

CHAPTER 49

Glorious things had been spoken in the previous chapters concerning the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon; but lest any should think, when it was accomplished, that it looked much greater and brighter in the prophecy than in the performance, and that the return of about 40,000 Jews in a poor condition out of Babylon to Jerusalem was not an event sufficiently answering to the height and grandeur of the expressions used in the prophecy, he here comes to show that the prophecy had a further intention, and was to have its full accomplishment in a redemption that should as far outdo these expressions as the other seemed to come short of them, even the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, of whom not only Cyrus, who was God's servant in foretelling it, was a type. In this chapter we have,

- I.** The designation of Christ, under the type of Isaiah, to his office as Mediator (v. 1-3).
- II.** The assurance given him of the success of his undertaking among the Gentiles (v. 4-8).
- III.** The redemption that should be wrought by him, and the progress of that redemption (v. 9-12).
- IV.** The encouragement given hence to the afflicted church (v. 13-17).
- V.** The addition of many to it, and the setting up of a church among the Gentiles (v. 18-23).
- VI.** A ratification of the prophecy of the Jews' release out of Babylon, which was to be the figure and type of all these blessings, (v. 24-26). If this chapter be rightly understood, we shall see ourselves to be more concerned in the prophecies relating to the Jews' deliverance out of Babylon than we thought we were.

ISAIAH 49:1-6

ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE GENTILES

Here,

I. An auditory is summoned together and attention demanded. The sermon in the foregoing chapter was directed to the house of Jacob and the people of Israel, v. 1, 12. But this is directed to the isles (that is, the Gentiles, for they are called *the isles of the Gentiles*, ^{<0105>}Genesis 10:5) and to *the people from far*, that were *strangers to the commonwealth of Israel*, and afar off. Let these listen (v. 1) as to a thing at a distance, which yet they are to hear with desire and attention. Note,

1. The tidings of a Redeemer are sent to the Gentiles, and to those that lie most remote; and they are concerned to listen to them.
2. The Gentiles listened to the gospel when the Jews were deaf to it.

II. The great author and publisher of the redemption produces his authority from heaven for the work he had undertaken.

1. God had appointed him and set him apart for it: *The Lord has called me from the womb* to this office and *made mention of my name*, nominated me to be the Saviour. By an angel he called him *Jesus — a Saviour*, who *should save his people from their sins*, ^{<012>}Matthew 1:21. Nay, from the womb of the divine counsels, before all worlds, he was called to this service, and help was laid upon him; and he came at the call, for he said, *Lo, I come*, with an eye to what was written of him *in the volume of the book*. This was said of some of the prophets, as types of him, ^{<205>}Jeremiah 1:5. Paul was separated to the apostleship from his mother's womb, ^{<015>}Galatians 1:15.

2. God had fitted and qualified him for the service to which he designed him. He *made his mouth like a sharp sword*, and *made him like a polished shaft*, or a bright arrow, furnished him with every thing necessary to fight God's battles against the powers of darkness, to conquer Satan, and bring back God's revolted subjects to their allegiance, by his word: that is the *two-edged sword* (^{<012>}Hebrews 4:12) which comes out of his mouth, ^{<015>}Revelation 19:15. The convictions of the word are the arrows that shall be sharp in the hearts of sinners, ^{<015>}Psalms 45:5.

3. God had preferred him to the service for which he had reserved him: *He has hidden me in the shadow of his hand* and in his quiver, which denotes,

(1.) Concealment. The gospel of Christ, and the calling in of the Gentiles by it, were long hidden from ages and generations, hidden in God (^{<485>}Ephesians 3:5, ^{<515>}Romans 16:25), hidden in the shadow of the ceremonial law and the Old-Testament types.

(2.) Protection. The house of David was the particular care of the divine Providence, because that blessing was in it. Christ in his infancy was sheltered from the rage of Herod.

4. God had owned him, had said unto him, “*Thou art my servant*, whom I have employed and will prosper; thou art Israel, in effect, *the prince with God*, that hast wrestled and prevailed; and in thee I will be glorified.” The people of God are *Israel*, and they are all gathered together, summed up, as it were, in Christ, the great representative of all Israel, as the high priest who had the names of all the tribes on his breastplate; and in him God is and will be glorified; so he said by a voice from heaven, ^{<527>}John 12:27, 28. Some read the words in two clauses: *Thou art my servant* (so Christ is, ^{<341>}Isaiah 42:1); *it is Israel in whom I will be glorified by thee*; it is the spiritual Israel, the elect, in the salvation of whom by Jesus Christ God will be glorified, and his free grace for ever admired.

