

The desert will blossom as the rose

by Douglas E. Cox

Isaiah's prophecy that the desert will blossom as the rose applies to time when the holy Spirit will be poured out on the Church.

The wilderness represents the Church's spiritual environment. As the children of Israel who came out of Egypt dwelt in the wilderness *en route* to the promised land, the church has also been in a wilderness since the time of the apostles, according to Rev. 12:6 & 14.

The saints look for a better country, of which the promised land was a type. [Heb. 11:16] This is depicted by the prophet Joel:

Joel 2:3

A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:1-12 said the experience of the Israelites happened *for our examples*.

Isaiah connected the time when the Spirit is poured out with the desert becoming fruitful. He wrote:

Isaiah 32:13

Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.

This depicts the city or cities becoming desolate, and the habitations of wild asses. The desolation would continue "until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest."

Isaiah described remarkable changes in the wilderness. His prophecy in chapter 35 applies to the Church, and describes the joy of the saints that accompanies salvation.

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

J. A. Alexander wrote in his introduction to Isa. 35:

The chapter is the description of a happy condition of the church after a period of suffering. Thus explained it may be considered as including various particulars, none of which can be regarded as its specific or exclusive subject. Without any change of its essential meaning, it may be applied to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, to the vocation of the Gentiles, to the whole Christian dispensation, to the course of every individual believer, and to the blessedness of heaven. The ground of this manifold application is not that the language of the passage is unmeaning or indefinite, but that there is a real and designed analogy between the various changes mentioned, which brings them all within the natural scope of the same inspired description.

On verses 5-6, Alexander commented:

5, 6. *Then* (when God has thus come) *shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap* (or bound) *as an hart and the tongue of the dumb shall shout (for joy), because waters have burst forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.* The change in the condition of the people is now represented by another figure, the removal of corporeal infirmities. The reason assigned in this last clause for the joy to be expressed shows clearly that the miraculous removal of disease and the miraculous irrigation of the desert are intended to express one and the same thing. The essential idea in both cases is that of sudden

and extraordinary change. The simple meaning of the passage is, that the divine interposition which had just been promised should produce as wonderful a change in the condition of mankind, as if the blind were to receive their sight, the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and deserts to be fertilized and blossom as the rose. In the process of this mighty transmutation, miracles were really performed, both of a bodily and spiritual nature, but the great change which includes these includes vastly more. The original form of expression is not that they *shall* rejoice for waters *shall* burst forth, but that they *shall* rejoice because waters *have* burst forth already, the last event being spoken of as relatively past, i. e. as previous to the act of rejoicing which the future verb expresses.

Rivers and streams appearing in the desert, the desert blossoming as the rose, trees growing in the wilderness, flourishing vegetation in a desert, are metaphors that apply to Scriptures being understood by the saints, that before seemed obscure.

Another prophecy about the wilderness was taken up as a theme by John the Baptist.

Isaiah 40:3

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

This prophecy is not referring to a literal highway, but a route or a path to the heavenly promised land, the eternal inheritance promised to the saints.

Isaiah described trees growing in the wilderness and in the desert, contrary to their natural environment.

Isaiah 41:19

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together:

Isaiah encouraged those dwelling in the wilderness to sing:

Isaiah 42:11

Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains.

He said God would create a new thing, a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:19-20

Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.

The wilderness will be like Eden.

Isaiah 51:3

For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

When the prophecies of Scripture are properly interpreted and their meaning becomes plain, they bring forth their intended fruit in the Church, so what was before like a desolate wilderness, turns into a garden of Eden.

The woman in Revelation 12 is a figure of the Church, which in verse 13 is persecuted by Satan. In Rev. 12:14 she is given two wings of a great eagle, which I suggest, represent the gift of understanding prophecy. With these wings she flies to the wilderness. Then the earth opens her mouth, and swallows up the flood that the serpent spews out of his mouth.

Revelation 12:14-16

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

Perhaps the reason the desert is described as rejoicing and in bloom in Isaiah's prophecies is that these figures foreshadow a change in the Church's understanding of prophecy. Traditional interpretations of prophecy are full of gloom and doom; they are depressing predictions of death and woe, whereas their true meaning is often quite different. Commentators have failed to understand prophecy, and have misinterpreted it. Their pessimistic speculations have turned many promises of good and of blessings for the Church into predictions of a negative nature. A prime example of this is the manner in which dispensationalist writers interpret the 70th week of Daniel 9. They detach it from the previous sections of the prophecy, creating a portentous gap, and say it is seven years of tribulation, which is yet future. But the Bible nowhere speaks of seven years of tribulation. The 70th week is not a future seven years, but represents the whole period from the start of Christ's ministry to the end of the age. The first half of the 70th week is three and a half natural years, the ministry of Jesus, and the last half-week is the *time, times, and a half*, a symbol of the remaining time of the Church, after Jesus' resurrection and ascent to heaven. At the end of the last half-week, God's Spirit is poured out upon the Church which has been made desolate. I think that this is the "anointing" promised in Daniel 9:24 & 27.