

## Isaiah 34-35

### Overview

Following Delitzsch, I take 34-35 as an integrated summary of 28-33 (or indeed of all of 13-33), just as 24-27 summarize and integrate 13-23. Ch. 34 anticipates God's judgment on the nations, and 35 his restoration of the creation. The same pattern characterized ch. 24-27, where 24 was judgment and 25-27 deliverance (and there, as here, the notion of singing is prominent).

### 34, Judgment on the Nations (Gentiles)

After an introductory summons to all creation, the description of judgment falls into two parts:

- 2-8, marked by a repeated introductory formula, focus on the slaughter of those who oppose Zion.
- 9-17, marked by conclusions with repeated emphases of eternity, focus on the desolation of the land that the rebels inhabit.

**34:1 Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people[s]: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it.**--He calls two groups: people, and the world in which they live.

The summons to the world, and ריב in v. 8, suggest that we should understand this chapter in terms of the covenant lawsuit. Additional confirmation is the frequent allusions to Deut 32, which is one of the earliest and most classic forms of the lawsuit in the Bible.

We saw this pattern first in 1:2, directed against Israel. But now the Lord makes clear that the Gentiles cannot escape his judgment. This ריב is on behalf of Israel (v. 8), against those who abused her.

The complete pattern includes:

- Call to witnesses
- Declaration of the Lord's faithfulness and the vassal's unfaithfulness
- Accusation posed as a question
- Declaration of guilt
- Statement of the sentence

Here we have only the call to witnesses and the sentence, but the declarations and accusations are abundant in the earlier chapters (the woes and burdens). The first part of the verse, addressed to peoples and nations, appears to summon the defendants as well.

### 2-8, Slaughter of the People

This section is marked by the fourfold repetition (in Hebrew) of "for ... the Lord has X." His four fearsome possessions are indignation (v. 2), a sword (vv. 5-6a.), a sacrifice (6b), and a day of

vengeance (8). The first and last focus on his motive, and are universal in scope; the second and third focus on the means, and are described in terms of Edom.

The imagery of this section is incredibly gruesome. The Lord is depicted as raging with uncontrolled anger, spreading dead bodies on the ground with abandon, flooding the earth with their gore, and thirsty for their blood. This is a picture of God that we would, in the flesh, rather not contemplate. But it is the picture that God moved Isaiah to record, and that the Spirit has preserved, to remind us of how great God's wrath is against our sin. We should draw two lessons from it.

- The first is thanks to God for the salvation he has given us in Christ, as we realize the awful wrath to which we were subject.
- The second is zeal in reaching out to the lost, once we appreciate the fate that awaits them.

The imagery here is reminiscent of some pagan deities. For example, the Indian goddess of slaughter Kali wears a necklace of human skulls and a belt of human hands<sup>1</sup>, and Chinese mythology is eloquent in its description of the torments to which demons subject their victims.<sup>2</sup> Gods and goddesses of war are abundant in the world's mythology.<sup>3</sup> However corrupted, these religions seem to reveal some consciousness that the divine realm is angry with humans. Isaiah shows us that their error is not in the intensity with which they represent that wrath, but in the solutions that they offer. They would have us believe that our prayers, or sacrifices, or good deeds can appease the offended deities. But we are powerless before the just wrath of such a holy God. Only the Sacrifice that he himself provided in Jesus the Messiah can deliver us from his ire.

## 2-4, The Lord's Wrath

**2 For the indignation of the LORD** לַיהוָה אֵת קִצְפּוֹ *is* [the LORD has indignation] upon **all nations**, and **his fury** חַמָּה upon **all their armies**:--“Fury,” like “indignation,” describes what the Lord has. Like “vengeance” in v. 8, this emotion is the Lord's prerogative alone, and should not characterize his people.<sup>4</sup>

Jam 1:20 the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

But the Lord is entitled to be angry, and here his wrath boils over.

The scope of his anger is universal: “all nations,” “all their armies.”

**he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter.**--Its result is complete destruction. The following three clauses, upsetting to us in their vividness, are meant to communicate both the emotional intensity and the power of God's wrath.

**3 Their slain also shall be cast out,**--They are denied the honor of a proper burial, but left to rot on the surface of the ground, a spectacle to those who pass by (cf. 66:24).

1 <http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/a/makali.htm>

2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Di\\_Yu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Di_Yu)

3 [http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl\\_wargods.htm](http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_wargods.htm)

4 Eph 4:26, “Be angry and sin not,” must be understood in the light of its original context in Ps 4:4, referring to a passive reaction that must be controlled and squelched. See notes in Robinson and Alford.

