

Wednesday, December 17

From Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, The Message Isaiah 35: 1-10

¹⁻² Wilderness and desert will sing joyously, the badlands will celebrate and flower—
Like the crocus in spring, bursting into blossom, a symphony of song and color.
Mountain glories of Lebanon—a gift. Awesome Carmel, stunning Sharon—gifts.
God's resplendent glory, fully on display. God awesome, God majestic.

³⁻⁴ Energize the limp hands, strengthen the rubbery knees. Tell fearful souls, "Courage!
Take heart! God is here, right here, on his way to put things right and redress all wrongs.
He's on his way! He'll save you!"

⁵⁻⁷ Blind eyes will be opened, deaf ears unstopped, lame men and women will leap like deer,
the voiceless break into song. Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness; streams
flow in the desert. Hot sands will become a cool oasis, thirsty ground a splashing fountain.
Even lowly jackals will have water to drink, and barren grasslands flourish richly.

⁸⁻¹⁰ There will be a highway called the Holy Road. No one rude or rebellious is permitted on
this road. It's for God's people exclusively--impossible to get lost on this road. Not even
fools can get lost on it. No lions on this road, no dangerous wild animals—Nothing and no
one dangerous or threatening. Only the redeemed will walk on it.

The people God has ransomed will come back on this road. They'll sing as they make their
way home to Zion unfading halos of joy encircling their heads, Welcomed home with gifts of
joy and gladness as all sorrows and sighs scurry into the night.

This paraphrase relies on Isaiah's historical setting: preparing the exiles' return to
Jerusalem. A necessary ingredient for the pilgrimage home will be the capacity to focus on
God despite all difficulties. Thus, the prophet reminds the current generation that this is
not the first time God has made a way for God's. Of course, Isaiah's imagery is drawn from
the stories recorded in the Bible Book of Exodus!

However, Isaiah does romanticize God's care for the Hebrews in the Wilderness.
Remember, that Exodus was included a full generation of desert living! But, Isaiah tells of
a new pilgrimage so well executed by God's design that "not even fools can get lost" along
the way! This journey's end will feel like a homecoming. The pilgrims will be full of God's
joy (note: their halos!) and they will receive God-given gifts of joy and gladness. Their
arrival in Jerusalem will end all sorrows and sighing. Peterson rightly emphasizes trust in
God throughout the pilgrimage as the needed transformation. Echoing through the ages is
the Biblical claim: *The Mercy of the Lord never fails; God's steadfast love endures forever!*

Prayer: *God of the traveler and the pilgrim, keep me on your path today. Guard my steps,
support my waning spirit, and bring me to this day's end in joy and gladness. Amen.*