

Note: Isaiah 35 is a poem of joy describing his vision of the people's return from exile in Babylon, celebrating the joy of the redeemed. But the return journey to Jerusalem will be a long and difficult one.

1. What words in the opening lines tell you that this is a poem of joy? (Is 35:1-2)
2. In this poem, Isaiah uses many elements of nature.
 - a. To what elements of nature did Isaiah choose to give which human qualities? (Is 35:1-2; 6-7)
 - b. If you were Isaiah today, writing this poem, would you have chosen different elements of nature to express the earth's joy at the release of captives? Why or why not?
3. Isaiah realizes that the released captives in Babylon will have a long homeward journey and a huge task ahead of them to rebuild Jerusalem. How does Isaiah's poem account for the anxiety of the freed captives? (Is 35:3-6)
4. Which of the images would have been most comforting or reassuring to you, if you had been one of the freed captives? (Is 35:3-6)
5. What is God's message to those who are fearful of returning to Jerusalem from Babylon? (Is 35:4)
6. How does God reassure those in Babylon, who may want to return to Jerusalem, but cannot, because they are physically handicapped in some way? (Is 35:5-6)
7. The journey back to Jerusalem is mostly through desert territory. What does God promise about the availability of water? (Is 35:6-7)
8. What different poetic images does Isaiah use to describe God's provisions for a safe return in the journey home from Babylon to Jerusalem? (Is 35:8-10)
9. God will provide a "Way of Holiness" for the returnees. (Is 35:8)
 - a. What is distinctive about this "Holy Way"? (Is 35:8-10)
 - b. *Reflection:* Has God ever provided a "way of holiness" for you after a serious loss, death, illness, or other misfortune? Share your story with table members.
10. When the returnees reach Jerusalem all they will see is a temple in ruins and the city walls reduced to rubble.
 - a. How does Isaiah describe their emotions when returning to Jerusalem? (Is 35:10)
 - b. Can you think of any comparable destructive experiences happening in the United States, or elsewhere, and the people returning with joy?