**and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses,**--Left on the surface of the ground, their decomposition renders the environment repulsive.

**and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.**--So much blood is spilled that it washes away the mountains.

**4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.**--At first glance, this seems to associate the destruction of the physical world with that of the nations. But careful attention to usage of the expression “host of heaven” (see notes) shows that we should understand it personally. There is only one passage in the Bible (Jer 33:22) where it refers only to the physical heavenly bodies, and that is later than Isaiah. Everywhere else, it refers either to righteous angels (1 Kings 22:19 = 2 Chr 18:18; Neh 9:6) or to objects of false worship, often personifications of the heavenly bodies. According to Dan 10:13-21; 12:1, earthly nations have their angelic counterparts, and when the nations are judged, their spiritual overseers must fall as well.

Against this background, Isaiah is saying that not only will the nations fall, but in addition the false gods whom they served will be cast down. The physical darkening of the heavenly bodies associated with the Lord's return (24:23; Joel 2:31: 3:15) is emblematic of this spiritual conquest.

## 5-6a, The Lord's Sword

The next thing that the Lord has is a sword. The formula is in v. 6, but the sword itself appears in 5.

**5 For my sword shall be bathed in heaven:**--Passive renderings, whether “be bathed” (AV) or “be drunken” (Delitzsch, Motyer) are at variance with the Piel, which elsewhere means “to water,” “to cause to drink.” Rather, the terrifying picture is that the One who dwells in heaven is thirsty and the sword descends to satisfy his thirst. “My sword satiates [someone] in heaven.”

**behold, it shall come down upon Idumea,**--Of the four paragraphs in this section, the outer two emphasize the universality of the Lord's judgment, but the center two focus on Idumea (Heb. Edom), the descendants of Esau. Given the universal scope announced in v. 2, we are probably to understand Edom as a representative of all the nations that have opposed themselves to Israel. In cinematic terms, Isaiah starts by showing the slaughter of all nations, then zooms in on one example to confront us in more detail with the terrifying process that is underway.

Let's review the history.

- Before Jacob and Esau were born, God promised (Gen 25:23) that “the elder shall serve the younger.”
- In a fleshly effort to fulfill this promise, Jacob (encouraged by his mother Rebekah) deceived his father and defrauded Esau of the blessing (Gen 27)
- Esau is initially angry with Jacob (Gen 27:41), but by the time Jacob returns home 20 years later,<sup>5</sup> Esau appears to have forgiven him personally (Gen 33:4-15).
- Perhaps hoping that the patriarch's attitude was preserved by the children, during the exodus

<sup>5</sup> See Anstey p. 115 for the chronology

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(Num 20:14-21) Moses seeks permission to cross Edom peaceably, but is refused. Nevertheless, he commands Israel, “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he *is* thy brother” (Deu 23:7).

- Saul (1050 BC, 1 Sam 14:47), David (1010 BC, Ps 60:1; 1 Kings 11:15), Jehoram (854 BC, 2 Ki 8:20), and Amaziah (796 BC, 2 Ki 14:7) warred with them.
- At the time of the Babylonian conquest, they aided Babylon against Jerusalem (Obadiah)

The nation is thus a fit emblem for someone who ought to have been friendly to Judah, but was not. If anyone is to be subject to a lawsuit on behalf of Israel, they are.

**and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.**--“Curse” is חרם, the ban to total destruction that Israel was required to exercise on the inhabitants of the land. During the Exodus Israel did not threaten Edom with the ban, but now they fall under it.

Note this use of משפט for punishment, not just the process of discerning.

**6 The sword of the LORD** תִּרְבֵּ לַיהוָה [the LORD has a sword];--Here is the expected formula, "The Lord has X."

**[it] is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams:**--The repeated reference to blood and fat, and the naming of the sacrificial animals, reminds us that in the law, the blood and fat of the sacrifices was reserved to the Lord alone (Lev 3:13-17; 7:22-27). He is claiming that which is his right.

In v. 5, the sword falls upon men, but in v. 6 on animals. Isaiah calls to mind the rivers of blood that flowed at the great sacrificial seasons, as when Solomon inaugurated the temple by offering innumerable sheep and oxen (1 Ki 8:5). Those sacrifices were offered to cover people's sin. But when a nation does not accept the offering that God provides, they must bear the stroke. The sword that falls on the substitute is the one that, without the substitute, must fall on the sinner.

