



June 24, 2018

“Out of the Desert”

Isaiah 35

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Life is filled with its share of trials and tribulations. We often describe these times like a “desert experience.” Isaiah wrote about this theme and how God would once again cause the desert to bloom and the redeemed of the Lord to be crowned with joy. In its future interpretation, Isaiah was writing about the Millennial Kingdom, in which Jesus Christ will rule and reign on Earth for 1,000 years. In its near interpretation, Isaiah wrote about God’s sustaining grace through the trials of everyday life. Lettie B. Cowman, having been inspired by [Isaiah 35:6](#), wrote a wonderful daily devotional book, entitled *Streams in the Desert*, which was born out of her personal anguish regarding the illness and homegoing of her husband, Charles. It’s remarkable to note that this book is still in print more than 90 years after it was first published! Mrs. Cowman’s book was written to show how the Lord refreshed her like a stream in the desert, and that’s the focus of this message by Pastor Gary.

Historical Background

1. Isaiah wrote prophetically, in a present context and a future context, and both are evident in this chapter.
2. Most Bible scholars are in agreement that [Isaiah 35](#) was written about the Millennial Kingdom.
 - a. The Millennial Kingdom will come into being after the Great Tribulation, which will be a time in which the Earth will become a veritable wasteland.
 - b. When the Lord returns he will make all things new and what was once a wasteland will bloom again and God’s people who have come through the Tribulation, as well as those who have returned with Christ, will experience gladness, joy, and singing.

3. Pastor Gary said: “This chapter has another narrative that is meaningful for us, even now. From time to time all of us will experience the wilderness, when times gets tough and our spiritual lives seem dry, and we feel feeble and weak. [We will feel] just like the people in... this text... Life has a way of creating similar conditions, and this chapter not only describes the redeeming work of God, in response to the tribulation that will come upon the Earth – that’s future – this chapter also describes the redeeming work of God in our lives in the immediate. ... [Isaiah 35](#) is an encouragement to us, that God is a God who brings forth good things out of our desert experiences, [and] he is in the habit of rescuing, restoring, and redeeming lives out of dry, desolate places. He will make the desert bloom once again, and he will replace the sorrow and sighing with gladness and joy.”
 - a. [Isaiah 35:3-4](#) - “*Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come... he will come to save you.’*”
4. Someone has said that all of us are either in a storm, coming out of a storm, or heading into a storm.
5. Pastor Gary shared a brief overview of the story of Charles and Lettie Cowman, who were missionaries to Japan and China in the early 1900s.
 - a. After 18 years of faithful missionary ministry, Mr. Cowman became ill, which made it necessary for them to return to the United States.
 - b. Mrs. Cowman took care of her husband for six years until his death in 1924.
 - c. Mrs. Cowman experienced times of sorrow and heartache as she watched her husband suffer and die, but she maintained a deep fellowship with the Lord.
 - d. Pastor Gary shared selected quotes from Mrs. Cowman’s book.¹
 - i. “Never look ahead to the changes and challenges of this life in fear. Instead, as they arise look at them with the full assurance that God, whose you are, will deliver you out of them. Hasn’t He kept you safe up to now? So hold His loving hand tightly, and He will lead you safely through all things. And when you cannot stand, He will carry you in His arms.”
 - ii. “Christians with the most spiritual depth are generally those who have been taken through the most intense and deeply anguishing fires of the soul. If you have been praying to know more of Christ, do not be surprised if He leads you through the desert or through a furnace of pain.”

¹ *Streams in the Desert: 366 Daily Devotional Readings.* – https://www.christianbook.com/streams-in-the-desert-trade-paperback/l-b-cowman/9780310230113/pd/23015?en=google&event=SHOP&kw=christian-living-0-20%7C23015&p=1179710&dv=c&qclid=EAAlQobChMlyvqao-722wIVx0SGCh1UGADbEAQYASABEgluqPD_BwE

- iii. “Trust God’s Word and His power more than you trust your own feelings and experiences. Remember, your Rock is Christ, and it is the **sea** that ebbs and flows with the tides, not Him.” (Emphasis added)
- iv. “Jesus Christ is not my security against the storms of life, but he is my perfect security in the storms. He has never promised me an easy passage, only a safe landing.”

Out Of The Desert Come God’s Glory And Splendor

- 6. **Isaiah 35:1-2** - *“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 greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.”*
- 7. Pastor Gary said: “Think of all the many times in the Bible or perhaps even in your own life when God’s glory and splendor [were] most on display. I think that you would agree with me that when he showed himself strong on behalf of his people, because they were facing some difficulty [or] crisis or impossible situation, [that’s when we] see the glory and splendor of God.”
 - a. The Israelites, who had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, were finally released by Pharaoh only to be hemmed in by Pharaoh’s pursuing army and the Red Sea, experienced the glory and splendor of God when he parted the waters!
 - i. **Exodus 13:17-15:21**
 - b. Hannah, who wasn’t able to have children, continued to pour out her heart in prayer to the Lord even when she didn’t get an answer from God, experienced the glory and splendor of God when she conceived and gave birth to a son!
 - i. **1 Samuel 1:11** - *“And she made a vow, saying, ‘O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life...’ ”*
 - ii. **1 Samuel 1:20** - *“So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I asked the LORD for him.’ ”*
 - c. The man who was born blind ² experienced the glory and splendor of the Lord, even though there had been a life-long delay, when he was miraculously healed!
 - i. **John 9:3** - *“[But] this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”*
 - d. Paul, who had some kind of an unidentified condition that he prayed about,

² **John 9:1-12**

experienced the glory and splendor of the Lord by coming to understand that the Lord would provide sustaining and keeping grace, even though the Lord did not heal or take away his affliction!

