

CHAPTER 44

God, by the prophet, goes on in this chapter, as before,

- I.** To encourage his people with the assurance of great blessings he had in store for them at their return out of captivity, and those typical of much greater which the gospel church, his spiritual Israel, should partake of in the days of the Messiah; and hereby he proves himself to be God alone against all pretenders (v. 1-8).
- II.** To expose the sottishness and amazing folly of idol-makers and idol-worshippers (v. 9-20).
- III.** To ratify and confirm the assurances he had given to his people of those great blessings, and to raise their joyful and believing expectations of them (v. 21-28).

ISAIAH 44:1-8

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

Two great truths are abundantly made out in these verses:

I. That the people of God are a happy people, especially upon account of the covenant that is between them and God. The people of Israel were so as a figure of the gospel Israel. Three things complete their happiness:

1. The covenant-relations wherein they stand to God, v. 1, 2. Israel is here called *Jeshurun* the upright one; for those only, like Nathanael, are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile, and those only shall have the everlasting benefit of these promises. Jacob and Israel had been represented, in the close of the foregoing chapter, as very provoking and obnoxious to God's wrath, and already given to the curse and to reproaches; but, as if God's bowels yearned towards him and his repentings were kindled together, mercy steps in with a *non-obstantenotwithstanding*, to all these quarrels: "Yet now, hear, O Jacob my servant! thou and I will be friends again for all this." God had said (²⁴⁸⁵ Isaiah 43:25), *I am he that blotteth out thy transgression*, which is the only thing that creates this distance; and when that is taken away the

streams of mercy run again in their former channel. The pardon of sin is the inlet of all the other blessings of the covenant. So and so I will do for them, says God (³⁸²Hebrews 8:12), *for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness*. Therefore *hear, O Jacob!* hear these comfortable words; therefore *fear not, O Jacob!* fear not thy troubles, for by the pardon of sin the property of them too is altered. Now the relations wherein they stand to him are very encouraging.

(1.) They are his *servants*; and those that serve him he will own and stand by and see that they be not wronged.

(2.) They are his *chosen*, and he will abide by his choice; he knows those that are his, and those whom he has chosen he takes under special protection.

(3.) They are his creatures. He *made them*, and brought them into being; he *formed them*, and cast them into shape; he began betimes with them, for he *formed them from the womb*; and therefore he will help them over their difficulties and help them in their services.

2. The covenant-blessings which he has secured to them and theirs, v. 3, 4.

(1.) Those that are sensible of their spiritual wants, and the insufficiency of the creature to supply them, shall have abundant satisfaction in God: *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty*, that thirsts after righteousness; he shall be filled. Water shall be poured out to those who truly desire spiritual blessings above all the delights of sense.

(2.) Those that are barren as the dry ground shall be watered with the grace of God, with floods of that grace, and God will himself give the increase. If the ground be ever so dry, God has floods of grace to water it with.

(3.) The water God will pour out is *his Spirit* (⁴⁰⁹John 7:39), which God will pour out without measure upon the seed, that is, Christ (⁴⁰⁶Galatians 3:16), and by measure upon all the seed of the faithful, upon all the praying wrestling seed of Jacob, ⁴¹³Luke 11:13. This is the great New-Testament promise, that God, having sent his servant Christ, and upheld him, will send his Spirit to uphold us.

(4.) This gift of the Holy Ghost is the great blessing God had reserved the plentiful effusion of for the latter days: *I will pour my Spirit*, that is, *my blessing*; for where God gives his Spirit he will give all other blessings.

(5.) This is reserved for the seed and offspring of the church; for so the covenant of grace runs: *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed*. To all who are thus made to partake of the privileges of adoption God will give the spirit of adoption.

(6.) Hereby there shall be a great increase of the church. Thus it shall be spread to distant places. Thus it shall be propagated and perpetuated to after-times: *They shall spring up and grow as fast as willows by the watercourses*, and in every thing that is virtuous and praiseworthy shall be eminent and excel all about them, as the willows overtop the grass among which they grow, v. 4. Note, It is a great happiness to the church, and a great pleasure to good men, to see the rising generation hopeful and promising. And it will be so if God pour his Spirit upon them, that blessing, that blessing of blessings.

