

History is His Story

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[0 : 00] Good to see you all tonight. Some of you I've maybe never seen before. Some of you it's a long time since I've seen you. But it's my task to dive into the Sea of Isaiah.

I'm not a regular here at Brunsfield, so I don't know what you've done so far in your seat in Isaiah. But I guess as Esther read chapter 34 and 35 tonight, you're probably glad that it's you that's not preaching.

You may be glad or you may wish there wasn't me that was preaching as well if I don't do a great job on it. But this is tough for us. We need to work our way through. Let me say what my goal tonight is. My goal tonight is to walk you through the passage, the two passages that we've got tonight.

I think Isaiah does give us some literary aids. One of the key things that Isaiah seems to do and the commentators suggest is that he's quite good on structure. So we'll need to say something about both the structure of the section that the verses are in as well as the chapters themselves.

Isaiah is quite clear often in his themes. And I don't think we miss much tonight. We shouldn't have missed it. The theme of judgment in there is chapter 34 and blessing in chapter 35.

[1 : 16] And so Isaiah gives us some good structural things. So we'll say something about that. And then we'll have a couple of very clear applications that I'm indebted to Alec Mateer for.

I don't know if any of you have read his daily walk through the book of Isaiah, but it's very helpful. And he's helped me with some two very clear applications. I've also been helped by my principal at Bible College back in the 80s.

Jeffrey Grogan was the principal at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow. Some of you may know of Jeffrey. He wrote a commentary on Isaiah and he had some helpful things to say as well that I've pinched as we walk our way through it tonight.

I was only given Isaiah 34 and 35. I wasn't given Matthew 11. But I'm glad you read Matthew 11 because obviously there's a reference in Isaiah 35 that was read where Jesus said, go back.

This is Matthew 11, 4. Jesus replied, go back, report to John what you see and hear. The blind will receive their sight. The lame will walk. Those who have leprosy are cured.

[2 : 27] The deaf will hear and the dead are raised. And the good news is preached to the poor. I think Allerysus once wrote, Jesus is God's righteousness revealed.

The answer to the judgment problem of Isaiah 34 is Jesus. And the one who gives the blessing that will be ours who are saved people in future glory is all because of Jesus.

The one who reveals God's righteousness as he lived and walked in Matthew. As Matthew records in Matthew 11. Let me pray and then let's work our way through Isaiah 34 and 35.

Lord, thank you for your word read to us and open before us. We pray, Lord, that you would just help us as we make our way through this tonight and as we seek to apply your word.

We thank you, Lord, that your word is your word and it has power to work in our hearts and minds this evening. And so, Lord, help us as we turn to it now.

[3 : 37] In Jesus' name. Amen. So if you have Isaiah 34 and Isaiah 35 open, let's go to the first thing. Isaiah's literary structure helps us, I think.

So I want to just say something briefly about the structure of this part of the book, chapter 28 to chapter 37. And I want to say something especially about the structure of verses of chapter 34 and 35.

And so first of all, about this big section, chapter 28 to chapter 37. You see at the beginning of chapter 33, woe to you.

That is the beginning of the sixth woe or the sixth summons that Isaiah gives from chapter 28 through in this section to chapter 37.

And so we're in the section of the sixth woe. So it's divided up into two lots of woes, the first three and the second three.

[4 : 44] And so we're obviously at the last of the second three. What's really interesting about these woes and particularly the latter three is that Isaiah Earth's roots in reality, something that the people really knew was going on.

The first three woes were almost just talking in general terms. But when we get to these last three, he focuses on the nation of Assyria that is there and then going to attack Judah.

He focuses on Egypt and the alliance that Judah want to have with Egypt. And he, if you like, their interim fulfillments.

He says, look, what I'm talking about in general terms, you can actually see what out before you earthed, rooted. In other words, I will do to Assyria what I say I'll do.

And I will do to Egypt what I say I'll do. And I will do to you, Zion, Judah, what I've said I will do. Somebody put it this way, that Isaiah chooses to use historical narrative as a rock of certainty.

[6 : 08] And I think the best way that I can put that for you tonight in application terms is to think that what Isaiah wants to do here by rooting what he's saying in the reality of the real situation that the Israelites, those in Judah, were facing as they faced Assyria and as they had alliance with Egypt to try and get rescued, was that God was saying, listen, you cannot rest in the armies of people.

And you cannot rest in your own wisdom. If you do, you'll fall flat on your face. And actually, when we read God's word when it's hard sometimes, having interim fulfillments or having this rock of certainty that this word is true is really important for our lives.

What Isaiah does here is to use this technique to fully assure us that what God plans to do, he is able to do because he's working out before them.