The reference to the Lord's vengeful sword is rooted in Deut 32, reminding us of the lawsuit background of this chapter:

Deu 32:41-42 If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. 42 I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; *and that* with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.

### 6b-7, The Lord's Sacrifice

**for the LORD hath a sacrifice** זָבַח לַיהוָה in **Bozrah**, and a great slaughter in the land of **Idumea.**--

The focus turns from the weapon to the victims. “Sacrifice” suggests the ritual offering of animals, but “slaughter” has none of the sacral connections.

**7 And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls;**--Three animals are named. Only “bullock” is acceptable in the law as a sacrifice. Why are the other two mentioned?

- “Unicorn” ראם is now understood to be most likely a reference to the wild ox, or perhaps the rhinoceros. The OT often uses the term as a metaphor for the strength of a leader, as in Moses'

blessing of Joseph in Deu 33:17, “his horns *are like* the horns of unicorns.”

- Similarly, “bulls” אַבְיָרִים is literally "powerful ones" and often refers to people.

This "sacrifice" is not restricted to canonical victims, but prominent people too.

**and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness.**--As in v. 3, the gore of the victims is spread over the ground. We are meant to cringe at the gruesomeness of the image.

## 8, The Lord's Vengeance

**8 For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance** כִּי יוֹם נִקְמָה לַיהוָה [the LORD has a day of vengeance], **and the year of recompences** שְׁלוּמִים—As in vv. 2 and 6b, the Lord has two things: a day of vengeance, and a year of recompences.

Like wrath, vengeance belongs to the Lord. He claimed it as his possession in Deut 32, where the pairing with “recompence” שְׁלוּמִים suggests a linkage with this text:

Deu 32:35 To me *belongeth* vengeance, and recompence

Deu 32:41 I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward שְׁלוּמִים them that hate me.

The NT quotes these texts to emphasize that it is the only the Lord who is entitled to take vengeance:

Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Wrath, manslaughter, and vengeance are all the Lord's prerogative. It is wrong for man to do these things, but God is not bound by human ethics.

**for the controversy רִיב of Zion.**--Isaiah reminds us of the lawsuit context. Zion, like an abused widow, has come to the judge for justice. Compare 1:23,

Thy princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause רִיב of the widow come unto them.

Unlike Israel's failed judges, the Lord will not neglect the oppressed.

Isa 51:21-23 Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: 22 Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause רִיב of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: 23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

## 9-17, Destruction of the Land

Now we move from the people to the land. The judgment is depicted in two ways, each followed by a refrain emphasizing its eternal nature.

## 9-10, Everlasting Burning

**9 And the streams thereof [of Edom] shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.**--The land is consumed with fire.

The duration of this judgment is emphasized with four statements of perpetual desolation. In Hebrew, in each case the time reference comes first, followed by the verb, imperfect in all but the last case.

**10 night nor day It shall not be quenched;  
for ever the smoke thereof shall go up:  
from generation to generation it shall lie waste;  
for ever and ever none shall pass through it.**

## 11-17, Eternal Wilderness

The second form of judgment is that the land is taken over with wild animals that displace the people. This section is chiasmic:

Wild animals occupy the land	11a	13b-17a
The land is unformed and untilled	11b	13a
Human leaders are nowhere to be found	12	

**11 But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it:**--Three of the four animals mentioned in the first, very brief animal section (all but the bittern) are classified in Lev 11 and Deut 14 as unclean. The first two (cormorant and owl) are mentioned only in Isaiah and those two passages. Not only is the land abandoned to wild animals, but they are unclean animals as well. You can't eat them, though they may eat you.

**and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion תוהו, and the stones of emptiness בוהו.**--God returns the land to the תוהו ובוהו of Gen 1:2, before he had begun to do his work of creation. In this half of the chiasm, the language marks it as abandoned by God; in the second half, as forsaken by man.

**12 They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing.**--At the center is the notice that no one is found to rule over this desolate land and bring it into submission. Man was created to have dominion over the earth, and even control freaks are a reflection, however distorted, of this divine purpose. But no human, no matter how strong-willed, can subdue this wilderness.

The judgment is very much like ch. 3, the condemnation of the proud men and pampered ladies, where God took away from Jerusalem those who were qualified to rule (vv. 2-3). The land is untamed. God will not order it, and man cannot control it.