3. The consent they cheerfully give to their part of the covenant, v. 5. When the Jews returned out of captivity they renewed their covenant with God (^{280B}Jeremiah 50:5), particularly that they would have no more to do with idols, ³⁴²Hosea 14:2, 3, 8. Backsliders must thus repent and do their first works. Many of those that were without did at that time join themselves to them, invited by that glorious appearance of God for them, ³⁸³Zechariah 8:23; ⁴⁰⁷Esther 8:17. And they say, *We are the Lord's and call themselves by the name of Jacob*; for there was one law, one covenant, *for the stranger and for those that were born in the land*. And doubtless it looks further yet, to the conversion of the Gentiles, and the multitudes of them who, upon the effusion of the Spirit, after Christ's ascension, should be *joined to the Lord and added to the church*. These converts are *one and another*, very many, of different ranks and nations, and all welcome to God, ⁵¹¹Colossians 3:11. When one does it another shall by his example be invited to do it, and then another; thus the zeal of one may provoke many.

(1.) They shall resign themselves to God: not one in the name of the rest, but every one for himself shall say, "*I am the Lord's; he has an incontestable right to rule me, and I submit to him, to all his commands, to all his disposal. I am, and will be, his only, his wholly, his for ever, will be for his interests, will be for his praise; living and dying I will be his.*"

(2.) They shall incorporate themselves with the people of God, *call themselves by the name of Jacob*, forgetting their own people and their fathers' house, and desirous to wear the character and livery of God's

family. They shall love all God's people, shall associate with them, give them the right hand of fellowship, espouse their cause, seek the good of the church in general and of all the particular members of it, and be willing to take their lot with them in all conditions.

(3.) They shall do this very solemnly. Some of them shall *subscribe with their hand unto the Lord*, as, for the confirming of a bargain, a man sets his hand to it, and delivers it as his act and deed. The more express we are in our covenanting with God the better, ^{<124E>}Exodus 24:7; ^{<124E>}Joshua 24:26, 27; ^{<102B>}Nehemiah 9:38. Fast bind, fast find.

II. That, as the Israel of God are a happy people, so the God of Israel is a great God, and he is God alone. This also, as the former, speaks abundant satisfaction to all that trust in him, v. 68. Observe here, to God's glory and our comfort,

- 1.** That the God we trust in is a God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power. He is *the Lord*, Jehovah, self-existent and self-sufficient; and he is *the Lord of hosts*, of all the hosts of heaven and earth, of angels and men.
- 2.** That he stands in relation to, and has a particular concern for, his church. He is *the King of Israel and his Redeemer*; therefore his Redeemer because his King; and those that take God for their King shall have him for their Redeemer. When God would assert himself God alone he proclaims himself Israel's God, that his people may be encouraged both to adhere to him and to triumph in him.
- 3.** That he is eternal *the first and the last*. He is God from everlasting, before the worlds were, and will be so to everlasting, when the world shall be no more. If there were not a God to create, nothing would ever have been; and, if there were not a God to uphold, all would soon come to nothing again. He is all in all, is the first cause, from whom are all things, and the last end, to and for whom are all things (^{<51B>}Romans 11:36), the *Alpha and the Omega*, ^{<611>}Revelation 1:11.

4. That he is God alone (v. 6): *Besides me there is no God. Is there a God besides me?* v. 8. We will appeal to the greatest scholars. Did they ever in all their reading meet with any other? To those that have had the largest acquaintance with the world. Did they ever meet with any other? There are *gods many* (^{<48E>}1 Corinthians 8:5, 6), *called gods*, and counterfeit gods: but

is there any besides our God that is infinite and eternal, any besides him that is the creator of the world and the protector and benefactor of the whole creation, any besides him that can do that for their worshippers which he can and will do for his? “*You are my witnesses. I have been a nonsuch to you. You have tried other gods; have you found any of them all-sufficient to you, or any of them like me? Yea, there is no god,*” *no rock* (so the word is), none besides Jehovah that can be a rock for a foundation to build on, a rock for shelter to flee to. God is the rock, and *their rock is not as ours*, ⁽⁵¹⁴⁾Deuteronomy 32:4, 31. *I know not any*; as if he had said, “I never met with any that offered to stand in competition with me, or that durst bring their pretensions to a fair trial; if I did know of any that could befriend you better than I can, I would recommend you to them; but I know not any.” There is no God besides Jehovah. He is infinite, and therefore there can be no other; he is all-sufficient, and therefore there needs no other. This is designed for the confirming of the hopes of God's people in the promise of their deliverance out of Babylon, and, in order to that, for the curing of them of their idolatry; when the affliction had done its work it should be removed. They are reminded of the first and great article of their creed, that *the Lord their God is one Lord*, ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾Deuteronomy 6:4. And therefore,