III. He is assured of the good success of his undertaking; for whom God calls he will prosper. And as to this,

1. He objects the discouragement he had met with at his first setting out (v. 4): “Then I said, with a sad heart, *I have laboured in vain*; those that were ignorant, and careless, and strangers to God, are so still: *I have called, and they have refused*; I have *stretched out my hands to a gainsaying people*.” This was Isaiah's complaint, but it was no more than he was told to expect, ^{<269>}Isaiah 6:9. The same was a temptation to Jeremiah to resolve he would labour no more, ^{<249>}Jeremiah 20:9. It is the complaint of many a faithful minister, that has not loitered, but laboured, not spared, but spent, his strength, and himself with it, and yet, as to many, it is all in vain and for nought; they will not be prevailed with to repent and believe. But here it seems to point at the obstinacy of the Jews, among whom Christ went in person preaching the gospel of the kingdom, laboured and spent his strength, and yet the rulers and the body of the nation rejected him and his doctrine; so very few were brought in, when

one would think none should have stood out, that he might well say, “*I have laboured in vain*, preached so many sermons, wrought so many miracles, in vain.” Let not the ministers think it strange that they are slighted when the Master himself was.

2. He comforts himself under this discouragement with this consideration, that it was the cause of God in which he was engaged and the call of God that engaged him in it: *Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord*, who is the Judge of all, *and my work with my God*, whose servant I am. His comfort is, and it may be the comfort of all faithful ministers, when they see little success of their labours,

(1.) That, however it be, it is a righteous cause that they are pleading. They are with God, and for God; they are on his side, and workers together with him. They like not their judgment, the rule they go by, nor their work, the business they are employed in, ever the worse for this. The unbelief of men gives them no cause to suspect the truth of their doctrine, ~~xxx~~ Romans 3:3.

(2.) That their management of this cause, and their prosecution of this work, were known to God, and they could appeal to him concerning their sincerity, and that it was not through any neglect of theirs that they laboured in vain. “*He knows the way that I take; my judgment is with the Lord*, to determine whether I have not delivered my soul and left the blood of those that perish on their own heads.”

(3.) Though the labour be in vain as to those that are laboured with, yet not as to the labourer himself, if he be faithful: his judgment is with the Lord, who will justify him and bear him out, though men condemn him and run him down; and his work (the reward of his work) is with his God, who will take care he shall be no loser, no, not by his lost labour.

(4.) Though the judgment be not yet brought forth unto victory, nor the work to perfection, yet both are with the Lord, to carry them on and give them success, according to his purpose, in his own way and time.

3. He receives from God a further answer to this objection, v. 5, 6. He knew very well that God had set him on work, had *formed him from the womb to be his servant*, had not only called him so early to it (v. 1), but begun so early to fit him for it and dispose him to it. Those whom God designs to employ as his servants he is fashioning and preparing to be so

long before, when perhaps neither themselves nor others are aware of it. It is he that forms the spirit of man within him. Christ was to be *his servant, to bring Jacob again to him*, that had treacherously departed from him. The seed of Jacob therefore, according to the flesh, must first be dealt with, and means used to bring them back. Christ, and the word of salvation by him, are sent to them first; nay, Christ comes in person to them only, *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. But what if Jacob will not be brought back to God and Israel will not be gathered? So it proved; but this is a satisfaction in that case,

(1.) Christ will be glorious in the eyes of the Lord; and those are truly glorious that are so in God's eyes. Though few of the Jewish nation were converted by Christ's preaching and miracles, and many of them loaded him with ignominy and disgrace, yet God put honour upon him, and made him glorious, at his baptism, and in his transfiguration, spoke to him from heaven, sent angels to minister to him, made even his shameful death glorious by the many prodigies that attended it, much more his resurrection. In his sufferings God was his strength, so that though he met with all the discouragement imaginable, by the contempts of a people whom he had done so much to oblige, yet he *did not fail nor was discouraged*. An angel was sent from heaven to *strengthen him*, ⁴²⁸Luke 22:43. Faithful ministers, though they see not the fruit of their labours, shall yet be accepted of God, and in that they shall be truly glorious, for his favour is our honour; and they shall be assisted to proceed and persevere in their labours notwithstanding. This weakens their hands, but their God will be their strength.