**13 And thorns סִיָּיִם shall come up in her palaces, nettles קִמּוֹשׁ and brambles הַזֹּחַן in the fortresses thereof:**--These three words for prickly weeds are uncommon. None of them is among the words used in the curse in Eden, but in the wisdom literature all three characterize the sluggard and the fool:

Ecc 7:6 For as the crackling of **thorns הַסִּיָּיִם** under a pot, so is the laughter of the **fool**: this also



is vanity.

Pro 24:30-31 I went by the field of the **slothful**, and by the vineyard of the man **void of understanding**; 31 And, lo, it was all grown over with **thorns** קַמְשָׁנִים, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

Pro 26:9 As a **thorn** הַחֹרֵף goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of **fools**.

Just as v. 11b depicts the land as bereft of God's creative hand, so v. 13a depicts it as lacking man's diligent care, the result of the lack depicted in v. 12.

**and it shall be an habitation of dragons [jackals], and a court for owls. 14 The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island [foxes?], and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. 15 There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.**--Now Isaiah gives a much longer list of wild beasts that will take over the land. All are wild, and many are named only here. Some groupings are of interest, indicated by color codes above: **unclean** in the OT, **only Isa and later** in the Bible, **demonic** associations. In particular, in the latter category:

- The satyr שָׂטִיר, the hairy goat, is an object of worship in Lev 17:7 and 2 Chr 11:15 (Jeroboam's pantheon)
- The screech owl לִילִית appears only here in the Bible. The name appears in other Semitic literature before Isaiah's time as a demon.

The wilderness is not only abandoned by God and man, but inhabited by demons.

**16 Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read:**--Isaiah calls attention to his own prophecy. When this happens, people are to note that it was prophesied beforehand.

**no one of these shall fail,**--All of these invasive species will be there.

**none shall want her mate:**--The mention of their mates emphasizes that this is going to be an ongoing problem. They will breed and take over the land.

**for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.**--The prophet, as the mouthpiece of God, has issued the prophecy, which is not a passive description but rather an active command, causing the future to take form (cf. Gen 1 and Isa 55:11 "it shall not return unto me void").

**17 And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line:**--When Israel occupied the land, Joshua assigned it to them by casting lots (Jos 14:2; 18:6), to discover the Lord's assignment for them. The Lord has just as sovereignly appointed these doleful creatures to dwell in the condemned land.

**they shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein.**--Once again, we are reminded that this judgment will go on for ever.

## How Long is Eternal?

How can this destruction of the physical land of Edom be said to be eternal? It might endure through the Millennium, but wouldn't it be destroyed at the creation of the new heavens and the new earth?

If we go back and take a closer look, we'll discover that this section is the origin of the NT teaching of the lake of fire. Consider each of the two characteristics, burning and wilderness.

### ***Burning***

The OT recognizes the eternal punishment of the wicked:

Dan 12:1-2 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

But it is the NT that emphasizes the role of fire in that punishment. This teaching has two phases.

First, it originates in the gospels: John the Baptist warns his hearers concerning the coming Messiah,

Mat 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

And the Lord himself taught,

Mat 13:41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Mat 13:49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, 50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Mar 9:43-48 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: 48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

In this last portion, "hell" is Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, which also appears in our Lord's teaching in Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:38; 18:9; 23:15, 33; and Luke 12:5. That was the location of Tophet, where the apostate Jews offered their children to Molech (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6).

Jer 7:31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire;



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Jer 32:35 And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech;

Josiah defiled it to prevent its use as a sanctuary.

2Ki 23:10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

It was used as a place to incinerate refuse, and fires would be burning there almost constantly. The NT adopts it as an emblem of the punishment of the wicked with fire. But the NT inherits this image from Isa 30:33, where the Lord takes over Tophet for his place of judgment.

The second body of information about this eternal burning is Revelation, and there we find explicit allusions to our passage.

Rev 14:9-11 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and **brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: 11 And the **smoke** of their torment **ascendeth up for ever and ever**: and they have no rest **day nor night**, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Rev 19:20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with **brimstone**.

Rev 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and **brimstone**, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented **day and night for ever and ever**.

Rev 20:14-15 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

The notions of “brimstone for ever,” “smoke for ever,” and the collocation “night and day” with “for ever and ever” appear elsewhere in the Bible only in Isa 34:9,10.

Thus Isaiah's prophecies in ch. 30 and 34 appear to be the seed for the NT image of a burning hell.

### **Wilderness**

Two of the wild beasts in vv. 12-17 are associated with demons. The goat, the “satyr,” was an object of pagan worship, and the only attested meaning for “screech owl” is Lilith, the night-demon known from ancient cuneiform literature (Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian). Many of the others are unclean birds.