- (1.) They needed not to hope in any other god. Those on whom the sun shines need neither moon nor stars, nor the light of their own fire.
- (2.) They needed not to fear any other god. Their own God was more able to do them good than all the false and counterfeit gods of their enemies were to do them hurt.
5. That none besides could foretel these things to come, which God now by his prophet gave notice of to the world, above 200 years before they came to pass (v. 7): “*Who, as I, shall call, shall call Cyrus to Babylon? Is there any but God that can call effectually, and has every creature, every heart, at his beck? Who shall declare it, how it shall be, and by whom, as I do?*” Nay, God goes further; he not only sees it in order, as having the foreknowledge of it, but *sets it in order*, as having the sole management and direction of it. Can any other pretend to this? He has always set things in order according to the counsel of his own will, ever *since he appointed the ancient people*, the people of Israel, who could give a truer and fuller account of the antiquities of their own nation than any other kingdom in the world could give of theirs. Ever since he appointed that people to be

his peculiar people his providence was particularly conversant about them, and he told them beforehand the events that should occur respecting their bondage in Egypt, their deliverance from it, and their settlement in Canaan. All was set in order in the divine predictions as well as in the divine purposes. Could any other have done so? Would any other have been so far concerned for them? He challenges the pretenders to show the things that shall come hereafter: "Let them, if they can, tell us the name of the man that shall destroy Babylon and deliver Israel? Nay, if they cannot pretend to tell us *the things that shall come* hereafter, let them tell us the things that *are coming*, that are nigh at hand and at the door. Let them tell us what shall come to pass to-morrow; but they cannot do that; fear them not therefore, nor be afraid of them. What harm can they do you? What hindrance can they give to your deliverance, when I have told thee it shall be accomplished in its season, and I have solemnly declared it?" Note, Those who have the word of God's promise to depend upon need not be afraid of any adverse powers or policies whatsoever.

~~240~~ ISAIAH 44:9-20

THE FOLLY OF IDOLATRY

Often before, God, by the prophet, had mentioned the folly and strange sottishness of idolaters; but here he enlarges upon that head, and very fully and particularly exposes them to contempt and ridicule. This discourse is intended,

- 1.** To arm the people of Israel against the strong temptation they would be in to worship idols when they were captives in Babylon, in compliance with the custom of the country (they being far from the city of their own solemnities) and to humour those who were now their lords and masters.
- 2.** To cure them of their inclination to idolatry, which was the sin that did most easily beset them and to reform them from which they were sent into Babylon. As the rod of God is of use to enforce the word, so the word of God is of use to explain the rod, that the voice of both together may be heard and answered.

3. To furnish them with something to say to their Chaldean task-masters. When they insulted over them, when they asked, *Where is your God?* they might hence ask them, *What are your gods?*

4. To take off their fear of the gods of their enemies, and to encourage their hope in their own God that he would certainly appear against those who set up such scandalous competitors as these with him for the throne.

Now here, for the conviction of idolaters, we have,

I. A challenge given to them to clear themselves, if they can, from the imputation of the most shameful folly and senselessness imaginable, v. 9-11. They set their wits on work to contrive, and their hands on work to frame, graven images, and they call them *their delectable things*; extremely fond they are of them, and mighty things they expect from them. Note, Through the corruption of men's nature, those things that should be detestable to them are desirable and delectable; but those are far gone in a distemper to whom that which is the food and fuel of it is most agreeable. Now,

1. We tell them that those that do so are all vanity; they deceive themselves and one another, and put a great cheat upon those for whom they make these images.

2. We tell them that *their delectable things shall not profit* them, nor make them any return for the pleasure they take in them; they can neither supply them with good nor protect them from evil. The *graven images* are *profitable for nothing* at all, nor will they ever get any thing by the devoirs they pay to them.

3. We appeal to themselves whether it be not a silly sottish thing to expect any good from gods of their own making: *They are their own witnesses*, witnesses against themselves, if they would but give their own consciences leave to deal faithfully with them, that they are blind and ignorant in doing thus. *They see not nor know*, and let them own it, *that they may be ashamed*. If men would but be true to their own convictions, ordinarily we might be sure of their conversion, particularly idolaters; for *who has formed a god?* Who but a mad-man, or one out of his wits, would think of forming a god, of making that which, if he make it a god, he must suppose to be his maker?