(2.) The gospel shall be glorious in the eyes of the world; though it be not so in the eyes of the Jews, yet it shall be entertained by the nations, v. 6. The Messiah seemed as if he had been primarily designed to *bring Jacob back*, v. 5. But he is here told that it is comparatively but a small matter; a higher orb of honour than that, and a larger sphere of usefulness, are designed him: "*It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob to the dignity and dominion they expect by the Messiah, and to restore the preserved of Israel, and make them a flourishing church and state as formerly*" (nay, considering what a little handful of people they are, it would be but a small matter, in comparison, for the Messiah to be the Saviour of them only); "*and therefore I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles* (many great and mighty nations by the gospel of Christ shall be brought to the knowledge and worship of the true

God), *that thou mayest be my salvation*, the author of that salvation which I have designed for lost man, and this *to the end of the earth*, to nations at the greatest distance." Hence Simeon learned to call Christ *a light to lighten the Gentiles* (^{413B}Luke 2:32), and St. Paul's exposition of this text is what we ought to abide by, and it serves for a key to the context, ^{413C}Acts 13:47. *Therefore*, says he, we turn to the Gentiles, to preach the gospel to them, *because so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles*. In this the Redeemer was truly glorious, though Israel was not gathered; the setting up of his kingdom in the Gentile world was more his honour than if he had raised up all the tribes of Jacob. This promise is in part fulfilled already, and will have a further accomplishment, if that time be yet to come which the apostle speaks of, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in. Observe, God calls it his salvation, which some think intimates how well pleased he was with it, how he gloried in it, and (if I may so say) how much his heart was upon it. They further observe that Christ is given for a light to all those to whom he is given for salvation. It is in darkness that men perish. Christ enlightens men's eyes, and so makes them holy and happy.

^{230E}ISAIAH 49:7-12

HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION OF MESSIAH

In these verses we have,

I. The humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah (v. 7): *The Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and Israel's Holy One*, who had always taken care of the Jewish church and wrought out for them those deliverances that were typical of the great salvation, speaks here to him, who was the undertaker of that salvation. And,

1. He takes notice of his humiliation, the instances of which were uncommon, nay, unparalleled. He was one *whom man despised*. He is *despised and rejected of men*, ^{250B}Isaiah 53:3. To be despised by so mean a creature (man, who is himself a worm) bespeaks the lowest and most contemptible condition imaginable. Man, whom he came to save and to put honour upon, yet despised him and put contempt upon him; so wretchedly ungrateful were his persecutors. The ignominy he underwent was not the least of his sufferings. They not only made him despicable, but

odious. He was *one whom the nation abhorred*; they treated him as the worst of men, and cried out, *Crucify him, crucify him*. The nation did it, the Gentiles as well as Jews, and the Jews herein worse than Gentiles; for his cross was *to the one a stumbling-block and to the other foolishness*. He was *a servant of rulers*; he was trampled upon, abused, scourged, and crucified as a slave. Pilate boasted of his power over him, ^{<490>}John 19:10. This he submitted to for our salvation.

2. He promises him his exaltation. Honour was done him even in the depth of his humiliation. Herod the king stood in awe of him, saying, *I it John the Baptist*; noblemen, rulers, centurions came and kneeled to him. But this was more fully accomplished when kings received his gospel, and submitted to his yoke, and joined in the worship of him, and called themselves the vassals of Christ. Not that Christ values the rich more than the poor (they stand upon a level with him), but it is for the honour of his kingdom among men when the great ones of the earth appear for him and do homage to him. This shall be the accomplishment of God's promise, and he will give him the heathen for his inheritance, and *therefore* it shall be done, *because of the Lord who is faithful* and true to his promise; and this shall be an evidence that Christ had a commission for what he did, and that God had chosen him, and would own the choice he had made.