John's angelic mentor echoes Isaiah's combination of demonology and ornithology when he proclaims,

Rev 18:2 Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every **foul spirit**, and a cage of every **unclean** and hateful **bird**.

We know that the angels who sinned in Gen 6:2, the “sons of God” who went in to the daughters of men, are currently held in prison awaiting a coming judgment:

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Jud 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

2Pe 2:4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

Our Lord describes the lake of fire not only as a place of burning, but also as the dwelling place of unclean spirits, the final place of punishment for those now held in chains of darkness:

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

And in fact, in the Revelation, the first ones to be consigned to the lake of fire are the beast and the false prophet, the demon-empowered rulers of the empire of Babylon the great:

Rev 19:20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The chiasm of Isa 34:11-17 emphasizes the lack both of God's creative power and of man's cultivating presence. The earth was made subject to man, but hell will be completely out of his control. He will be adrift in a wilderness full of wild, untamed spirits, the ultimate torment for a creature originally destined to have dominion.

Thus Edom's double doom, of burning and wilderness, will indeed continue forever. These verses in Isaiah are the seed from which the NT teaching of Gehenna grows, an eternal place of torment characterized by burning and untameable demons. It is fashionable in modern liberal Christianity to deny the existence of such a place, and even many evangelicals choose to emphasize other things. But as we have seen, from Isa 34, through our Lord's personal teaching during his earthly ministry, and on into the Revelation, the Scriptures warn often of this terrible place, and urge us to flee for refuge to the Savior whom God has provided for us. Isa 34 appears to be the most detailed description of Gehenna in the Bible.

### 35, Restoration of the Nation (Israel)

As in the previous summary in 24-27, judgment (ch. 24) passes into restoration (ch. 25-27). There, a distant echo of singing in 24:14-16 blossomed into three great songs in ch. 25-27. So here, singing (רָנַן, the joyful shout, as in 24:14) marks the restoration. The references are arranged chiasmically:

- gladness שׂוֹשׁ and singing רָנַן in 1-2 and 10
- שׂוֹשׁ amplified with גִּיל in 1-2, with שִׂמְחָה in 10
- רָנַן recurs at the center, v. 5

The theme of the section is the march of the redeemed to Zion through the wilderness.

## 1-2, Response of the Wilderness to the Multitude

**35:1 The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad יִשְׂשׂוּם for them;**--Isaiah introduces a mysterious “them,” which surfaces throughout this section in vv. 2 and 8. This is an important rhetorical device, not to be explained away as do most translations.<sup>6</sup> Not until vv. 9-10 is it identified. The presence of this company stimulates joy on the part of the inanimate earth.

**and the desert shall rejoice תִּגַּל, and blossom as the rose. 2 It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice תִּגַּל even with joy גִּילת and singing רִנָּן:**--The song that was heard from afar during judgment in 24:14-16, and amplified in the mouth of the saints in ch. 25-27, now occupies even the inanimate creation. As this company travels along, the world is transformed before it, awakening to greet it. The rejoicing of the land (as opposed to people) is a common image of the Messianic age (see notes).

**the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon,**--Lebanon was renowned for its majestic cedars, Carmel and Sharon as fruitful garden lands. Now the wilderness and desert will share in their fruitfulness.

Up to this point the wilderness is responding to the unnamed company. Now these people respond to the change they see taking place around them. The wilderness receives restoration, but only humans can understand its significance as demonstrating God's power. This second half of v. 2, structurally linked with 2a, but thematically pointing to the next section, is a linked keyword transition.

**they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.**--Note the alternation, though with shift of subject and object:

	recipient	glory	excellency
<b>Land</b>	shall be given unto it [the desert]	the glory of Lebanon	the excellency of Carmel and Sharon
<b>God</b>	They [the people] shall see	the glory of the LORD	the excellency of our God

## 3-7, Response of the Multitude to the Wilderness

**3 Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.**--The unnamed company that inspires the wilderness is not proud and strutting, but stumbling and discouraged. This is a people that has been under bondage and oppression, through divine chastisement. Thus Heb 12:12-13 uses this text to speak of the encouragement of those under divine discipline:

12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

**4 Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not:**--The exhortation is reminiscent of two previous passages.