4. We challenge them to plead their own cause with any confidence or assurance. If any one has the front to say that he has formed a god, when all his fellows come together to declare what each of them has done towards the making of this god, they will all be ashamed of the cheat they have put upon themselves, and laugh in their sleeves at those whom they have imposed upon; for *the workmen* that formed this god *are of men*, weak and impotent, and therefore cannot possibly make a being that shall be omnipotent, nor can they without blushing pretend to do so. *Let them all be gathered together*, as Demetrius and the craftsmen were, to support their sinking trade; *let them stand up* to plead their own cause, and make the best they can of it, with hand joined in hand; *yet they shall fear* to undertake it when it comes to the setting to, as conscious to themselves of the weakness and badness of their cause, *and they shall be ashamed* of it, not only when they appear singly, but when by appearing together they hope to keep one another in countenance. Note, Idolatry and impiety are things which men may justly both tremble and blush to appear in the defence of.

II. A particular narrative of the whole proceeding in making a god; and there needs no more to expose it than to describe it and tell the story of it.

1. The persons employed about it are handicraft tradesmen, the meanest of them, the very same that you would employ in making the common utensils of your husbandry, a cart or a plough. You must have a *smith*, a blacksmith, who *with the tongs works in the coals*; and it is hard work, for he *works with the strength of his arms*, till *he is hungry* and his strength fails, so eager is he, and so hasty are those who set him at the work to get it despatched. He cannot allow himself time to eat or drink, for *he drinks no water, and therefore is faint*, v. 12. Perhaps it was a piece of superstition among them for the workman not to eat or drink while he was making a god. The plates with which the smith was to cover the image, or whatever iron-work was to be done about it, *he fashioned with hammers*, and made it all very exact, according to the model given him. Then comes *the carpenter*, and he takes as much care and pains about the timber-work, v. 13. He brings his box of tools, for he has occasion for them all: *He stretches out his rule* upon the piece of wood, *marks it with a line*, where it must be sawed or cut of; *he fits it*, or polishes it, *with planes*, the greater first and then the less; *he marks out with the compasses* what must be the size and shape of it; and it is just what he pleases.

2. The form in which it is made is that of a man, a poor, weak, dying creature; but it is the noblest form and figure that he is acquainted with, and, being his own, he has a peculiar fondness for it and is willing to put all the reputation he can upon it. He makes it *according to the beauty of a man*, in comely proportion, with those limbs and lineaments that are the beauty of a man, but are altogether unfit to represent the beauty of the Lord. God put a great honour upon man when, in respect of the powers and faculties of his souls, he made him after the image of God; but man does a great dishonour to God when he makes him, in respect of bodily parts and members, after the image of man. Nor will it at all atone for the affront so far to compliment his god as to take the fairest of the children of men for his original whence to take his copy, and to give him all the beauty of a man that he can think of; for all the *beauty of the body of a man*, when pretended to be put upon him who is an infinite Spirit, is a deformity and diminution to him. And, when the goodly piece is finished, it must *remain in the house*, in the temple or shrine prepared for it, or perhaps in the dwelling house if it be one of the *lares* or *penates* the household gods.

3. The matter of which it is mostly made is sorry stuff to make a god of; it is the stock of a tree.

(1.) The tree itself was fetched out of *the forest*, where it grew among other trees, of no more virtue or value than its neighbours. It was a *cedar*, it may be, or a *cypress*, or an *oak*, v. 14. Perhaps he had an eye upon it some time before for this use, and *strengthened it for himself*, used some art or other to make it stronger and better-grown than other trees were. Or, as some read it, *which hath strengthened or lifted up itself among the trees of the forest*, the tallest and strongest he can pick out. Or, it may be, it pleases his fancy better to take an *ash*, which is of a quicker growth, and which was of his own planting for this use, and which has been nourished with rain from heaven. See what a fallacy he puts upon himself, in making that his refuge which was of his own planting, and which he not only gave the form to, but prepared the matter for; and what an affront he puts upon the God of heaven in setting up that a rival with him which was nourished by his rain, that rain which falls upon the just and unjust.

(2.) The boughs of this tree were good for nothing but for fuel; to that use were they put, and so were the chips that were cut off from it in the working of it; they are *for a man to burn*, v. 15, 16. To show that that tree

has no innate virtue in it for its own protection, it is as capable of being burnt as any other tree; and, to show that he who chose it had no more antecedent value for it than for any other tree, he makes no difficulty of throwing part of it into the fire as common rubbish, asking no question for conscience' sake.