Or if you like, what he said he will do can be trusted. And so for you and I tonight, although we hope that as the Lord sees the earthly reality of our lives, hopefully we're not like the Assyrians.

Hopefully we're not like the Egyptians. And hopefully we're not actually like the Israelites. Hopefully we're like those who are not ready to trust in the armies and political systems or in our own wisdom.

[7 : 52] But they'll be ready to trust in his wisdom and in his strength and in his power. And so these are three woes followed by three other woes of interim fulfillment.

I won't bore you with this, but they're also paired. One and three, two and five, and three and six. And our summons in our section tonight is part of the longest summons from chapter 33, verse 1 to 35, verse 10.

And actually like summons 3 that you find in chapter 29, it's actually wholly visionary and eschatological. It's not earthed.

It's heaven bound. That's what we've got to see as we look at both these chapters. Heaven bound as far as future judgment is concerned and heaven bound as far as future blessing is concerned as well.

Or as somebody put it this way, here we can read historical events only between the lines. But our eyes should be held throughout.

[9 : 12] Not on the near future, but on the far eschatological future. So there's a word in terms of the structure of chapter 28 to 37.

And then briefly, just something on the word of structure there in chapter 34 and chapter 35. One of the things that you should note just in terms of, I guess, Isaiah preaching his sermon, as it were, from chapter 33 to chapter 35.

He begins with the woe in verse 1 of chapter 33. But then he has his first proclamation, his first bit of preaching, which begins in verse 13 of chapter 33.

You who are far away, hear what I've done. And you who are near, acknowledge my power. And so chapter 34 then moves in verse 1 to his second proclamation.

Another, come near. And this time it's, come near you nations and listen. Pay attention you peoples. And it's his proclamation of this final overthrow of the world in all its hostility to God's rule.

[10 : 34] It's horrible. And we'll say something about that more when we come to the theme of the chapter. As far as the structure of chapter 35 is concerned, then what we get here is this, at the end of this summons, it moves from this final overthrow of the world in all its hostility to God's rule, to the glorious picture of the final exodus, so the final pilgrimage of the Lord's people to their eternal and blissful destination of Zion.

So there you go. It's important to get Isaiah's structure, both of chapter 28 to 37 and 34 and 35.

You might not have taken all that in. I had a number of hours and a week to think about it, but it might be worth going away, reading those chapters and thinking about that yourselves.

And so the second thing I want to do is just say something that Isaiah is really clear on, his second literary tool or aid. If his first was structure, then his second is actually to be absolutely crystal clear in chapter 34 and chapter 35 exactly what they're all about.

Judgment and blessing or judgment on the world. And you'll see why I've hashtagged Edom and blessing for God's people.

[12 : 07] And you'll see why I've hashtagged Israel on that as we look at it briefly. And so let's take chapter 34 in terms of its theme, first of all.

Judgment on the world, hashtag Edom. Well, here is Isaiah's articulating the final overthrow of all the world in all its hostility to God's rule.

And the fact that Edom comes up as the chapter goes on is a really interesting wee technique that the prophets began to use. Edom was a way in shorthand of basically saying, this is the highest form of ultimate rebellion and to God's rule.

So that's how extreme it is. How extreme it is in terms of rebellion against God. That's really, really important as Isaiah moves from judging the nations to focusing in this tiny wee nation of Edom.

Actually, that tiny wee nation is to highlight that that was a way the prophets helped us to see really clearly that this is radical, highlighted, magnified rebellion against the rule of God.

[13 : 31] So therefore, for God to overthrow the world in all its hostility against his rule is his right. Even although as Isaiah describes it here, it's not a pleasant scene.

In fact, it's a fearful description, isn't it, in verse 3. The slain will be thrown out and their dead bodies will send up a stench and the mountains will be soaked by their blood.

Fearful. It's meant to be. Driving home the point that God's wrath will lead to the death of his enemies.

It's horrible, isn't it? I mean, I don't know if you just even stop at that wee phrase. The mountains will be soaked by their blood or the mountains of this world will be dissolved in the blood of those that God has slain.

It's horrible. It's almost like an anathema. It's a fearful description that God is saying that he has the right to have a final overthrow of the world in all its hostility to his rule because he's God.

[15 : 03] And because, like the Edomites, there was this radical, multiplied, intense arrogance against him.

You see it in verse 5. My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens. See it descends in judgment upon Edom. The sword of judgment.

The sword of judgment. Has fallen in judgment on Edom and the people. They are the people that I have totally destroyed already because of their anathema, their antagonistic rebellion against God.

I think Geoffrey Grogan, what does he say in his commentary here? I've got it. He says, The inhabitants of Edom were clearly under divine judgment, just like sacrificial animals.