6 “Them” is awkward; the only object taken by שׂוֹשׁ elsewhere is cognate משׂוֹשׁ (in 66:10), motivating the universal interpretation of the *mem as nun paragogicum* assimilated to the following מְדַבֵּר. Still, the AV translators recognize the presence of the 3mp in vv. 2, 4, and 8, not identified until v. 10 as “the redeemed of the Lord.” “They” in v. 2 is hardly “wilderness and solitary place,” which, subsumed under “desert,” is throughout 3fs, nor would it make sense to make Carmel and Sharon the subject. I will expound following AV.

## Isaiah 34-35

At first one thinks of the Lord's words to Joshua on the death of Moses,

Jos 1:9 Have not I commanded thee? **Be strong** and of a good courage; **be not afraid**, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

But the quote is not exact. Isaiah uses a different verb ירא than does the Lord to Joshua ערך. Isaiah is probably thinking of David's encouragement to Solomon, which uses the same verb that Isaiah does:

1Ch 28:20 **Be strong** and of good courage, and do it: **fear not**, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee;

The difference in the episodes is subtle but telling. In Josh, the people are entering the land to conquer and settle it. There is no temple, nor thought of one—the Lord dwells in their midst in a tabernacle. But David is commissioning Solomon to build the temple. The focus in Isaiah is on the march to Zion. The people are on their way to the sanctuary, and Isaiah encourages them with the memory of how God strengthened Solomon as he prepared a place for the nation to worship the Lord.

To both Joshua and Solomon, the basis of the encouragement was the same: “The Lord is with thee.” The same basis is here as well:

**behold, your God will come with vengeance, even the recompense<sup>7</sup> גְּמוּלָהּ of God;**--Recall 34:8,, the Lord's fourth terrible possession of judgment,

For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.

**he will come and save you.**--When God's people are oppressed, Scripture comforts them that God will save them by judging their adversaries.

2Th 1:6-10 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; 7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

**5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing יְהַלֵּל:**--Not only discouragement, but every form of physical weakness will be overcome.

In the NT, the Lord Jesus alludes to this verse when he responds to the question from John the Baptist about whether he is the Messiah.

Mat 11:2-6 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? 4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the

<sup>7</sup> A different word than in 34:8, גְּמוּלָהּ rather than שְׁלֹמִים, though the overall intent appears to be the same.

dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

As often, the first advent of our Lord is the prototype of the second. He did not restore the desert and wilderness, but he did demonstrate the power to restore people

**for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.**--The verb is past tense. We are still seeing the impact on people of the change in the environment.

**7 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.**--Water is the most precious commodity in the Near East, but in that day it will be abundant.

### **8-9a, The Highway to the Destination**

So far, we have the wilderness responding in joy to the unnamed multitude, and the multitude encouraged at the sight of the transformed world before them. But where are they going?

**8 And an highway shall be there, and a way,**--They are not wandering, but traveling on a highway. You don't build a road to nowhere. The construction requires hard work, Isa 40:3-4,

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. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

One invests this effort only to make it possible for people to move to some important destination.

Isaiah defines this highway with five clauses. The first and last are positive, while the middle three are negative.

**and it shall be called The way of holiness [to the Sanctuary];**--“Holiness” is definite, **שְׁהִיָּה**. The article might be intended for the entire construct phrase, as the AV renders it. But throughout the OT, the construction "the way of X" with X definite (**הַדָּרֶךְ הַזֶּה**) regularly means "the road leading to X," and **שְׁהִיָּה** is a common designation for the sanctuary. So we can certainly translate "the road leading to the sanctuary," which fits very well with the rest of the chapter. Isaiah has presented this vision before:

Isa 2:2-3 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob

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.

First we saw the wilderness transformed by the presence of the multitude. Then we saw the multitude aroused from their discouragement by the sight of waters in the wilderness. Now we learn the purpose of their journey: they are on the highway that leads to the sanctuary.

The three negative descriptions describe the excellence of this road in terms of its freedom from three defects: pollution, confusion, and predation.

**the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those:**--It is free from *pollution*. Just as the

highway is distinguished from the open wilderness, those who walk upon it are distinguished from the mass of humanity. It is a special road, for special people. It is intended to serve the unnamed company that is in view throughout this section. We do not yet know who the multitude are, but we know who they are not. Though stumbling and weak, they are not the unclean, who would be excluded from the sanctuary to which the highway leads.

**the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.**--It is free from *confusion*, so plainly marked that even a fool would not be able to get lost in it. The point is not that the morally defective fool will be allowed on this road; that is excluded by the previous description.

**9 No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there;--**It is free from *predation*, wild animals that might threaten the travelers.