[1.] It serves him for his parlour-fire: *He will take thereof and warm himself* (v. 15), and he finds the comfort of it, and is so far from having any regret in his mind for it that he saith, *Aha! I am warm; I have seen the fire;* and certainly that part of the tree which served him for fuel, the use for which God and nature designed it, does him a much greater kindness and yields him more satisfaction than ever that will which he makes a god of.

[2.] It serves him for his kitchen-fire: *He eats flesh* with it, that is, he dresses the flesh with it which he is to eat; he *roasteth roast, and is satisfied* that he has not done amiss to put it to this use. Nay,

[3.] It serves him to heat the oven with, in which we use that fuel which is of least value: *He kindles it and bakes bread* with the heat of it, and none charges him with doing wrong.

(3.) Yet, after all, the stock or body of the tree shall serve to make a god of, when it might as well have served to make a bench, as one of themselves, even a poet of their own, upbraids them, *Horat. Sat. 1:8:*

*Olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum,
Quum faber, incertus scamnum faceretne Priapum,
Maluit esse deum; deus inde ego*

*In days of yore our godship stood
A very worthless log of wood,
The joiner, doubting or to shape us
Into a stool or a Priapus,
At length resolved, for reasons wise,
Into a god to bid me rise. Francis*

And another of them threatens the idol to whom he had committed the custody of his woods that, if he did not preserve them to be fuel for his fire, he should himself be made use of for that purpose:

*Furaces moneo manus repellas,
Et silvam domini focus reserves,
Si defecerit haec, et ipse lignum es.*

*Drive the plunderers away, and preserve the wood
for thy master's hearth, or thou thyself shalt
be converted into fuel. Martial*

When the besotted idolater has thus served the meanest purposes with part of his tree, and the rest has had time to season (he makes that a god in his imagination while that is in the doing, *and worships it*): He *makes it a graven image, and falls down thereto* (v. 15), that is (v. 17), *The residue thereof he makes a god, even his graven image*, according to his fancy and intention; he *falls down to it, and worships it*, gives divine honours to it, prostrates himself before it in the most humble reverent posture, as a servant, as a suppliant; *he prays to it*, as having a dependence upon it, and great expectations from it; *he saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god*. There where he pays his homage and allegiance he justly looks for protection and deliverance. What a strange infatuation is this, to expect help from gods that cannot help themselves! But it is this praying to them that makes them gods, not what the smith or the carpenter did to them. What we place our confidence in for deliverance that we make a god of.

*Qui fingit sacros, auro vel marmore, vultus
Non facit ille deos; qui rogat, ille facit.*


*He who supplicates the figure, whether it be
of gold or of marble, makes it a god, and not
he who merely constructs it. Martial*

III. Here is judgment given upon this whole matter, v. 18-20. In short, it is the effect and evidence of the greatest stupidity and sottishness that one could ever imagine rational beings to be guilty of, and shows that man has become worse than the beasts that perish; for they act according to the dictates of sense, but man acts not according to the dictates of reason (v. 18): *They have not known nor understood common sense*; men that act rationally in other things in this act most absurdly. Though they have some knowledge and understanding, yet they are strangers to, nay, they are rebels against the great law of consideration (v. 12): *None considers in his heart*, nor has so much application of mind as to reason thus with himself, which one would think he might easily do, though there were none to reason with him: *"I have burnt part of this tree in the fire, for baking and*

roasting; *and now shall I make the residue thereof an abomination?*" (that is, *an idol*, for that is an abomination to God and all wise and good men); "shall I ungratefully choose to do, or presumptuously dare to do, what the Lord hates? shall I be such a fool as to fall down to the stock of a tree a senseless, lifeless, helpless thing? shall I so far disparage myself, and make myself like that I bow down to?" A growing tree may be a beautiful stately thing, but the stock of a tree has lost its glory, and he has lost his that gives glory to it. Upon the whole, the sad character given of these idolaters is,

1. That they put a cheat upon themselves (v. 20): *They feed on ashes*; they feed themselves with hopes of advantage by worshipping these idols, but they will be disappointed as much as a man that would expect nourishment by feeding on ashes. Feeding on ashes is an evidence of a depraved appetite and a distempered body; and it is a sign that the soul is overpowered by very bad habits when men, in their worship, go no further than the sight of their eyes will carry them. They are wretchedly deluded, and it is their own fault: *A deceived heart* of their own, more than the deceiving tongue of others, *has turned them aside* from the faith and worship of the living God to dumb idols. They are *drawn away of their own lusts and enticed*. The apostasy of sinners from God is owing entirely to themselves and to the evil heart of unbelief that is in their own bosom. A revolting and rebellious heart is a deceived heart.

