



# BURNING SAND SHALL BECOME A POOL

## Isaiah 35:1-10

- 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 God, the majesty of our God.
- 3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.
- 4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. Who will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. God will come and save you."
- 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
- 6 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;
- 7 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.
- 8 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 traveller, not even fools, shall 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 our God 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.

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests that the poetry of Isaiah offers the human community an incentive to change our behaviour towards Earth's community and commit to ecological conversion.

This month we are celebrating the Season of Creation from Creation Day, 1 September, to the feast of St Francis of Assisi, 4 October. The Season is an invitation from our Churches to focus more sharply on our created or material world that includes the other-than-human with the human. All are created, all are material. This focus is necessary in order that we shift our consciousness to automatically

embrace the other-than-human. We are not there yet!

The Isaiah 35:4-7 text is the first reading for the 23rd Sunday of the Year and a gift for our reflection during the Season of Creation. The entire poem of Isaiah 35:1-10, from which the four verses of the First Reading are taken, show the Earth-consciousness of the poet/prophet very explicitly. It is a consciousness which we are endeavouring to inhabit also.

### Time and Place

Two key aspects of an ecological consciousness to guide our reading are attentiveness to *time* and attentiveness to *place* – in our own lives and in the biblical texts with which we engage. The time is that of Isaiah, an eighth-century prophet. His oracles are collected in the first 39 chapters of the much longer collection of Isaiah in our Bibles. Isaiah is called to preach and prophesy to Judah, the Southern Kingdom (Is 6), at a time of political threat from the north. The place is the built environment of the city of Jerusalem (Zion). The prophet also draws the other-than-human reality into his preaching challenging a people who have abandoned God. We hear this in the poignant opening verses of an earlier Isaian oracle: “Let me sing to my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard” (Is 5:1).

### Offering a Vision of Change

Isaiah 35 is the last great oracle of this eighth-century prophet (or perhaps, as some scholars suggest, from a later prophet that found its way into the concluding section of the First Isaiah – Is 1-39). The dominant theme characterising this prophetic oracle is “reversal”. We hear this in the opening verses where deserts blossom and wildernesses rejoice. The prophet offers a vision of hope – a vision which can be ours today. We can ask ourselves: What signs can we see of deserts blossoming or wildernesses rejoicing? Are they a material reality somewhere in our lives and our world now? Or are they what we simply hope for?

The prophet in Isaiah 35

uses poetry as the medium of his message. While we can read prose that confronts with stories of desertification, the making of wildernesses, poetry can reach into our hearts. We recognise the voice of the prophet speaking in evocative poetry to ancient Israel certainly, but also speaking to us today. And we hear contemporary prophets urging us in this same genre.



*If we are to ward off the imminent destruction of precious ecosystems and species, the human community must be responsible for the reversal.*

### Vision of Hope

Both ancient and contemporary poets use reversal to face us with the devastation of Earth and all Earth’s living being:

Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!” (Is 35:6-7)

And just as it was difficult for ancient Israel to stay strong in the face of their impending political disasters, so too, is it difficult for us today to stay strong in the face of impending ecological disasters.

### Commitment to Ecological Conversion

“Be strong, do not fear!” We need these calls to rise up in many different contexts and in many different languages. If we are to ward off the imminent destruction of precious ecosystems and species, the human community must be responsible for

the reversal. We must be strong in our commitment. We must be forthright and hold our elected leaders responsible to the Paris Agreement, by way of example.

The prophet says: “God will come to save”, but not as an interventionist actor. God will come and save as the one who stands with the entire Earth community in its journey toward right relationships.

In Is 35:5-10 the poet/prophet offers a new vision of restoration to the community. As in Is 35:1-2, the vision of restoration has water at its heart:

6 For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;  
7 the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs.

Water and access to water is necessary for all that lives, and hence is one of the most central aspects of our ecological crisis. The need is not new in our time, as the words of the prophet indicate.

The vision that the prophet Isaiah writes is as appropriate for us in our days of ecological crisis as it was for the people of Judah in eighth-century BCE. During the Season of Creation we’re invited to be attentive to the word being addressed to us through our scriptures as well as through our lives. Our times confront us daily with imperatives to ecological conversion. Through our conversion we will know and experience the incredible diversity and complexity of Earth, respect its creativity and live in right relationship with all as we co-create the future of this planet.

May this Season of Creation provide opportunities for the restoration and development of right relationship within the Earth Community. ❁

See <https://seasonofcreation.com> for more detail and resources for each of the Sundays during the Seasons of Creation.



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