II. The blessings he has in store for all those to whom he is made salvation.

1. God will own and stand by him in his undertaking (v. 8): *In an acceptable time have I heard thee*, that is, I will hear thee. Christ, *in the days of his flesh, offered up strong cries, and was heard*, ^{<507>}Hebrews 5:7. He knew that the *Father heard him always* (^{<494>}John 11:42), heard him for himself (for, though the cup might not pass from him, yet he was enabled to drink it), heard him for all that are his, and therefore he interceded for them as one having authority. *Father, I will*, ^{<474>}John 17:24. All our happiness results from the Son's interest in the Father and the prevalency of his intercession, that he always heard him; and this makes the gospel time an acceptable time, welcome to us, because we are accepted of God, both reconciled and recommended to him, that God hears the Redeemer for us, ^{<505>}Hebrews 7:25. Nor will he hear him only, but help him to go through with his undertaking. The Father was always with him at his right hand, and did not leave him when his disciples did. Violent attacks were made upon our Lord Jesus by the powers of darkness, when it was their

hour, to drive him off from his undertakings, but God promises to preserve him and enable him to persevere in it; on that *one stone were seven eyes*, ~~388~~ Zechariah 3:9. God would preserve him, would preserve his interest, his kingdom among men, though fought against on all sides. Christ is preserved while Christianity is.

2. God will authorize him to apply to his church the benefits of the redemption he is to work out. God's preserving and helping him was to make the day of his gospel a day of salvation. And so the apostle understands it: *Behold, now is the day of salvation*, now the word of reconciliation by Christ is preached, ~~400~~ 2 Corinthians 6:2.

(1.) He shall be guarantee of the treaty of peace between God and man: I will *give thee for a covenant of the people*. This we had before (~~386~~ Isaiah 42:6), and it is here repeated as faithful, and well worthy of all acceptation and observation. He is given for a covenant, that is, for a pledge of all the blessings of the covenant. It was in him that God was *reconciling the world to himself*; and he that *spared not his own Son* will deny us nothing. He is given for a covenant, not only as he is the Mediator of the covenant, the blessed *days-man who has laid his hand upon us both*, but as he is all in all in the covenant. All the duty of the covenant is summed up in our being his; and all the privilege and happiness of the covenant are summed up in his being ours.

(2.) He shall repair the decays of the church and build it upon a rock. He shall *establish the earth*, or rather the *land*, the land of Judea, a type of the church. He shall *cause the desolate heritages to be inherited*; so the cities of Judah were after the return out of captivity, and so the church, which in the last and degenerate ages of the Jewish nation had been as a country laid waste, but was again replenished by the fruits of the preaching of the gospel.

(3.) He shall free the souls of men from the bondage of guilt and corruption and bring them into the glorious liberty of God's children. He shall *say to the prisoners* that were bound over to the justice of God, and bound under the power of Satan, *Go forth*, v. 9. Pardoning mercy is a release from the curse of the law, and renewing grace is a release from the dominion of sin. Both are from Christ, and are branches of the great salvation. It is he that says, *Go forth*; it is the Son that makes us free, and then we are free indeed. He saith *to those that are in darkness, Show yourselves*; “not only *see*, but *be seen*, to the glory of God and your own

comfort.” When he discharged the lepers from their confinement, he said, *Go show yourselves to the priest.* When we see the light, let our light shine.

(4.) He shall provide for the comfortable passage of those whom he sets at liberty to the place of their rest and happy settlement, v. 9-11. These verses refer to the provision made for the Jews' return out of their captivity, who were taken under the particular care of the divine Providence, as favourites of Heaven, and now so in a special manner; but they are applicable to that guidance of divine grace which all God's spiritual Israel are under, from their release out of bondage to their settlement in the heavenly Canaan.

[1.] They shall have their charges borne and shall be fed at free cost with food convenient: *They shall feed in the ways*, as sheep; for now, as formerly, *God leads Joseph like a flock.* When God pleases even highway ground shall be good ground for the sheep of his pasture to feed in. Their pastures shall be not only in the valleys, but *in all high places*, which are commonly dry and barren. Wherever God brings his people he will take care they shall want nothing that is good for them, ^{<180>}Psalm 34:10. And so well shall they be provided for that they shall not hunger nor thirst, for what they need they shall have seasonably, before their need of it comes to an extremity.