- i. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** - *"... there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

8. Pastor Gary said: "In all of these examples, [as well] as many more in the Bible, these people would never have seen the splendor and glory of God if they had not been in a difficult or impossible situation, and the same is true for you and me. We can't really experience the full extent of God's glory and splendor without trials and tribulations in life."

Out Of The Desert Come God's Strength

9. **Isaiah 35:3-6a** - *"Strengthen the feeble **hands**, steady the **knees** that give way; say to those with fearful **hearts**, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.' Then will the **eyes** of the blind be opened and the **ears** of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute **tongue** shout for joy."* (Emphasis added)
 - a. The references to different parts of the human body indicate that the Lord will strengthen every part of us.
10. "God knows that you can withstand your trial, or else He would not have given it to you. His trust in you explains the trials of your life, no matter how severe they may be. God knows your strength, and He measures it to the last inch. Remember, no trial has ever been given to anyone that was greater than that person's strength, through God, to endure it." - Lettie B. Cowman

Out Of The Desert Come God's Refreshing

11. **Isaiah 35:6b-7** - *"**Water** will gush forth in the wilderness and **streams** in the desert. The burning sand will become a **pool**, the thirsty ground bubbling **springs**. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow."* (Emphasis added)
 - a. The references to different types of water speak to the fact that human

beings need water to survive, but these references also represent the soothing aspects of water that we experience from the sound of the ocean or a fountain, or the beauty of a stream, pond, or lake.

- b. Pastor Gary said: “Out of dry and arid places God will bring times of refreshing to sustain and sooth us. God knows how to do that for us like nothing and no one else can.”

Out Of The Desert Come Joy And Gladness To Replace Sorrow And Sighing

12. [Isaiah 35:10](#) - “[And] the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”

- a. In Hebrew, the definition of “*overtake them*” is a military term, which means that God will hunt us down to give us gladness and joy.

13. Pastor Gary said: “Notice that [Isaiah] mentioned ‘*sorrow and sighing*,’ ... because [life as a Christian] isn’t about the absence of sorrow and sighing [or] the denial of sorrow and sighing, like it’s not there. The very nature of the desert means that there will be sorrow and sighing, but that God, in his mercy, will bring joy and gladness... The truth is, that after visiting with enough of you who have gone through some of the deepest, darkest things, I think it is true that a person’s life is forever changed when some unexpected tragedy strikes. But, God will help you to laugh again, and God will help you to live again, and God will help you to love again. And there [will be] times when you just have to hold on for dear life, to the promises of God.”

14. “Joy sometimes needs pain to give it birth.” – Lettie B. Cowman

15. Pastor Gary said: “[Isaiah 35](#) is about how God inserts himself into the devastation of our lives and says, ‘I will restore you, you will recover, and there will be rejoicing again in your life.’ ”

16. Pastor Gary shared a poem Lettie Cowman wrote and included in her book.

“It is easy to love Him when the blue is in the sky,
When summer winds are blowing, and we smell the roses nigh;
There is little effort needed to obey His precious will
When it leads through flower-decked valley, or over sun-kissed hill.
It is when the rain is falling, or the mist hangs in the air,
When the road is dark and rugged, and the wind no longer fair,
When the rosy dawn has settled in a shadowland of gray,
That we find it hard to trust Him, and are slower to obey.
It is easy to trust Him when the singing birds have come,

And their canticles are echoed in our heart and in our home;
But 'tis when we miss the music, and the days are dull and drear,
That we need a faith triumphant over every doubt and fear.
And our blessed Lord will give it; what we lack He will supply;
Let us ask in faith believing – on His promises rely;
He will ever be our Leader, whether smooth or rough the way,
And will prove Himself sufficient for the needs of every day.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Isaiah 35](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments concerning the difficult times all of us experience over the course of our lifetime. (See #2 and #3 above)
3. Read the quotes Pastor Gary shared from Lettie B. Cowman’s book, entitled *Streams in the Desert*. (See #5 above)
4. Provide an overview of the four examples Pastor Gary gave of people who experienced a “desert” season in life and allow the people in your group to share their experiences, as well as give testimony to the ways the Lord ministered to them. (See #6 through #8 above)
5. Read and discuss [Isaiah 35:3–6a](#). (See #9 and #10 above)
6. How has the Lord ministered a time of refreshment to you in a “desert place”? (See #11 above)
7. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s remarks concerning the fact that sorrow and sighing are part of life, but the Lord promises to bring us into times when we can laugh again, live again, and love again. (See #13 above)
8. Ask someone in your group to read Lettie Cowman’s poem as you end your discussion time and enter into a time of prayer. (See #16 above)

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).