

CHAPTER 35

As after a prediction of God's judgments upon the world (Isa. 24) follows a promise of great mercy to be had in store for his church (Isa. 25), so here after a black and dreadful scene of confusion in the foregoing chapter we have, in this, a bright and pleasant one, which, though it foretel the flourishing estate of Hezekiah's kingdom in the latter part of his reign, yet surely looks as far beyond that as the prophecy in the foregoing chapter does beyond the destruction of the Edomites; both were typical, and it concerns us most to look at those things which they were typical of, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. When the world, which lies in wickedness, shall be laid in ruins, and the Jewish church, which persisted in infidelity, shall become a desolation, then the gospel church shall be set up and made to flourish.

- I. The Gentiles shall be brought into it (v. 1, 2, 7).
- II. The well-wishers to it, who were weak and timorous, shall be encouraged (v. 3, 4).
- III. Miracles shall be wrought both on the souls and on the bodies of men (v. 5, 6).
- IV. The gospel church shall be conducted in the way of holiness (v. 8, 9).
- V. It shall be brought at last to endless joys (v. 10). Thus do we find more of Christ and heaven in this chapter than one would have expected in the Old Testament.

ISA. 35: 1-4

In these verses we have,

I. The desert land blooming. In the foregoing chapter we had a populous and fruitful country turned into a horrid wilderness; here we have in lieu of that, a wilderness turned into a good land. When the land of Judah was freed from the Assyrian army, those parts of the country that had been made as a wilderness by the ravages and outrages they committed began to recover themselves, and to look pleasantly again, and to blossom as the rose. When the Gentile nations, that had been long as a wilderness, bringing forth no fruit to God, received the gospel, joy came with it to them, Psa. 67: 3, 4; 96:11, 12. When Christ was preached in Samaria there was *great joy in that city* (Act. 8: 8); those that sat in darkness saw a great and joyful light, and then they blossomed, that is, gave hopes of abundance of fruit; for that was it which the preachers of the gospel aimed at (Joh. 15:16), to *go and bring forth fruit*, Rom. 1:13; Col. 1: 6. Though blossoms are not fruit, and often miscarry and come to nothing, yet they are in order to fruit. Converting grace makes the soul that was *a wilderness to rejoice with joy and singing*, and to *blossom abundantly*. This

flourishing desert shall have all *the glory of Lebanon* given to it, which consisted in the strength and stateliness of its cedars, together with *the excellency of Carmel and Sharon*, which consisted in corn and cattle. Whatever is valuable in any institution is brought into the gospel. All the beauty of the Jewish church was admitted into the Christian church, and appeared in its perfection, as the apostle shows at large in his epistle to the Hebrews. Whatever was excellent and desirable in the Mosaic economy is translated into the evangelical institutes.

II. The glory of God shining forth: *They shall see the glory of the Lord*. God will manifest himself more than ever in his grace and love to mankind (for that is his glory and excellency), and he shall give them eyes to see it, and hearts to be duly affected with it. This is that which will make the desert blossom. The more we see by faith of the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God the more joyful and the more fruitful shall we be.

III. The feeble and faint-hearted encouraged, v. 3, 4. God's prophets and ministers are in a special manner charged, by virtue of their office, to *strengthen the weak hands*, to comfort those who could not yet recover the fright they had been put into by the Assyrian army with an assurance that God would now return in mercy to them. This is the design of the gospel,

1. To strengthen those that are weak and to confirm them — the weak hands, which are unable either to work or fight, and can hardly be lifted up in prayer, and the feeble knees, which are unable either to stand or walk and unfit for the race set before us. The gospel furnishes us with strengthening considerations, and shows us where strength is laid up for us. Among true Christians there are many that have weak hands and feeble knees, that are yet but babes in Christ; but it is our duty to strengthen our brethren (Luk. 22:32), not only to bear with the weak, but to do what we can to confirm them, Rom. 15: 1; 1Th. 5:14. It is our duty also to strengthen ourselves, to lift up *the hands which hang down* (Heb. 12:12), improving the strength God has given us, and exerting it.

2. To animate those that are timorous and discouraged: *Say to those that are of a fearful heart*, because of their own weakness and the strength of their enemies, that are *hasty* (so the word is), that are for betaking themselves to flight upon the first alarm, and giving up the cause, that say, in their haste, "We are cut off and undone" (Psa. 31:22), there is enough in the gospel to silence these fears; it says to them, and let them say it to themselves and one to another, *Be strong, fear not*. Fear is weakening; the more we strive against it the stronger we are both for doing and suffering; and, for our encouragement to strive, he that says to us, *Be strong* has laid help for us upon one that is mighty.