[2.] They shall be sheltered and protected from every thing that would incommode them: *Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them*, or God causes *his flock to rest at noon*, ^{<200>}Song of Solomon 1:7. No evil thing shall befall those that put themselves under a divine protection; they shall be enabled to *bear the burden and heat of the day.*

[3.] They shall be under God's gracious guidance: *He that has mercy on them*, in bringing them out of their captivity, *shall lead them*, as he did their fathers in the wilderness, by a pillar of cloud and fire. *Even by springs of water*, which will be ready to them in their march, *shall he guide them.* God will furnish them with suitable and seasonable comforts, not like the pools of rainwater in the valley of Baca, but like the water out of the rock which followed Israel. Those who are under a divine guidance, and follow that closely, while they do so, may, upon good grounds, hope for divine comforts and cordials. The world leads its followers by broken cisterns, or brooks that fail in summer; but God leads those that are his by springs of water. And those whom God guides shall find a ready road and all obstacles removed (v. 11): *I will make all my mountains a way.* He that

in times past made the sea a way, now with as much ease will make the mountains a way, though they seemed impassable. The highway, or causeway, shall be raised, to make it both the plainer and the fairer. Note, The ways in which God leads his people he himself will be the overseer of, and will take care that they be well mended and kept in repair, as of old the ways that led to the cities of refuge. The levelling of the roads from Babylon, as it was foretold (²³⁰¹Isaiah 40:2, 3), was applied to gospel work, and so may this be. Though there be difficulties in the way to heaven, which we cannot by our own strength get over, yet the grace of God shall be sufficient to help us over them and to make even the mountains a way, ²³⁰⁸Isaiah 35:8.

(5.) He shall bring them all together from all parts, that they may return in a body, that they may encourage one another and be the more taken notice of. They were dispersed into several parts of the country of Babylon, as their enemies pleased, to prevent any combination among themselves. But, when God's time shall come to bring them home together, one spirit shall animate them all, all that lie at the greatest distance from each other, and those also that had taken shelter in other countries shall meet them in the land of Judah, v. 12. Here shall a party *come from far*, some *from the north*, some *from the west*, some *from the land of Sinim*, which probably is some province of Babylon not elsewhere named in scripture, but some make it to be a country belonging to one of the chief cities of Egypt, called *Sin*, of which we read, ²³¹⁵Ezekiel 30:15, 16. Now this promise was to have a further accomplishment in the great confluence of converts to the gospel church, and its full accomplishment when God's chosen shall come from the east and from the west to sit down with the patriarchs in the kingdom of God, ⁴⁰⁸¹Matthew 8:11.

²³⁰³ISAIAH 49:13-17

ENCOURAGEMENT TO ZION

The scope of these verses is to show that the return of the people of God out of their captivity, and the eternal redemption to be wrought out by Christ (of which that was a type), would be great occasions of joy to the church and great proofs of the tender care God has of the church.

I. Nothing can furnish us with better matter for songs of praise and thanksgiving, v. 13. Let the whole creation join with us in songs of joy, for it shares with us in the benefits of the redemption, and all they can contribute to this sacred melody is little enough in return for such inestimable favours, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 96:11. Let there be joy in heaven, and let the angels of God celebrate the praises of the great Redeemer; let the earth and the mountains, particularly the great ones of the earth, *be joyful, and break forth into singing, for the earnest expectation of the creature that waits for the glorious liberty of the children of God* (^{<BIB>}Romans 8:19, 21) shall now be *abundantly answered*. God's people are the blessings and ornaments of the world, and therefore let there be universal joy, for *God has comforted his people that were in sorrow and he will have mercy upon the afflicted* because of his compassion, upon *his* afflicted because of his covenant.

II. Nothing can furnish us with more convincing arguments to prove the most tender and affectionate concern God has for his church, and her interests and comforts.

1. The troubles of the church have given some occasion to question God's care and concern for it, v. 14. *Zion, in distress, said, The Lord has forsaken me, and looks after me no more; my Lord has forgotten me, and will look after me no more.* See how deplorable the case of God's people may be sometimes, such that they may seem to be forsaken and forgotten of their God; and at such a time their temptations may be alarmingly violent. Infidels, in their presumption, say *God has forsaken the earth* (^{<BIB>}Ezekiel 8:12), and has *forgotten their sins*, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 10:11. Weak believers, in their despondency, are ready to say, "God has forsaken his church and forgotten the sorrows of his people." But we have no more reason to question his promise and grace than we have to question his providence and justice. He is as sure a rewarder as he is a revenger. Away therefore with these distrusts and jealousies, which are the bane of friendship.

