



## EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Matthew 1–13 Sermon Series

Supports Session 10: Confronting Doubts

Sermon Title: “Promises Made and Promises Kept” (Isaiah 35:1-10; 61:1)

### Connection to Session 10

In Matthew 11, John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to determine whether or not Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He was expecting the Messiah, and he wanted confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah. In order to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus referenced Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61. In Isaiah 35 and 61, God promised He would begin a restorative work in His people when He comes to them. Jesus shows that all these promises have been fulfilled in His ministry, proving that He is the Son of God and Messiah.

### Introduction/Opening

As John the Baptist sat in prison, he likely felt an array of emotions. He knew Jesus and heard about all Jesus was doing. He was likely hopeful that Jesus was the Messiah, but he wanted to be sure. Hopefulness does not preclude the possibility of simultaneous doubt. When we experience doubt in our relationship with Jesus, we may ask for proof that Jesus is who He says He is to strengthen our faith. It is worth noting that the proof Jesus provided was nestled in a prophecy of Scripture found in Isaiah 35, which referenced what would happen when God transformed and restored His people.

### Outline

1. **God will renew the land for His people (Isa. 35:1-2).**
  - a. The land is a major theme in the Old Testament. God’s people were redeemed from slavery in Egypt through the exodus. God promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, yet they had to travel through the wilderness to obtain it.
  - b. Looking across the expansive deserts of Oman, one might wonder how any life might hope to exist. Yet, there in the desert is the Wadi Bani Khalid, a desert oasis that flows with water, greenery, and life. A dry, desolate land was familiar to the Israelites. Since the Israelites had faced the judgment of God that Isaiah had prophesied, they may have wondered if there was any hope of renewal. However, God promised that when He redeemed them, the land would be renewed by His grace and His power.
  - c. The wilderness is a symbol of testing and difficulty. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness. Jesus himself had to face the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. The promise in Isaiah 35 is that the wilderness itself will be renewed into a productive garden.

## **2. God will renew the strength of His people (Isa. 35:3-4).**

- a. As John the Baptist sat in prison, he likely wondered if Jesus was indeed the Messiah He seemed to be. Perhaps John was weak, doubtful, and uncertain regarding his fate. He wanted to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah, so he sent messengers to Jesus to discover if He was the Christ. Jesus's words to John were undoubtedly intended to strengthen him, much like the words God spoke to His people through Isaiah.
- b. "Strengthen the weak hands, steady the shaking knees! Say to the cowardly: 'Be strong; do not fear!'" (Isa. 35:3-4). The refrains, "Do not fear," and, "Be strong," run throughout Scripture. These encouragements were intended to bolster God's people and remind them that He was with them.
- c. John needed these encouragements as do modern Christians. We live in a world that can feel like the wilderness—surrounded by danger, a lack of spiritual vitality, and doubt about God's goodness. Yet, in Christ, we can be strong and confident that God is with us and promises us a great future with Him.

## **3. God will renew the joy of His people (Isa. 35:5-10; 61:1).**

- a. Joy runs throughout Isaiah 35. From joy in the desert to the unending joy of God's redeemed people, God intends for His people to experience His full blessing.
- b. In Matthew 11, Jesus referenced Isaiah 35 to confirm His identity as the Messiah. After God promised that He would come to save His people (Isa. 35:4), He promised that the eyes of the blind would be opened, the deaf would hear, and the lame would leap (vv. 5-6). Throughout His ministry, Jesus fulfilled these very promises. Jesus healed blind men (Matt. 9:27-30), restored the hearing of the deaf (Mark 7:31-37), and restored lame men with the ability to walk (2:12). What was lacking has been provided, namely, the joy of a full life.
- c. Isaiah 61, a passage Jesus also quoted, says the Messiah will preach "the good news," as well as perform miracles. The good news is the coming kingdom of God, which is evidenced in the ministry of Jesus. He came to renew and restore His people with an "unending joy" (Isa 35:10). They will face no threats from within or without; they will enjoy peace and safety in the kingdom of God.

## **Conclusion**

When we face doubt or uncertainty concerning the identity, purpose, or power of Jesus, we can look to the Scriptures to see that every promise God made, God kept. God promises to renew His people. We find His renewing power in one person alone: Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, every promise of God has been made and kept, and in Him alone can we experience God's presence, strength, and joy in this life and forever. Anchoring our hope in Christ will help us through seasons of doubt, uncertainty, and struggle.

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