

DON'T LOSE HEART!

34 Come near, you nations, and listen. Pay attention, you peoples. Let the earth hear, and all that is in it; the world, and all that comes forth out of it. ²Jehovah has indignation against all the nations, and his wrath is against all their armies. He will totally destroy them; he will give them over to be slaughtered. ³Their slain will be thrown away, their dead bodies will send up a stench; and the mountains will be soaked with their blood. ⁴All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved, and the heavens [themselves] will be rolled up like a scroll. All of the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. ⁵My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; look, [now] it shall come down in judgment upon Edom, upon the people who are under my curse. ⁶The sword of Jehovah is bathed in blood, it has become fat with the fatness [of beasts]—with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Jehovah has [prepared] a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. ⁷The wild oxen will fall with them, together with the bull calves and the great bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood, and the dust will be soaked with fat; ⁸for Jehovah has [appointed] a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, for Zion's cause.

⁹Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, and her dust into brimstone—the land will become blazing pitch. ¹⁰It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again. ¹¹The desert owl and the screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. [Jehovah] will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. ¹²They will summon the nobles to the kingdom, but there will be none [to respond]—all her princes will vanish. ¹³Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles [will overrun] her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals and a home for owls. ¹⁴The wild beasts of the desert will meet with the hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; the night creatures will settle there and find for themselves a place of rest. ¹⁵The owl will make its nest there and lay its eggs; she will hatch them and care for her young under the shadow of her wings. There, also, the falcons will gather, each with its mate. ¹⁶Look in the scroll of Jehovah and read: Not one of these will be missing, not one shall lack its mate—for the command has come from my [own] mouth; and his Spirit will gather them together. ¹⁷He allots their portions; his hand has divided [the land] among them with [the measuring] line. They will possess it forever; from generation to generation they will dwell there.

35 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, ²it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice with joy and singing. It will receive the glory of Lebanon, as well as the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of Jehovah, the majesty of our God. ³Strengthen the weak hands and steady the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who have fearful hearts, Be strong, do not be afraid. See, your God is coming with vengeance, with divine retribution; he is coming to save you.

⁵Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unplugged. ⁶Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy; for waters will gush forth in the wilderness and [there will be] streams in the desert. ⁷The burning

sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground [will become] bubbling springs; in the haunts where jackals [once] lay, there will be grass with reeds and papyrus. ⁸A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called, The Way of Holiness. The unclean man will not travel on it; it will [only] be for the redeemed. Whoever walks on that road, even the feeble-minded, will not go astray. ⁹No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get onto [that road]—they will not be found there. Only the redeemed will walk there. ¹⁰Then those who have been ransomed by Jehovah will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them; sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isa. 34:1-35:10)

Introduction

He was identified as being “the most violent man in the city of Milwaukee.” He was called “a menace to the safety of society,” and the prosecutor urged the judge to impose the maximum sentence the law allows.

Who is this man? What heinous crime has he committed?

His name is James Soderna. His crime was violating the court injunction that prohibited him from returning to the local abortion clinic and blocking the entrance.

Those who know James Soderna describe him as so meek and gentle that the police were unaware of his existence—this is not a violent man, this is not a menace to society. Surely the judge would agree and show leniency—agree he did! The judge agreed with the prosecutor: James Soderna was given the maximum sentence of two years imprisonment.

About the same time James Soderna was brought to trial, another case also came before the courts of Milwaukee. This case involved a young mother who willfully starved her six-year-old son to death. In her case the judge took into consideration “the mitigating circumstances” (the boy was handicapped) and gave her a thirty-day sentence—even allowing her to leave detention every day to go to her job.

Two separate cases, both occurring simultaneously within the same court system, together forming just one example of an incredible perversion of justice and abandonment of godliness—it’s almost enough to make you lose heart!

But don’t lose heart! That’s the message of the passage of Scripture presently before us. These chapters of Isaiah address the church of Christ in a day when the cause of Zion (i.e.; the kingdom of God, including His cause, His honor, and all that belongs to Him) was being trampled upon by the forces of evil.

It was enough to cause the people of God to lose heart; there was need for the encouraging exhortation: *“Strengthen the weak hands and steady the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who have fearful hearts, Be strong, do not be afraid”* (Isa. 35:3-4a.)