2. The triumphs of the church, after her troubles, will in due time put the matter out of question.

(1.) What God will do for Zion we are told, v. 17.

[1.] Her friends, who had deserted her, shall be gathered to her, and shall contribute their utmost to her assistance and comfort: *Thy children shall*

make haste. Converts to the faith of Christ are the children of the church; they shall join themselves to her with great readiness and cheerfulness, and flock into the communion of saints, as doves to their windows. “*Thy builders shall make haste*” (so some read it), “who shall build up thy houses, thy walls, especially thy temple; they shall do it with expedition.” Church work is usually slow work; but, when God's time shall come, it shall be done suddenly.

[2.] Her enemies, who had threatened and assaulted her, shall be forced to withdraw from her: *Thy destroyers, and those who made thee waste*, who had made themselves masters of the country and ravaged it, *shall go forth of thee.* By Christ the prince of this world, the great destroyer, is cast out, is dispossessed, has his power broken and his attempts quite baffled.

(2.) Now by this it will appear that Zion's suggestions were altogether groundless, that God has not forsaken her, nor forgotten her, nor ever will. Be assured,

[1.] That God has a tender affection for his church and people, v. 15. In answer to Zion's fears, God speaks as one concerned for his own glory (he takes himself to be reflected upon if Zion say, *The Lord has forsaken me*, and he will clear himself), as one concerned also for his people's comfort; he would not have them droop, and be discouraged, and give way to any uneasy thoughts. “You think that I have forgotten you. *Can a woman forget her sucking child?*” *First*, It is not likely that she should. A woman, whose honour it is to be of the tender sex as well as the fair one, cannot but have compassion for a child, which, being both harmless and helpless, is a proper object of compassion. A mother, especially, cannot but be concerned for her own child; for it is her own, a piece of herself, and very lately one with her. A nursing mother, most of all, cannot but be tender of her sucking child; her own breasts will soon put her in mind of it if she should forget it. But, *Secondly*, It is possible that she may forget. A woman may perhaps be so unhappy as not to be able to remember her sucking child (she may be sick, and dying, and going to the land of forgetfulness), or she may be so unnatural as not to have *compassion on the son of her womb*, as those who, to conceal their shame, are the death of their children as soon as they are their life, ^{<200>}Lamentations 4:10; ^{<155>}Deuteronomy 28:57. But, says God, *I will not forget thee.* Note, God's compassions to his people infinitely exceed those of the tenderest parents

towards their children. What are the affections of nature to those of the God of nature!

[2.] That he has a constant care of his church and people (v. 16): *I have engraven thee upon the palms of my hands*. This does not allude to the foolish art of palmistry, which imagines every man's fate to be engraved in the palms of his hands and to be legible in the lines there, but to the custom of those who tie a string upon their hands or fingers to put them in mind of things which they are afraid they shall forget, or to the wearing of signet or locket-rings in remembrance of some dear friend. His setting them thus as a seal upon his arm denotes his setting them as a seal upon his heart, and his being ever mindful of them and their interests, ²¹⁸⁶ Song of Solomon 8:6. If we *bind God's law as a sign upon our hand* (²¹⁸⁸ Deuteronomy 6:8, 11, 18), he will engrave our interests as a sign on his hand, and will look upon that and remember the covenant. He adds, "*Thy walls shall be continually before me; thy ruined walls, though no pleasing spectacle, shall be in my thoughts of compassion.*" Do Zions' friends *favour her dust?* ²¹²⁴ Psalm 102:14. So does her God. Or, "The plan and model of thy walls, that are to be rebuilt, is before me, and they shall certainly be built according to it." Or, "Thy walls (that is, thy safety) are my continual care; so are the watchmen on thy walls." Some apply his engraving his church on the palms of his hands to the wounds in Christ's hands when he was crucified; he will look on the marks of them, and remember those for whom he suffered and died.

²³⁰⁸ ISAIAH 49:18-23

ENCOURAGEMENT TO ZION

Two things are here promised, which were to be in part accomplished in the reviving of the Jewish church after its return out of captivity, but more fully in the planting of the Christian church by the preaching of the gospel of Christ; and we may take the comfort of these promises.

