

Flourishing: Land, People, Community

# Isaiah 35

# What does flourishing mean?

- Miriam Webster : “Marked by vigorously, healthy growth; very active and successful;” synonyms – thriving, successful, prosperous
- Oxford language – “developing rapidly and successfully, thriving
- Harvard Human Flourishing program: 5 domains of flourishing –
- Happiness and life satisfaction; mental and physical health; meaning and purpose; character and virtue; close social relationships

# Martin Seligman – U. of Pennsylvania

- P – positive emotions – increase positive emotions through gratitude, forgiveness, build hope and optimism
- E – engagement – fully develop skill and strengths to challenging task, being “in the flow”
- R – relationships – presences of friends, family, social connections
- M – meaning – belonging to something bigger than one’s self
- A – accomplishment – pursue something even if it brings no positive emotions
- Focus is on human flourishing, individualistic and psychological

# 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals

- A world where people, communities and creation can flourish
- Some of the goals:
- No poverty or hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, clean water and sanitation, clean affordable energy, decent work and economic growth, innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, responsible production and consumption
- Work on climate change, supporting life below sea and on land
- Peace, justice, partnerships for these goals

# HB Concepts

- Shalom
- Welfare, safety, prosperity
- Peace, quiet, contentment, friendship
- Completeness
- Soundness
- Wholeness
- Righteousness
- Right, just, normal
- Justice, ethically right
- Vindication, deliverances, prosperity
- Redemption, salvation
- Recall salvation is holistic, earthly concept in HB/OT
- Being what you are created to be

# Flourish – parach

- Bud, blossom, break forth, sprout,
- About growth, life and thriving
- Often connected to righteous people/righteousness in the psalms
- When righteousness is not legal or economic, can be creational
- Be what you are created to be:
- Vocation of all humans: till and keep the soil
- Till – serve
- Keep - guard

# Bible

- Gives vision and means for flourishing
- Salvation in Jesus Christ, gift of the Holy Spirit
- God is the source of all flourishing; not human effort
- God's intent for creation is shalom/wholeness/thriving/flourishing, what life is meant to be
- Biblical flourishing is holistic, not just economic, not just individualistic, not just happiness. Involves people, communities and land



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)





Flourishing: Land, People, Community

# Isaiah 35

# Literary Context

Chapter 34 – Ominous forces are removed so God's transformation can take place

Chapter 35 – Bridge between the two Isaiahs

Chapters 36-39 – Historical account of the history of Sennacherib's attack in 701 as part of God's care and protection as theme of 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah

Following many scholars, I see Isaiah 35 as part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah, edited into a bridge position of 1st Isaiah

# Socio-historical Context – Babylonian Exile, Exile

- #PandemicPastoring by Eileen Campbell-Reid (*Pastoral Imagination*)
- Loss of place –virtual worship
- How to rebuild routines and connections to fit new realities
- Pervasive anxiety, fear and “scarcity” in the system
- Need to attend to grief, lament what is lost and passing away
- Need to begin singing a new song, a new story, filled with future possibilities for how to be beloved community. There is a future

# Historical context – end of Babylonian exile

- Babylonian Exile
- Fall of Jerusalem
- Fall of the House of David
- Destruction of Temple
- 10-15% population deported to Babylon
- Cyrus the Persian now on the scene



# Theological context

- Why did God allow this to happen?
- Is Marduk stronger than the Lord?
- Does God care?
- Does God have the power to make a difference?



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

# Exile - process

- Initial trauma
- Long duration
- Acclimation - inertia. If life isn't too bad, the known present can be more comfortable and secure than the promises of a glorious future

# Prophetic imagination

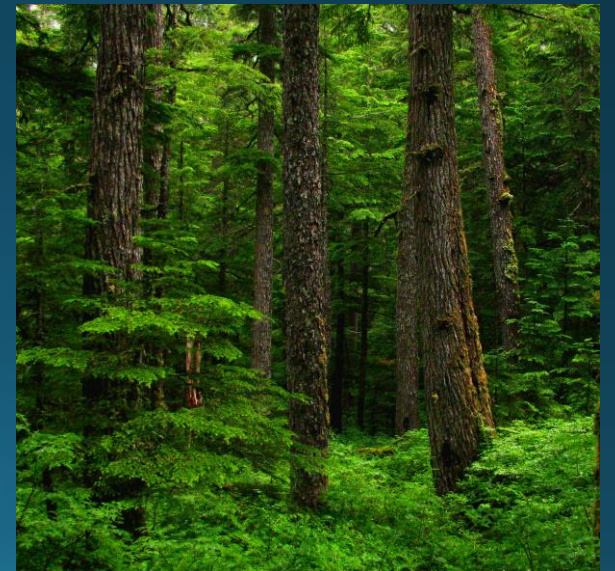
- A community defeated by war, removed by oppressive power, experiencing desolation and dislocation, then inertia...
- Call to create a new vision, a reminder that the order of things as they are not are not as God intends them to be and can be overcome by God's creative power.
- Promise not just the end of exile, but a redemptive reversal coming of God that makes the people whole, a new creation as well as human salvation. All creation is restored.





# Isaiah 35.1-2

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



# Nature rejoicing, singing, joy



- Exalt, delight, be bright,
- Excitement
- Lifting of the heart
- Often God rejoicing in the people of God
- How do you feel to know that God rejoices in you?

# Isaiah 35.3-4

- **Strengthen** the weak hands, and **make firm** the feeble knees. **Say** to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! **Here is your God. God will come** with vengeance (vindication), with recompense. **God will come** and save you.”
- Change world view; inertia – mission and identity
- Vengeance – depends on location, God righting wrongs, a redress of negative circumstances, ordering chaos
- Recompense – dealing, benefit

# Isaiah 35.5-7



- Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For **waters** shall break forth in the wilderness, and **streams** in the desert; the burning sand shall become a **pool**, and the thirsty ground **springs of water**; the haunt of jackals shall become a **swamp**, the grass shall become **reeds and rushes**.

# Creation and Transformations A new Exodus

---

Transformational power of God's presence

---

Both human and nonhuman creation transformed

---

Isaiah 6.9-10 – spiritual blindness and deafness – God's judgment now overcome with grace

---

Life giving and overabundance of waters

---



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)



# Isaiah 35.8-9



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

- A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. 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.

# Travelers on the Holy Way – God prepares the way, not us



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

- Holy way – new exodus, direct line home, pilgrimage way to Zion
- Unclean – made clean!!
- Fools – morally “directionally challenged”
- Redeemed – theme used mainly in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah; Lord as Israel’s redeemer, kinship idea, identity
- Safety and security emphasized

# Isaiah 35.10

- And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
- Ransomed – Exodus, exile
- Joy – gladness, mirth, festivity
- Flee – take flight, disappear





# Thoughts and reflections

- Transformations of human and nonhuman creation
- Call for the community to participate – they have an identity as the people of God and a mission to support one another and proclaim the Good News. This is really good news.
- Inertia – new story and new song to share and live
- There is a future hope despite our present reality, grounded in God.
- We can move forward into an uncertain future, knowing that God is both already there and also with us on our journey to the future.
- Communal and public joy.
- People, community and creation rejoice and flourish