Maybe that's why there's so much blood highlighted here. Like them, the Edomites' fate was death. Yet in one way, it's hardly appropriate to liken the antagonistic Edomites to the comparatively docile domestic animals employed in sacrificial ritual.

[16 : 19] But God had the right to respond to them and the right to respond those who take the stand that the Edomites took.

Verse 2, of course, raises the whole issue before us of what right does God have to have wrath and judgment? The Lord is angry with all the nations. His wrath is upon all the armies.

He will totally destroy them and give them over to slaughter. What right? Geoffrey Grogan again, as he comments on the word judgment, says this.

Verse 5, it says, The slaughter of Edom is, in its moral context, because of their rebellion. And he wants to say that divine vengeance here is not mingled with the malice and evil as in the case of human vengeance.

But it's a quality that in God is divine and praiseworthy. And in the execution of what God does is honoured and glorified.

[17 : 35] Let me say that again because it's really important when you read a verse like verse 2 and when you see what happens in verse 5 and when you get the sense of these mountains being dissolved in the blood in verse 3, we have to remind ourselves that God's divine vengeance, God's wrath on all that is evil and all that is in holy rebellion to him is not mingled with the malice and evil in the case of human vengeance.

It is a quality that in God is divine and praiseworthy. It's a fearful description. We meet the antagonistic Edomites and we see God in his right judgment and wrath.

And actually verse 10 is a really interesting verse as well in the chapter. I don't know if you saw the reiteration of the sort of complete and permanent destruction phrases.

Do you see that they are from generation to generation? Forever and ever. There's a permanence about the whole thing.

Look at it, verse 10. It will not be quenched day and night. It is from generation to generation. It will never happen.

[19 : 02] It will ever pass through again and again. There's this sense of ongoing, permanent, complete destruction. It's horrible, isn't it?

But Isaiah doesn't want us to miss it. Equally, Isaiah doesn't want us to miss chapter 35. The joy of the redeemed, as the NIV puts it.

Or the eternal blessings for God's people. Hashtag Israel. There's a blessing. There's a new exodus for them. They had been through the wilderness.

They had been through leaving Egypt, through the wilderness for all those years. They had faced dry and broken and barren lands that seemed to be referred to again here in chapter 35.

You probably spotted it with the idea of streams in the desert and bubbling springs and desert lands. But let me say something briefly about this sixth summons of this glorious picture of God's final exodus and pilgrimage for the Lord's people.

[20 : 12] The eternal, blissful destination of Zion. The summons began in chapter 33 by a message directly to Zion and their king.

That's what you get at the end of chapter 33. And then it's contrasted towards the end of chapter 33 and into 34 with the eternal destiny of the saved and the unsaved.

And then it seems to, in chapter 35, bring itself back to where it began with a pilgrim people. You see them referred to as them in verses 1 to 8.

You see them referred to as they in verses 2 and 10. You see them defined gloriously in verses 9 and 10 as the redeemed and the ransomed.

And one commentator says, we met the redeemed and the ransomed before in chapter 24. And in this matching third summons in chapter 29, here it only contained an understated reference to redemption.

[21 : 19] But here at the end of chapter 35, we read the story in full. A protected path, an assured arrival, a safe homecoming, and unbroken happiness.

Isaiah doesn't want us to miss it. God's just judgment on a rebellious world. And God's incredible blessing for those who are his people.

Well done. That was heavy, wasn't it? You think it's heavy to listen to? It's heavy to preach. But here are two applications that Alec Mateer, I think, has helped me with as we bring these two chapters into a conclusion tonight.

And the first from his book, *Isaiah by Day*, is this thought, serious passages about divine wrath and judgment are hard to take.

And this is one of them. But then listen to what he says. They're hard to take. Isaiah doesn't try to spare our feelings.

[22 : 37] And we are for the most part, we for the most part, don't feel as he did. If you read Isaiah chapter 21 in verse 4, as Isaiah gets the sense of all this that's going on him, the way the NIV puts it is, he said his heart staggered and the horror appalled him.

Mateer says, I wonder, are our hearts broken for our lostness and the lostness of people? Especially those who feel the blow of the divine hand.

He says, it will come. He says, for the wages of sin is death and death it will be. The outpouring of divine exasperation was once divine patience, but now has reached its terminus.

Isaiah's picture of the mountains eroded by the colossal flow of blood of the slain, as we see, is only a picture, but it will be matched by the reality when that sad day comes.

Mateer says, praise God, that the company of the saved will be innumerable, but that does not take away from the multitudes who stand unready, unfit, hopeless in the valley of that eternal decision.