I. That the church shall be replenished with great numbers added to it. It was promised (v. 17) that *her children should make haste*; that promise is here enlarged upon, and is made very encouraging. It is promised,

1. That multitudes shall flock to the church from all parts. *Look round, and see how they gather themselves to thee* (v. 18), by a local accession to the Jewish church. They come to Jerusalem from all the adjacent countries, for that was then the centre of their unity; but, under the gospel, it is by a spiritual accession to the mystical body of Christ in faith and love. Those that *come to Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant* do thereby *come to the Mount Zion, the church of the first-born*, ^{<302>}Hebrews 12:22, 23. *Lift up thy eyes, and behold how the fields are white unto the harvest*, ^{<405>}John 4:35. Note, It is matter of joy to the church to see a multitude of converts to Christ.
2. That such as are added to the church shall not be a burden and blemish to her, but her strength and ornament. This part of the promise is confirmed with an oath: *As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thyself with them all*. The addition of such numbers to the church shall complete her clothing; and, when all that were chosen are effectually called, then the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall have made herself ready, shall be quite dressed, ^{<607>}Revelation 19:7. They shall make her to appear comely and considerable; and she shall therefore bind them on with as much care and complacency as a bride does her ornaments. When those that are added to the church are serious, and holy, and exemplary in their conversation, they are an ornament to it.
3. That thus the country which was waste and desolate, and *without inhabitant* (^{<219>}Isaiah 5:9; 6:11), shall be again peopled, nay, it shall be over-peopled (v. 19): *“Thy waste and thy desolate places, that have long lain so, and the land of thy destruction, that land of thine which was destroyed with thee and which nobody cared for dwelling in, shall now be so full of people that there shall be no room for the inhabitants.”* Here is blessing poured out till there be not *room enough to receive it*, ^{<480>}Malachi 3:10. Not that they shall be crowded by their enemies, or straitened for room, as Abraham and Lot were, because of the Canaanite in the land. *“No, those that swallow thee up, and took possession of thy land when thy possession of it was discontinued, shall be far away. Thy people shall be numerous, and there shall be no stranger, no enemy, among them.”* Thus the *kingdom of God among men*, which had been impoverished and almost depopulated, partly by the corruptions of the Jewish church and partly by the abominations of the Gentile world, was again peopled and enriched by the setting up of the Christian church, and by its graces and glories.

4. That the new converts shall strangely increase and multiply. Jerusalem, after she has lost abundance of her children by the sword, famine, and captivity, shall have a new family growing up instead of them, children which she *shall have after she has lost the other* (v. 20), as Seth, who was *appointed another seed instead of Abel*, and Job's children, which God blessed him with instead of those that were killed in the ruins of the house. God will repair his church's losses and secure to himself a seed to serve him in it. It is promised to the Jews, after their return, that *Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets*, ^{<385>}Zechariah 8:5. The church, after it has lost the Jews, who will be cut off by their own infidelity, shall have abundance of children still, more than she had when the Jews belonged to her. See ^{<387>}Galatians 4:27. They shall be so numerous that,

(1.) The Children shall complain for want of room; they shall say (and it is a good hearing), “Our numbers increase so fast that *the place is too strait for us;*” as the sons of the prophets complained, ^{<161>}2 Kings 6:1. But, strait as the place is, still more shall desire to be admitted, and the church shall gladly admit them, and the inconvenient straitness of the place shall be no hindrance to either; for it will be found, whatever we think, that even when the *poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind*, are brought in, *yet still there is room*, room enough for those that are in and room for more, ^{<141>}Luke 14:21, 22.

(2.) The mother shall stand amazed at the increase of her family, v. 21. She shall say, *Who has begotten me these?* and, *Who has brought up these?* They come to her with all the duty, affection, and submission of children; and yet she never bore any pain for them, nor took any pains with them, but has them ready reared to her hand. This gives her a pleasing surprise, and she cannot but be astonished at it, considering what her condition had been very lately and very long. The Jewish nation had left her children; they were cut off. She had been desolate, without ark, and altar, and temple-service, those tokens of God's espousals to them; nay, she had been a captive, and continually removing to and fro, in an unsettled condition, and not likely to bring up children either for God or herself. She was left alone in obscurity (*this is Zion whom no man seeks after*), left in all the solitude and sorrow of a widowed state. How then came she to be thus replenished? See here,

[1.] That the church is not perpetually visible, but there are times when it is desolate, and left alone, and made few in number.

