

“Final Judgment & Salvation”
Isaiah 34-35
by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

Judgment on the Nations

Isaiah 34

- ¹ Draw near, O nations, to hear,
and give attention, O peoples!
Let the earth hear, and all that fills it;
the world, and all that comes from it.
- ² For the LORD is enraged against all the nations,
and furious against all their host;
he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter.
- ³ Their slain shall be cast out,
and the stench of their corpses shall rise;
the mountains shall flow with their blood.
- ⁴ All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall fall,
as leaves fall from the vine,
like leaves falling from the fig tree.
- ⁵ For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom,
upon the people I have devoted to destruction.
- ⁶ The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood;
it is gorged with fat,
with the blood of lambs and goats,
with the fat of the kidneys of rams.
For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah,
a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
- ⁷ Wild oxen shall fall with them,
and young steers with the mighty bulls.
Their land shall drink its fill of blood,
and their soil shall be gorged with fat.
- ⁸ For the LORD has a day of vengeance,
a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
- ⁹ And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch,
and her soil into sulfur;
her land shall become burning pitch.
- ¹⁰ Night and day it shall not be quenched;
its smoke shall go up forever.
From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
none shall pass through it forever and ever.
- ¹¹ But the hawk and the porcupine shall possess it,
the owl and the raven shall dwell in it.

*He shall stretch the line of confusion over it,
and the plumb line of emptiness.*

¹² *Its nobles—there is no one there to call it a kingdom,
and all its princes shall be nothing.*

¹³ *Thorns shall grow over its strongholds,
nettles and thistles in its fortresses.*

*It shall be the haunt of jackals,
an abode for ostriches.*

¹⁴ *And wild animals shall meet with hyenas;
the wild goat shall cry to his fellow;
indeed, there the night bird settles
and finds for herself a resting place.*

¹⁵ *There the owl nests and lays
and hatches and gathers her young in her shadow;
indeed, there the hawks are gathered,
each one with her mate.*

¹⁶ *Seek and read from the book of the LORD:
Not one of these shall be missing;
none shall be without her mate.
For the mouth of the LORD has commanded,
and his Spirit has gathered them.*

¹⁷ *He has cast the lot for them;
his hand has portioned it out to them with the line;
they shall possess it forever;
from generation to generation they shall dwell in it.*

The Ransomed Shall Return

Isaiah 35

¹ *The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;*

² *it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.*

*The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.*

*They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.*

³ *Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.*

⁴ *Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!*

*Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”*

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Introduction: How Bad is the World, Really?

Why does the Bible have to have so many passages about judgment and the wrath of God? Why can't we just have the positive, encouraging messages?

I'll confess something to you this morning: As I was first preparing for today's message, I read Isaiah 34, and I was concerned. I am committed to preaching the whole counsel of God's Word, of proclaiming all that God proclaims, no skipping or evading, but honestly, I was dreading preaching Isaiah 34. It is such a heavy chapter:

*For the LORD is enraged against all the nations,
and furious against all their host;
he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter.
Their slain shall be cast out,
and the stench of their corpses shall rise;
the mountains shall flow with their blood.
All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll. – vv. 2-4*

Well, you heard it already, didn't you?

Why does the Bible have passages like this? Why does God threaten such vengeance and judgment on the whole world – “*against all the nations*”?

I think the reason why Isaiah 34 makes us uncomfortable and the reason why we ask questions like this is because we’re delusional. We are deluded into a false way of thinking and seeing the world. We think the world is not so bad.

But the truth is that the world really is very bad. Right now, in the world, 50 million people are living in some form of slavery. About 12 million of those slaves are children, sold into slavery at an average cost of about \$90.

Right now, there are 110 known armed conflicts in the world. About 240,000 people were killed in these armed conflicts last year. Another 440,000 were murdered in criminal activity outside of wars. This doesn’t count the 73 million abortions every year – 73 million. Worldwide, 61% of unintended pregnancies end with the legal killing of the unborn child.

Our world is plagued by wars, slavery, murder, rape, racism, nationalism, oppression, and more. In the online world, the algorithms that run social media traffic and internet feeds have learned that what keeps people engaged online is anger, specifically self-righteous outrage at “the other.” And so, our societies are being torn apart, not primarily by some massive government or political effort but by the patterns of behavior of ordinary people.

God’s Message for the Nations, 34:1-7

God’s message for the nations in Isaiah 34:1-7 is very bold and clear: The selfish and violent evil of the nations angers God and will be judged one day. The preview of this judgment promised here came when an angel of the Lord slaughtered 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night. We’ll be finally coming to that passage next week, which we’ve been anticipating for so long here in Isaiah, so I won’t say much more about it today. But that Assyrian army had marched through so many countries, cities, and towns, devastating and killing and plundering, taking many slaves and making many widows and orphans. They definitely deserved what the LORD gave them.