[24 : 12] He then goes on to say, Jesus didn't hide his face or ours from it in Matthew 25 and 46. Nor did John make any attempts to camouflage the grim procession to the lake of fire in Revelation 20.

And then he says this, and these are people we know, sometimes people we love, always people for whom we have a responsibility in the gospel.

And then he says, today is the day to ponder these things, but it's also the day in the light of God's word to look at ourselves, to determine to flee from sin, for though in Christ the wrath of the sin-hating God with me can do nothing.

Our eternity is as secure as if we were already on before the throne. Ephesians 2. Yet, as long as he leaves us tarrying here on earth, our sin will then bring us death.

Like our ancestors in Deuteronomy, we face the daily choice of life or death. To choose good and not evil.

[25 : 54] To refuse disobedience and cultivate obedience, for it is the Lord's word, his commands, which bring life, which bring progress, which bring blessing and inheritance.

The Holy Spirit, he says, is given to those who will be him. Well, that's the application on judgment.

He is a slightly brighter application on blessing. Mateo says this, but if the beauty of Isaiah's words and thoughts thrill us, how great is our excitement when we realize that he is actually writing about us.

And here's what Mateo says. Sometimes even Isaiah excels himself. He was a master wordsmith and poet. In chapter 35, he is at his highest and best.

But then, as Mateo says, but if the beauty of Isaiah's words and thoughts thrill us, how great is our excitement when we realize that he is writing about us.

[27 : 04] We are the enigmatic thee and them. Chapter 1, verse 1, verse 2 and verse 8.

Let me just read it again to you, those verses. verse 1. The desert and the parched land will be glad. The wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom. It will rejoice and sing for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it. The splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory and splendor of God.

Lebanon commentators tell us stands for natural abundance and fertility, Carmel for order, Sharon for beauty. We're told here that these things can be ours.

Verse 8 puts it this way, and the highway will be there. It will be called the way of holiness. The unclean will not journey on it. It will be for those who walk in that way.

[28 : 13] Wicked fools will not go there. The lion will not be there and so on and so on. And then they, verse 9, they will not be found there, but the redeemed will walk there and the ransom will turn and they will enter Zion with singing and everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away. What thrill, says Mathieu, should be ours to know that we are the enigmatic they and them.

The anonymous ones around whom the poem moves because we are the redeemed. We are the ransomed of verses 9 and 10.

The ransomed are those whom the price has been paid for. The redeemed are those whom the Lord, the divine next of kin, identified himself, saying to us this.

This is brilliant. It's not minus material. That's why it's brilliant. The redeemed and the ransomed are those who the goel, the kinsman redeemer, the Lord, the divine, your divine next of kin, has identified himself with, saying this.

[29 : 28] So, what's your problem? Give it to me. What's your need? I will meet it. What's your burden?

Lay it on my shoulders. That is the way of the goel, the kinsman redeemer. He bears it all, pays it all, does it all.

He is the doer. We are the recipients. But now that we know who they are and they are, follow through what Isaiah says about them.

First, whatever our circumstances appear, you see, verse 1, the desert and the parched place, we can be confident that we will be provided for.

Yeah, we might need the eye of faith to see beyond what's there. But this imagery drawn from Exodus, where this menacing wilderness was habitual in hindering the Israelites until he produces the miraculous manna to feed them, produces the water from the rock to quench our thirst.

[31 : 02] And so that desert and parched place, we need to give to him, knowing that he can give us his manna and that he can quench our thirst from the rock.

Every situation, every place, the glory of God is present. You see it there? The glory of God ultimately will be present as our great blessing on that day.

And then look at this highway that he provides. It's this glorious picture of a road above the wilderness, so it's just higher than everything else that we walk on, and it's our great blessing.

For you and I, it's possible to run a straight line, says Matia, from conversion to glory. That's why the highway exists. And finally, says Matia, the end is guaranteed.

The redeemed shall come. Everything that made the journey a sad experience will take legs. Every unalloyed delight that slipped like soap out of the pilgrim's grasp will finally be possessed.

[32 : 19] For Zion admits no disappointment. It's a glorious picture, isn't it? I've done a poor unfolding of it for you.

But there you go. A structure in Isaiah, the clear message of 34, the clear message of 35, a challenge to us about the blessing that can be ours and others, and the challenge for us as we daily face the thought that Isaiah 34 is true and that God has the right to judge a fallen world.

We began and I'll finish with Matthew 11. Jesus is God's righteousness revealed. He is the champion to mean that we don't need to face that judgment.

And he is the giver so that we can receive that blessing. That's our Jesus. I hope he's yours. Keep on trusting. Thank you.