IV. Assurance given of the approach of a Saviour: “*Your God will come with vengeance. God will appear for you against your enemies, will recompense both their injuries and your losses.*” The Messiah will come, in the fulness of time, to take vengeance on the powers of darkness, to spoil them, and make a show of them openly, to recompense those that mourn in Zion with abundant comforts. *He will come and save us.* With the hopes of this the Old-Testament saints strengthened their weak hands. He will come again at the end of time, will come in flaming fire, to recompense tribulation to those who have troubled his people, and, to those who were troubled, rest, such a rest as will be not only a final period to, but a full reward of, all their troubles, 2Th. 1: 6, 7. Those whose *hearts tremble for the ark of God*, and who are under a concern for his church in the world, may silence their fears with this, God will take the work into his own hands. Your God will come, who pleads your cause and owns your interest, even God himself, who is God alone.

ISA. 35: 5-10

“*Then, when your God shall come, even Christ, to set up his kingdom in the world, to which all the prophets bore witness, especially towards the conclusion of their prophecies of the temporal deliverances of the church, and this evangelical prophet especially — then look for great things.*”

I. Wonders shall be wrought in the kingdoms both of nature and grace, wonders of mercy wrought upon the children of men, sufficient to evince that it is no less than a God that comes to us.

1. Wonders shall be wrought on men’s bodies (v. 5, 6): *The eyes of the blind shall be opened*; this was often done by our Lord Jesus when he was here upon earth, with a word’s speaking, and one he gave sight to that was *born* blind, Mat. 9:27; 12:22; 20:30; Joh. 9: 6. By his power the ears of the deaf also were unstopped, with one word. *Ephphatha — Be opened*, Mar. 7:34. Many that were lame had the use of their limbs restored so perfectly that they could not only go, but *leap*, and with so much joy to them that they could not forbear leaping for joy, as that impotent man, Acts 3: 8. The dumb also were enabled to speak, and then no marvel that they were disposed to sing for joy, Mat. 9:32, 33. These miracles Christ wrought to prove that he was sent of God (Joh. 3: 2), nay, working them by his own power and in his own name, he proved that he was God, the same who at first made man’s mouth, the hearing ear, and the seeing eye. When he would prove to John’s disciples his divine mission he did it by miracles of this kind, in which this scripture was fulfilled.

2. Wonders, greater wonders, shall be wrought on men's souls. By the word and Spirit of Christ those that were spiritually blind were enlightened (Acts 26:18), those that were deaf to the calls of God were made to hear them readily, so Lydia, whose heart *the Lord opened, so that she attended*, Acts 16:14. Those that were impotent to every thing that is good by divine grace are made, not only able for it, but active in it, and run the way of God's commandments. Those also that were dumb, and knew not how to speak of God or to God, having their understandings opened to know him, shall thereby have their lips opened to show forth his praise. The tongue of the dumb shall sing for joy, the joy of God's salvation. Praise shall be perfected out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.

II. The Spirit shall be poured out from on high. There shall be *waters and streams*, rivers of living water; when our Saviour spoke of these as the fulfilling of the scripture, and most probably of this scripture, the evangelist tells us, *He spoke of the Spirit* (Joh. 7:38, 39), as does also this prophet (Isa. 32:15); so here (v. 6), *in the wilderness*, where one would least expect it, *shall waters break out*. This was fulfilled when the *Holy Ghost fell upon the Gentiles that heard the word* (Act. 10:44); then were the fountains of life opened, whence streams flowed, that watered the earth abundantly. These waters are said to *break out*, which denotes a pleasing surprise to the Gentile world, such as brought them, as it were, into a new world. The blessed effect of this shall be that the *parched ground shall become a pool*, v. 7. Those that laboured and were heavily laden, under the burden of guilt, and were scorched with the sense of divine wrath, found rest, and refreshment, and abundant comforts in the gospel. In *the thirsty land*, where no water was, nor ordinances (Psa. 63: 1), there shall be *springs of water*, a gospel ministry, and by that the administration of all gospel ordinances in their purity and plenty, which are *the river that makes glad the city of our God*, Psa. 46: 4. *In the habitation of dragons*, who chose to dwell in the parched scorched ground (Isa. 34: 9, 13), these waters shall flow, and dispossess them, so that, *where each lay shall be grass with reeds and rushes*, great plenty of useful productions. Thus it was when Christian churches were planted, and flourished greatly, in the cities of the Gentiles, which, for many ages, had been habitations of dragons, or devils rather, as Babylon (Rev. 18: 2); when the property of the idols' temples was altered, and they were converted to the service of Christianity, then the habitations of dragons became fruitful fields.

III. The way of religion and godliness shall be laid open: it is here called *the way of holiness* (v. 8) the way both of holy worship and a holy conversation. Holiness is the rectitude of the human nature and will, in conformity to the divine nature and will. The way of holiness is that course of religious duties in

which men ought to walk and press forward, with an eye to the glory of God and their own felicity in the enjoyment of him. “When our God shall come to save us he shall chalk out to us this way by his gospel, so as it had never been before described.”