2. That they wilfully persist in their self-delusion and will not be undeceived. There is none of them that can be persuaded so far to suspect himself as to say, *Is there not a lie in my right hand?* and so to think of delivering his soul. Note,

(1.) Idolaters have a lie in their right hand; for an idol is a lie, is not what it pretends, performs not what it promises, and it is a *teacher of lies*,
 Habakkuk 2:18.

(2.) It highly concerns those that are secure in an evil way seriously to consider whether there be not a lie in their right hand. Is not that a lie which with complacency we hold fast as our chief good? Are our hearts set upon the wealth of the world and the pleasures of sense? They will certainly prove a lie in our right hand. And is not that a lie which with confidence we hold fast by, as the ground on which we build our hopes for heaven? If we trust to our external professions and performances, as if

those would save us, we deceive ourselves with a lie in our right hand, with a house built on the sand.

(3.) Self-suspicion is the first step towards self-deliverance. We cannot be faithful to ourselves unless we are jealous of ourselves. He that would deliver his soul must begin with putting this question to his own conscience. *Is there not a lie in my right hand?*

(4.) Those that are given up to believe in a lie are under the power of strong delusions, which it is hard to get clear of, ^{<240>}2 Thessalonians 2:11.

^{<240>}ISAIAH 44:21-28

ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In these verses we have,

I. The duty which Jacob and Israel, now in captivity, were called to, that they might be qualified and prepared for the deliverance designed them. Our first care must be to get good by our afflictions, and then we may hope to get out of them. The duty is expressed in two words: *Remember* and *return*, as in the counsel to Ephesus, ^{<614>}Revelation 2:4, 5.

1. “*Remember these, O Jacob! Remember what thou hast been told of the folly of idolatry, and let the convictions thou art now under be ready to thee whenever thou art tempted to that sin. Remember that thou art my servant, and therefore must not serve other masters.*”

2. *Return unto me*, v. 22. It is the great concern of those who have backslidden from God to hasten their return to him; and this is that which he calls them to when they are in affliction, and when he is returning to them in a way of mercy.

II. The favours which Jacob and Israel, now in captivity, were assured of; and what is here promised to them upon their remembering and returning to God is in a spiritual sense promised to all that in like manner return to God. It is a very comfortable word, for more is implied in it than is expressed (v. 21): “*O Israel! thou shalt not be forgotten of me, though for the present thou seemest to be so.*” When we begin to remember God he

will begin to remember us; nay, it is he that remembers us first. Now observe here,

1. The grounds upon which God's favourable intentions to his people were built and on which they might build their expectations from him. He will deliver them out of captivity; for,

(1.) They are his servants, and therefore he has a just quarrel with those that detain them. *Let my people go, that they may serve me.* The servants of the King of kings are under special protection.

(2.) He formed them into a people, formed them *from the womb*, v. 24. From the first beginning of their increase into a nation they were under his particular care and government, more than any other people; their national constitution was of his framing, and his covenant with them was the charter by which they were incorporated. They are his, and he will save them.

(3.) He has redeemed them formerly, has many a time redeemed them out of great distress, and he is still the same, in the same relation to them, has the same concern for them. “Therefore *return unto me, for I have redeemed thee*, v. 22. Whither wilt thou go, but to me?” Having redeemed them, as well as formed them, he has acquired a further title to them and propriety in them, which is a good reason why they should dutifully return to him and why he will graciously return to them. The *Lord has redeemed Jacob*; he is about to do it (v. 23); he has determined to do it; for he is the Lord their Redeemer, v. 24. Note, The work of redemption which God has by his Son wrought for us encourages us to hope for all promised blessings from him. He that has redeemed us at so vast an expense will not lose his purchase.

(4.) He has *glorified himself in them* (v. 23), and therefore will do so still, ~~John~~ John 12:28. It is matter of comfort to us to see God's glory interested in the deliverances of the church; for *therefore* he will certainly redeem Jacob, because thus he will glorify himself. And *this* assures us that he will perfect the redemption of his saints by Jesus Christ, because there is a day set when he will be glorified and admired in them all.

