their reality be experienced now? This is what **chapters 36-39** are about." (Pp. 626-27)