There was cause to fear: over the face of the earth moved the wrath of a great evil; the cause of Zion appeared in danger of being swallowed up and its place usurped by the kingdom of darkness—it was a time of fear and trembling. But the message of these chapters is: Fear not, don't lose heart; on the contrary, take courage, for your God will come to defend His cause and to save His people.

Even as we look at the world around us, and witness the pre-dominance of evil, let us heed the message of Isaiah 34-35, Don't Lose Heart!

I. Don't Lose Heart! The LORD will Come with Holy Vengeance for "Zion" (Isa. 34:8)

Verses 1-4 of Isaiah 34 foretell the coming day of God's judgment of this present world. The opening verse may be seen as a divine and universal subpoena being served upon the nations: *"Come near, you nations, and listen. Pay attention, you peoples. Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes forth out of it."* The announcement contained in verse 1 is reminiscent of Psalm 24:1-2, reminding us that mankind, being created by God, is ultimately accountable to God: *"The earth belongs to Jehovah, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ²because he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."* Verse 2a proceeds to indicate the LORD's indignation against all the nations and all their hosts; note, also, Psalm 7:11, *"God is a righteous judge; indeed, a God who has indignation every day."*

Verses 2b-3 portray the execution of God's judgment in the most fearsome of terms—portraying the judgment in terms of a great battle in which the LORD slays His enemies and then treats them with the utmost contempt. *"Their slain will be thrown away"*—they will not be given the dignity of receiving a decent burial. *"Their dead bodies will send up a stench"*—the stench of the rotting corpses will reach heaven itself. *"The mountains will be soaked with their blood"*—just as the water of a heavy rain drenches the soil, so will rivers of blood drench the mountains.

Verse 4 indicates that this day of final judgment will be of cosmic proportions; consider, also, 2 Peter 3: 10, *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will disappear with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed by being burned up, and the earth together with the works that are in it will be exposed"* (2 Pet. 3:10.)

In verses 5-7 and 9-15 the judgment of God is portrayed as being directed against the nation of Edom. In Old Testament times Edom was the epitome of implacable hostility against the LORD and His people; therefore, Edom symbolically represents the nations of the world as they have set themselves against the kingdom of God. The enmity that characterized the life of Edom has its roots deep within the soul of every natural man: *"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"* (Rom. 8:7.) Verses 6-7 portray the judgment

of sinful mankind (typified by the judgment upon the nation of Edom) as a great sacrifice being offered up to the LORD.

The day of divine judgment is defined as *“a day of vengeance ... for Zion’s cause”* (vs. 8.) The LORD has appointed a day of reckoning at which time He will punish sinful man for what he has done to Zion: for how he has mocked God’s name, trampled down God’s honor, usurped God’s prerogatives, violated God’s law, hated God’s rule, persecuted God’s people, in sum, how he *“opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God”* (2 Thess. 2:4.)

Continuing to focus upon Old Testament Edom as the representative of sinful mankind, the appointed judgment is defined as being nothing less than the fire of hell, *“Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch, and her dust into brimstone—the land will become blazing pitch”* (vs. 9.) It is described as being an everlasting punishment: *“It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever”* (vs. 10a.) It is the total abandonment to the righteous curse of God:

From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again. ¹¹The desert owl and the screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. [Jehovah] will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. ¹²They will summon the nobles to the kingdom, but there will be none [to respond]—all her princes will vanish. ¹³Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles will overrun her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals and a home for owls. ¹⁴The wild beasts of the desert will meet with the hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; the night creatures will settle there and find for themselves a place of rest. ¹⁵The owl will make its nest there and lay its eggs; she will hatch them and care for her young under the shadow of her wings. There, also, the falcons will gather, each with its mate. (Isa. 34:10b-15)

Over all the land that was once occupied by the enemies of God there is now inscribed by the hand of God the divine declaration, “This Property is Condemned.” The land becomes the habitation of owls, ravens, and all kinds of awful creatures (vs. 11a.) The LORD Himself consigns it to be a place of chaos and desolation (vs. 11b)—literally, the LORD causes it to become a place that is *“formless”* and *“empty,”* thus calling to mind the original state of the creation: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²And the earth was formless and empty; and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the surface of the waters”*. (Gen. 1:1-2) The nobles shall no longer be found to defend the kingdom, and all the princes will vanish (verse 12.) Its palaces and fortresses shall now be infested with thorns and inhabited by jackals, hyenas, and other assorted wild beasts (vs. 14-15.)