Those who walk on it will not be corrupted, lost, or harmed.

### **9b-10, The Travelers**

The fifth description of the highway, which again turns positive, finally identifies the multitude,. It is amplified with themes from vv. 1-2 as we see them approaching their final destination.

**but the redeemed גְּאֻלִּים shall walk *there*: 10 And the ransomed of the LORD פְּדוּיֵי יְהוָה shall return,**--Finally we learn the identify of the company that is on this joyful earth-transforming journey: the redeemed, those whom the Lord has ransomed.

The two words are very close semantically. Both describe setting someone free by paying a price. Each represents about half of the OT instances of the Greek *λυτροω*, the main NT word for redemption. Yet they have different emphases.

“Redeemed” reflects Hebrew *גאל*, which emphasizes the one who pays the price. This is the first of 25 instances in Isaiah, who uses the word more than any other OT book (25x). Next are Ruth and Leviticus, with 22 instances each, and both emphasize that the one paying the price must be a kinsman. In keeping with the emphasis on the doer, the verb frequently appears as a participle (46/96 of the Qal instances), often nominally, “the redeemer.”

“Ransomed” reflects Hebrew *פדה*. This verb says nothing about the performer, and in fact only 2 of its 55 Qal instances are as the participle (and neither is nominal). The emphasis is entirely on the commercial transaction. This verb appears only 4x in Isaiah. Two are here and in the quotation of this verse in 51:11. The other two come before this point:

1:27 Zion shall be **redeemed** with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

The complement with *ב* indicates the means or price; cf. Exod 13:13; 34:20. It may refer to God's exertion by which he accomplishes something (Deut 9:26; Neh 1:10).

29:22 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who **redeemed** Abraham

As we discussed on this passage, the focus is on Abraham's deliverance from his idolatrous past, which God condemned and judged.

Let's put these terms together.



## Isaiah 34-35

Looking back, Israel is “the ransomed of the Lord” because he has delivered them by his judgment on other nations. In fact, in 43:3-4, he says,

For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

Other nations are the ransom price (כפר) with which he redeems them. We should understand the terrible judgments on the pagan world of ch. 13-34 as examples of this ransom.

Looking ahead, Israel is “the redeemed” because of his close relationship with them through his Servant, whose work will be described in much more detail in the second half of the book.

**and come to Zion with songs רָנָה and everlasting joy שְׂמֵחָה upon their heads**<sup>8</sup>:--Enjoying such zealous and tender care, they approach the Sanctuary of their king with great excitement. At the start of the chapter, it was the wilderness that cried out with joy at the sight of the redeemed multitude stumbling toward them. Now, realizing that God has delivered them, the people pick up the joyful cry.

When David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Zion, it was with great joy and singing:

2Sa 6:15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

Psa 68:25-26 The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. 26 Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel.

The Ark was the symbol of the presence of the Lord. We think of them as bringing it to Jerusalem, but perhaps Isaiah sees that event as a type of the day when God himself brings his people to his holy city with joyful shouting. Another anticipation was when our Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (which in the church calendar happens to be today). Recall the joy of those who accompanied him, and in particular his words to the Pharisees:

Luk 19:39-40 And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. 40 And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

At the first advent, the people cried with joy, and the stones were standing by. At the second advent, the inanimate creation will lead in the praise, to be joined by the people.

**they shall obtain joy שִׂשׂוֹן and gladness שְׂמֵחָה shall overtake them, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**--Their time of suffering and sorrow is over. They are overcome with joy.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, “head” is singular, not plural. This could be merely a distributive singular. ראש occurs 24x in the OT, vs. 16x for ראשיהם, and many instances are distributive (e.g., Lev 21:5; Jos 7:6). But sometimes the “head” in question is a single entity for the group (Num 1:49; Mic 2:13). Could the “head” here be their leader, the Messiah (cf. 1 Cor 11:3)? It was for the joy of bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10; 12:2) that he suffered, and now that they are arrived safely at their destination, he rejoices, and they rejoice with him. Cf. also Lk 15:10, where the supporting parables suggest that the one rejoicing is the Lord.

## Notes

### Vocabulary for Wrath

	θυσμος	θυσμ-	οργη	οργ-	
ףא x277	93	23	95		5
חמה x131	73	5	24		3
חרון x41	12		23		
כעס x76	9	6	5	35 (32x verbs)	
עברה x36	9		11		
קצף x63	6	3	11		14

### Host of Heaven

What is the meaning of “host of heaven” in 34:4?