(5.) He has pardoned their sins, which were the cause of their calamity and the only obstruction to their deliverance, v. 22. *Therefore* he will break the

yoke of captivity from off their necks, because he has *blotted out, as a thick cloud, their transgressions*. Note,

[1.] Our transgressions and our sins are as a cloud, a thick cloud; they interpose between heaven and earth, and for a time suspend and intercept the correspondence between the upper and lower world (*sin separates between us and God*, ^{<281D>}Isaiah 59:2); they threaten a storm, a deluge of wrath, as thick clouds do, which God will rain upon sinners. ^{<311B>}Psalm 11:6.

[2.] When God pardons sin he blots out this cloud, this thick cloud, so that the intercourse with heaven is laid open again. God looks down upon the soul with favour; the soul looks up to him with pleasure. The cloud is scattered by the influence of the Sun of righteousness. It is only through Christ that sin is pardoned. When sin is pardoned, like a cloud that is scattered, it appears no more, it is quite gone. The *iniquity of Jacob shall be sought for, and not found*, ^{<281D>}Jeremiah 50:20. And the comforts that flow into the soul when sin is pardoned are like the *clear shining after clouds and rain*.

2. The universal joy which the deliverance of God's people should bring along with it (v. 23): *Sing, O you heavens!* This intimates,

(1.) That the whole creation shall have cause for joy and rejoicing in the redemption of God's people; to that it is owing that it subsists (that it is rescued from the curse which the sin of man brought upon the ground) and that it is again put into a capacity of answering the ends of its being, and is assured that though now it groans, being burdened, it shall at last be delivered from the bondage of corruption. The greatest establishment of the world is the kingdom of God in it, ^{<191B>}Psalm 96:11-13; 98:79.

(2.) That the angels shall rejoice in it, and the inhabitants of the upper world. The heavens shall sing, for the Lord has done it. And there is joy in heaven when God and man are reconciled (^{<211E>}Luke 15:7), joy when Babylon falls, ^{<681D>}Revelation 18:20.

(3.) That those who lay at the greatest distance, even the inhabitants of the Gentile world, should join in these praises, as sharing in these joys. The *lower parts of the earth*, the forest and the trees there, shall bring in the tribute of thanksgiving for the redemption of Israel.

3. The encouragement we have to hope that though great difficulties, and such as have been thought insuperable, lie in the way of the church's deliverance, yet, when the time for it shall come, they shall all be got over with ease; for *thus saith Israel's Redeemer, I am the Lord that maketh all things*, did make them at first and am still making them; for providence is a continued creation. All being, power, life, emotion, and perfection, are from God. He *stretches forth the heavens alone*, has no help nor needs any; and the earth too he *spreads abroad by himself*, and by his own power. Man was not by him when he did it (~~4304~~ Job 38:4), nor did any creature advise or assist; only his own eternal wisdom and Word was by him then as *one brought up with him*, ~~4083~~ Proverbs 8:30. His stretching out the heavens by himself denotes the boundless extent of his power. The strongest man, if he has to stretch a thing out, must get somebody or other to lend a hand; but God stretched out the vast expanse and keeps it still upon the stretch, himself, by his own power. Let not Israel be discouraged then; nothing is too hard for him to do that made the world, ~~4348~~ Psalm 124:8. And, having made all things, he can make what use he pleases of all, and has it in his power to serve his own purposes by them.

4. The confusion which this would put upon the oracles of Babylon, by the confutation it would give them, v. 25. God, by delivering his people out of Babylon, would *frustrate the tokens of the liars*, of all the lying prophets, that said the Babylonian monarchy had many ages yet to live, and pretended to ground their predictions upon some token, some sign or other, which, according to the rules of their arts, foreboded its prosperity. How mad will these conjurors grow with vexation when they see that their skill fails them, and that the contrary happens to that which they so coveted and were so confident of. Nor would it only baffle their pretended prophets, but their celebrated politicians too: He *turns the wise men backward*. Finding they cannot go on with their projects, they are forced to quit them; and so he makes the judges fools, *and makes their knowledge foolish*. Those that are made acquainted with Christ see all the knowledge they had before to be foolishness in comparison with the knowledge of him. And those that are adversaries to him will find all their counsels, like Ahitophel's, turned into foolishness, and themselves *taken in their own craftiness*, ~~4189~~ 1 Corinthians 3:19.

5. The confirmation which this would give to the oracles of God, which the Jews had distrusted and their enemies despised: God *confirms the word of his servant* (v. 26); he confirms it by accomplishing it in its

season; and *performs the counsel of the messengers* whom he hath many a time sent to his people, to tell them what great blessings he had in store for them. Note, The exact fulfilling of the prophecies of scripture is a confirmation of the truth of the whole book and an incontestable evidence of its divine origin and authority.