Verse 16 testifies to the certainty of that approaching day of holy vengeance: the LORD Himself has spoken the word; His Holy Spirit shall carry out that appointed

judgment. The LORD has furthermore guaranteed it by putting it into writing: it is inscribed in *"the scroll of Jehovah."*

Christian, as you look at the world around you and witness the predominance of evil, don't lose heart, be assured that the LORD will come with a holy vengeance for Zion.

II. Don't Lose Heart! The LORD will Surely Bring You into "Zion" (Isa. 35:10)

Isaiah 35:10 declares, *"those who have been ransomed by Jehovah will return. They will enter Zion."* The Hebrew term, **בָּוֹא**, usually translated "to come," also has the meaning "to enter," which is preferable in this particular verse. Viewed in the light of New Testament fulfillment, here is the assurance that you, as one who trusts in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and has been redeemed by His sacrifice at Calvary, shall surely arrive at Zion and gain entrance into that heavenly kingdom of God; note John 14:1-3,

Do not let your heart be troubled; trust in God, trust in me also. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I am going to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me; so that where I am, you may be also. (Jn. 14:1-3)

Verses 8-9 describe *"the highway"* the LORD has prepared to bring His redeemed to Zion. That highway is marked, *"The Way of Holiness."* (vs. 8a.) The spiritually and morally unclean shall not travel that highway; indeed, they **refuse** to travel that road: *"How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? ... ²⁴you rejected me when I called ... ²⁵you ignored all my counsel and would not accept my rebuke"* (Prov. 1:22, 24, 25.) But it is the privilege and the responsibility of the redeemed, in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, to walk in that way of holiness: *"Make every effort ... to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14.)

The Highway of Holiness is described as being secure from lions and every beast of prey (vs. 9.) Here is the assurance that the LORD will guard our souls from the deadly clutches of the evil one:

My sheep respond to my voice; I know them and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life—they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one. (Jn. 10:27-30)

Isaiah 35:1-2,5-7,10b describe what awaits the redeemed when we enter into Zion. The entire creation, devastated by the judgment of God (Isa. 34:13-15),

shall be completely renovated and completely renewed, it shall be transformed into a beautiful and fruitful habitation for the LORD and His redeemed (vs. 1-2.) The picture here is that of a barren wilderness thoroughly transformed into a beautiful paradise. Note the emphasis on the wilderness being glad and the desert rejoicing; the testimony of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:19-22 is in keeping with this great future expectation:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as with the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Rom. 8:19-22)

This wonderful transformation will serve to reveal the glory of the LORD, as His own beauty and excellency are reflected in His renewed creation. In the new creation there shall be the restoration of health and life in all of its vigor; the effects of the curse are replaced by the abundant blessing of God: *"Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unplugged. ⁶Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy"* (vs. 5-6a.) When we arrive in Zion, the covenant blessings of God shall finally and eternally overtake us: *"gladness and joy will overtake them"*—the blessings that have pursued us all our lives, note Psalm 23:6a, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow [or, shall pursue] me all the days of my life."*

Christian, as you consider the evil you encounter in this present world, and that which still remains in the remnant of your old sinful nature, don't lose heart, be assured that the LORD will surely bring you into Zion.

Conclusion

These chapters of Scripture (Isaiah 34-35) address the church of Christ in a day when the cause of Zion was being trampled upon by the forces of evil. It was a day when the people of God were tempted to fear that both they as well as the cause of God would be swallowed up into the black hole of spiritual darkness and evil that engulfs the world.

But the message of God addressed to His people in such days as these is this: Don't lose heart! On the contrary, *"Strengthen the weak hands and steady the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who have fearful hearts, Be strong, do not be afraid. See, your God is coming with vengeance, with divine retribution; he is coming to save you"* (Isa. 35:3-4.)