Isa 34:4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

The context deals with judgment on people and nations; the destruction of the physical environment is not in focus until v. 9.

Here's the general distribution:

	Heavenly bodies	No reference to heavenly bodies
False worship	Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Ki 23:5; Jer 8:2; cf. Acts 7:42, 43	2 Ki 17:16; 21:3, 5 = 2 Chr 33:3, 5; 2 Ki 23:4; Jer 19:13; Zeph 1:5
Angels subservient to the Lord		1 Ki 22:19 = 2 Chr 18:18 Micaiah; Neh 9:6

There is one reference to the heavenly bodies simply as physical objects, later than Isaiah:

Jer 33:22 As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.

This is a paraphrase of

Gen 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

So Jer's “host of heaven” corresponds to Gen 22:17 “stars of the heaven”

## Isaiah 34-35

But there is also a late reference to the host as heavenly powers, without reference to physical bodies:

Dan 8:10 And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them.

Given Daniel's preoccupation with angelic powers behind the nations in Dan 10:12-21; 12:1, it would appear that this little horn is aspiring to overtake even the heavenly powers. Or even follow Young and Wood, who see it as a reference to the people of God, cf. 12:3; Gen 15:5. Jerome is better: he refers it to the children of Israel, "who were protected by the assistance of angels."

Conclusion: with one exception, later than Isaiah, all biblical references to the "host of heaven" refer to personal entities, which in pagan thought were associated with the heavenly bodies.

### ***Prophecies of the Inanimate Choir***

The idea that inanimate things will cry out in praise to the Lord is frequently associated with the coming Messianic age.

Psa 96:11-13 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. 12 Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice 13 Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

Psa 98:7-9 Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 8 Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together 9 Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

Psa 148:7-13 Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: 8 Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: 9 Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: 10 Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: 11 Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: 12 Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.

Rom 8:18-22 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

This last reference shows that in spite of the parallel between Isa 35 and the Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday, the full engagement of creation in praise is yet future.

### ***Words for Singing***

Exo 15:1 שִׁירָה this is what the singers in the temple do

Isaiah 34-35

Exo 32:18 ענה

Jdg 5:3 זמר

1Ch 16:9 זמר and שיר parallel to שיה

1Ch 16:33 רנן is what the trees do when the Lord comes to judge the earth; Jb 29:13. TWOT: the joy of Israel at God's saving acts

The various actions can easily occur together:

2Ch 20:21-22 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers מְשֻׁרְרִים unto the LORD, and that should praise מְהִלִּים the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. 22 And when they began to sing and to praise הַלְלָהּ וְתִהְיֶה הַלְלָהּ, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

Note associations with instruments:

	ידה	שיר	זמר αγαλλιαω 24 (גיל x27) ευσφραϊνω 12 (שמח x141; שוש x8)	רנן
נָבֵל	Ps 71:22		Ps 33:2; 144:9	
כַּנּוֹר	Ps 33:2		Ps 71:22; 98:5; 147:7; 149:3	
עֲשׂוֹר			Ps 33:2; 144:9	
מַחֲזֵל	Ps 149:3			
תָּף			Ps 149:3	

As a finite verb, שיר is not used with instruments. זמר is the term for accompanied singing. However, the root שיר does occur with instruments

- as a *nomen opificum*, the general class of singers; 1 Ki 10:12 = 2 Chr 9:11; 2 Ki 5:12. There is no such form from זמר.
- In the phrase בְּכִלֵי-שִׁיר as in 1 Ch 15:16

**Translation of 8b**

הַלְלָהּ דְרָךְ וְאִוִּלִּים לֹא יִתְעוּ:

Interpretations divide into two groups, depending on whether or not one respects the *athnax* that ends the previous clause.

## Isaiah 34-35

AV respects the *athnax*.

Delitzsch claims Isaiah cannot have written it thus, but interprets with AV. "Fools" refers to the physical infirmities mentioned earlier.

Young follows AV; the reference to fools simply shows how plain the road is, and has no moral implications. Thus also Alexander and Motyer.

Calvin ignores the preceding *athnax* and refers the first two words to the previous clause: "He [sc. The Lord] shall be to them one who walks in the way [as a guide], and [thus those who formerly were] fools shall not [any longer] err." This is very attractive, except for the accents.

Oswalt divides as Calvin does, but understands the two clauses differently. "It [the road] shall be for the one who walks in the way," the believer, "and fools shall not err in it," shall not enter it or occupy it, parallel with the unclean.