6. The particular favours God designed for his people, that were now in captivity, v. 26-28. These were foretold long before they went into captivity, that they might see reason to expect a correction, but no reason to fear a final destruction.

(1.) It is here supposed that Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, should for a time lie in ruins, dispeopled and uninhabited; but it is promised that they shall be rebuilt and re-peopled. When Isaiah lived, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were full of inhabitants; but they will be emptied, burnt, and destroyed. It was then hard to believe that concerning such strong and populous cities. But the justice of God will do that; and, when that is done, it will be hard to believe that ever they will recover themselves again, and yet the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do that to. God has said to Jerusalem, *Thou shalt be inhabited*; for, while the world stands, God will have a church in it, and therefore he will raise up those who *shall say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built*; for, if it be not built, it cannot be inhabited, ³⁴²⁵Psalm 69:35, 36. When God's time shall have come for the building up of his church, let him alone to find both houses for his people (for they shall not lie exposed) and people for his houses, for they shall not stand empty. The cities of Judah too shall again be built. The Assyrian army under Sennacherib only took them, and then, upon the defeat of that army, they returned undamaged to the right owners; but the Chaldean army demolished them, and by carrying away the inhabitants left them to go to decay of themselves; for, if less judgments prevail not to humble and reform men, God will send greater. Yet these desolations shall not be perpetual. God will *raise up the wastes and decayed places thereof*; for he will not contend for ever. The city of strangers, when it is ruined, shall never be built (²³¹⁰Isaiah 25:2), but the city of God's own children is but discontinued for a time.

(2.) It is here supposed that the temple too should be destroyed, and lie for a time rased to the foundations; but it is promised that the foundation of it shall again be laid, and no doubt built upon. As the desolation of the sanctuary was to all the pious Jews the most mournful part of the

destruction, so the restoration and re-establishment of it would be the most joyful part of the deliverance. What joy can they have in the rebuilding of Jerusalem if the temple there be not rebuilt? for it is that which makes it a holy city and truly beautiful. This therefore was the chief thing that the Jews had at heart and had in view in their return; therefore they would go back to Jerusalem, to *build the house of the Lord God of Israel there*, ^{<HUB>}Ezra 1:3.

(3.) It is here supposed that very great difficulties would lie in the way of this deliverance, which it would be impossible for them to wade through; but it is promised that by a divine power they shall all be removed (v. 27): *God saith to the deep, Be dry*; so he did when he brought Israel out of Egypt, and so he will again when he brings them out of Babylon, if there be occasion. *Who art thou, O great mountain? Dost thou stand in the way? Before Zerubbabel, the commander-in-chief of the returning captives, thou shalt become a plain*, ^{<304E>}Zechariah 4:7. So, *Who art thou, O great deep? Dost thou retard their passage and think to block it up? Thou shalt be dry, and thy rivers that supply thee shall be dried up*. When Cyrus took Babylon by draining the river Euphrates into many channels, and so making it passable for his army, this was fulfilled. Note, Whatever obstructions lie in the way of Israel's redemption, God can remove them with a word's speaking.

(4.) It is here supposed that none of the Jews themselves would be able by might and power to force their way out of Babylon but it is promised that God will raise up a stranger from afar off, that shall fairly open the way for them, and now at length he names the very man, many scores of years before he was born or thought of (v. 28): *That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd*. Israel is his people, and the sheep of his pasture. These sheep are now in the midst of wolves, in the hands of the thief and robber; they are impounded for trespass. Now Cyrus shall be his shepherd, employed by him to release these sheep, and to take care of their return to their own green pasture again. "In this *he shall perform all my pleasure*, shall bring about what is purposed by me and will be highly pleasing to me." Note,

[1.] The most contingent things are certain to the divine prescience. He knew who was the person, and what was his name, that should be the deliverer of his people, and, when he pleased, he could let his church know it, that, when they heard of such a name beginning to be talked of in

the world, they might *lift up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption drew nigh.*

[2.] It is the greatest honour of the greatest men to be employed for God as instruments of his favour to his people. It was more the praise of Cyrus to be God's shepherd than to be emperor of Persia.

[3.] God makes what use he pleases of men, of mighty men, of those that act with the greatest freedom; and, when they think to do as they please, he can overrule them, and make them do as he pleases. Nay, in those very things wherein they are serving themselves, and look no further than that, God is serving his own purposes by them and making them to perform all his pleasure. Rich princes shall do what poor prophets have foretold.