God’s Day of Vengeance, 34:8-12

Verses 8-12 speak of a day that is yet future, in the distant future from the time period of Isaiah. This great day that is coming, the day of the LORD, is going to bring a final end to all evil and devastate the nations that have devastated God’s world and God’s people.

Some people teach on the day of the LORD in such a way that breaks up the day into a series of days spread out over many years, seeing secret rapture of the church, and then a period of Great Tribulation, and then a partial resurrection and Judgment Day, and then a millennial reign, and then another great rebellion and another great Judgment Day, before finally the LORD ends all evil forever and ushers in the perfect New Heavens and the New Earth. But Isaiah 34-35 is really one passage, though it is separated in our Bibles into two chapters, and it tells one story of one great and coming day, the Day of the LORD, which will bring both final judgment and salvation, deliverance for all creation and all of God’s people forever.

In the end, God is firmly committed to ridding His world of all evil and all traces of the effects of evil and to bringing His creation and His people into a state of abundant life and perfect joy forever, and that’s what this single passage before us today teaches us.

God's Creation Freed from Bondage, 34:13-35:2

One of the aspects of the Day of the LORD highlighted in this passage is the deliverance of creation from the oppressive bondage of human sin. This deliverance of creation is described in 34:13 – 35:2. It serves as the transition in this passage from the focus on judgment to a focus on final deliverance and restoration. The fact that creation and the animals are shown being blessed and restored first is significant. They were created first, after all.

The places that humans constructed for warfare will become inhabited by wild animals – not just as a judgment against the warfare of the nations but also as a loving provision for the animals. If you read the creation account of Genesis 1, you can see very clearly that God values life and wants a world teeming with life. Fallen, corrupt, wicked human beings take life violently and destroy God's good creation in the process.

Romans 8 makes it clear that all creation is longing to be redeemed and restored, and that God will do so when He brings full and final redemption to His people – at the revealing of the Sons of God in glory. And so, as creation is blessed and freed, God brings blessing and encouragement to His weak and struggling people.

God's Message to His Weak People, 35:3-7

³ *Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.*

⁴ *Say to those who have an anxious heart,
"Be strong; fear not!*

*Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you."*

⁵ *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;*

⁶ *then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;*

⁷ *the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.*

These words of this prophecy are describing the future glory when Christ returns, but they are also showing us God's heart for His people. In Christ, many of these things are provided for us now spiritually even as they will be fully revealed and given to us in the resurrection for all eternity.

Are you weak now? Are you struggling? Is your heart anxious? God wants you to have strength, confidence, and joy now. You can know with full assurance that your God will come and save you, and that He will keep you in His love and grace until that day. On your worst days, when you're defeated and discouraged and struggling deeply, remember that God has given you life in His Son and has given you precious promises for your future.

If you see someone else who is discouraged or anxious, encourage them with these Gospel truths. Paul points us to the Day of the LORD as a source of encouragement in 1 Thessalonians 4 –

¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words. – 1 Thess. 4:16-18, ESV

Even now, we can see God fulfilling verses 5-6 in the lives of many people spiritually, as He opens blinded eyes and unstops deaf ears so people can see and hear the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and come to salvation in Him. Without the work of God's Holy Spirit, we are blind to spiritual realities and deaf to the voice of God calling us to salvation. Our souls are as dry and dead as the desert. We have no life within us and no hope of turning to and trusting in Jesus – not within ourselves.

However, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit works in us to give us spiritual sight. This allows us to see our sin and our need for forgiveness. He allows us to hear the call of God in the Gospel. He refreshes our soul and brings life to the barren desert.

If you are here this morning, and you do not know the forgiveness and life that come from belonging to Jesus, listen to the good news –

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. – John 3:16-18, ESV

The natural human condition is to be under condemnation because of our sin, our selfish and willful rebellion against our holy and loving Creator God. Yet God, in love, sent His one and only Son to save us and bring us eternal life by His life, death, and resurrection. Come to Him and believe in Him. Call on Him to save you today!

If you trust in Jesus and not in yourself, you can know that He will come and save you. He will fully redeem, restore, and glorify you in a way you could never imagine, but it's a way told in verses 8-10 of Isaiah 35 -

God's Glorious Future for His People, 35:8-10

*⁸And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.
⁹No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;*

*they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

What does God have in store for His people? Freedom, security, and everlasting joy as sorrow and sighing flee away. Are you trusting Him for it? Are you looking forward to it?