1. It shall be an appointed way; not a way of sufferance, but a *highway*, a way into which we are directed by a divine authority and in which we are protected by a divine warrant. It is the King’s highway, the King of Kings’ highway, in which, though we may be waylaid, we cannot be stopped. The *way of holiness* is the way of God’s commandments; it is (as highways usually are) the *good old way*, Jer. 6:16.

2. It shall be an appropriated way, the way in which God will bring his own chosen to himself, but *the unclean shall not pass over it*, either to defile it or to disturb those that walk in it. It is a way by itself, distinguished from the way of the world, for it is a way of separation from, and nonconformity to, this world. *It shall be for those* whom the Lord has *set apart for himself* (Psa. 4: 3), shall be reserved for them: *The redeemed shall walk there*, and the satisfaction they take in these *ways of pleasantness* shall be out of the reach of molestation from an evil world. *The unclean shall not pass over it*, for it shall be a fair way; those that walk in it are the *undefiled in the way*, who *escape the pollution that is in the world*.

3. It shall be a straight way: *The wayfaring men*, who choose to travel in it, *though fools*, of weak capacity in other things, shall have such plain directions from the word and Spirit of God in this way that they *shall not err therein*; not that they shall be infallible even in their own conduct, or that they shall in nothing mistake, but they shall not be guilty of any fatal misconduct, shall not so miss their way but that they shall recover it again, and get well to their journey’s end. Those that are in the narrow way, though some may fall into one path and others into another, not all equally right, but all meeting at last in the same end, shall yet never fall into the broad way again; the Spirit of truth shall lead them into all truth that is necessary for them. Note, The way to heaven is a plain way, and easy to hit. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*, and made them wise to salvation. *Knowledge is easy to him that understands*.

4. It shall be a safe way: *No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast* (v. 9), none to hurt or destroy. Those that keep close to this way keep out of the reach of Satan the roaring lion, that wicked one touches them not. Those that walk in the way of holiness may proceed with a holy security and serenity of mind, knowing that nothing can do them any real hurt; they shall be quiet from the fear of evil. It was in Hezekiah’s days, some time after the captivity of the ten tribes, that God, being displeased with the colonies settled there, *sent lions*

among them, 2Ki. 17:25. But Judah keeps her integrity, and therefore *no lions shall be there*. Those that walk in the *way of holiness* must separate themselves from the unclean and the ravenous, must *save themselves from an untoward generation*; hoping that they themselves are of the redeemed, let them walk *with the redeemed who shall walk there*.

IV. The end of this way shall be everlasting joy, v. 10. This precious promise of peace now will end shortly in endless joys and rest for the soul. Here is good news for the citizens of Zion, rest to the weary: *The ransomed of the Lord*, who therefore ought to follow him wherever he goes (Rev. 14: 4), *shall return and come to Zion*,

1. To serve and worship God in the church militant: they shall deliver themselves out of Babylon (Zec. 2: 7), shall *ask the way to Zion* (Jer. 50: 5), and shall *find the way* Isa. 52:12. God will open to them a door of escape out of their captivity, and it shall be an effectual door, though there be many adversaries. They shall join themselves to the gospel church, that *Mount Zion*, that *city of the living God*, Heb. 12:22. They shall come with songs of joy and praise for their deliverance out of Babylon, where they wept upon every *remembrance of Zion*, Psa. 137: 1. Those that by faith are made citizens of the gospel Zion may *go on their way rejoicing* (Act. 8:39); they shall sing in the ways of the Lord, and be still praising him. They rejoice in Christ Jesus, and the sorrows and signs of their convictions are made to flee away by the power of divine consolations. Those that mourn are blessed, for they shall be comforted.

2. To see and enjoy God in the church triumphant; those that walk in *the way of holiness*, under guidance of their Redeemer, shall come to Zion at last, to the heavenly Zion, shall come in a body, shall all be presented together, *faultless, at the coming of Christ's glory with exceeding joy* (Jude 1:24; Rev. 7:17); they shall come with songs. When God's people returned out of Babylon to Zion they came *weeping* (Jer. 50: 4); but they shall come to heaven singing a new song, which no man can learn, Rev. 14: 3. When they shall *enter into the joy of their Lord* it shall be what the joys of this world never could be *everlasting joy*, without mixture, interruption, or period. It shall not only fill their hearts, to their own perfect and perpetual satisfaction, but it shall be *upon their heads*, as an ornament of grace and a crown of glory, as a garland worn in token of victory. Their joy shall be visible, and no longer a secret thing, as it is here in this world; it shall be proclaimed, to the glory of God and their mutual encouragement. They shall then obtain the joy and gladness which they could never expect on this side heaven; *and sorrow and sighing shall flee away* for ever, as the shadows of the night before the rising sun. Thus these prophecies, which relate to the Assyrian invasion, conclude, for the support of the people of God under that calamity, and to direct their joy, in their deliverance from it, to

something higher. Our joyful hopes and prospects of eternal life should swallow up both all the sorrows and all the joys of this present time.