[2.] That yet on the other hand its desolations shall not be perpetual, nor will it be found too hard for God to repair them, and out of stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

[3.] That sometimes this is done in a very surprising way, as when a nation is born at once, ²⁴⁰⁸Isaiah 66:8.

5. That this shall be done with the help of the Gentiles, v. 22. The Jews were cast off, among whom it was expected that the church should be built up; but God will *sow it to himself in the earth*, and will thence reap a plentiful crop, ²⁴²³Hosea 2:23. Observe,

(1.) How the Gentiles shall be called in. God will *lift up his hand to them*, to invite or beckon them, having all the day stretched it out in vain to the Jews, ²⁴¹⁰Isaiah 65:2. Or it denotes the exerting of an almighty power, that of his Spirit and grace, to compel them to come in, to make them willing. And he will *set up his standard to them*, the preaching of the everlasting gospel, to which they shall gather, and under which they shall enlist themselves.

(2.) How they shall come: *They shall bring thy sons in their arms*. They shall assist the sons of Zion, which are found among them, in their return to their own country, and shall forward them with as much tenderness as ever any parent carried a child that was weak and helpless. God can raise up friends for returning Israelites even among Gentiles. *The earth helped the woman*, ²⁴²⁶Revelation 12:16. Or, “When they come themselves, they shall bring their children, and make them thy children;” compare ²⁴⁰⁴Isaiah 60:4. “Dost thou ask, *Who has begotten and brought up these?* Know that they were begotten and brought up among the Gentiles, but they are now brought into thy family.” Let all that are concerned about young converts, and young beginners in religion, learn hence to deal very tenderly and carefully with them, as Christ does with the lambs which he *gathers with his arms and carries in his bosom*.

II. That the church shall have a great and prevailing interest in the nations, v. 22, 23.

1. Some of the princes of the nations shall become patrons and protectors to the church: *King shall be thy nursing fathers*, to carry thy sons in their

arms (as Moses, ^{<04112>}Numbers 11:12); and, because women are the most proper nurses, *their queens shall be thy nursing mothers*. This promise was in part fulfilled to the Jews, after their return out of captivity. Several of the kings of Persia were very tender of their interests, countenanced and encouraged them, as Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes; Esther the queen was a nursing mother to the Jews that remained in their captivity, putting her life in her hand to snatch the child out of the flames. The Christian church, after a long captivity, was happy in some such kings and queens as Constantine and his mother Helena, and afterwards Theodosius, and others, who nursed the church with all possible care and tenderness. Whenever the sceptre of government is put into the hands of religious princes, then this promise is fulfilled. The church in this world is in an infant state, and it is in the power of princes and magistrates to do it a great deal of service; it is happy when they do so, when their power is a praise to those that do well.

2. Others of them, who stand it out against the church's interests, will be forced to yield and to repent of their opposition: *They shall bow down to thee and lick the dust*. The promise to the church of Philadelphia seems to be borrowed from this (^{<04119>}Revelation 3:9): *I will make those of the synagogue of Satan to come and worship before thy feet*. Or it may be meant of the willing subjection which kings and kingdoms shall pay to Christ the church's King, as he manifests himself in the church (^{<04211>}Psalms 72:11): *All kings shall fall down before him*. And by all this it shall be made to appear,

(1.) That God is the Lord, the sovereign Lord of all, against whom there is no standing out nor rising up.

(2.) That those who wait for him, in a dependence upon his promise and a resignation to his will, shall not be made ashamed of their hope; for the vision of peace is for an appointed time, and at the end *it shall speak and shall not lie*.

^{<04221>}ISAIAH 49:24-26

ENCOURAGEMENT TO ZION

Here is,

I. An objection started against the promise of the Jews' release out of their captivity in Babylon, suggesting that it was a thing not to be expected; for (v. 24) they were a prey in the hand of the mighty, of such as were then the greatest potentates on earth, and therefore it was not likely they should be rescued by force. Yet that was not all: they were lawful captives; by the law of God, having offended, they were justly delivered into captivity; and by the law of nations, being taken in war, they were justly detained in captivity till they should be ransomed or exchanged. Now this is spoken either,

1. By the enemies, as justifying themselves in their refusal to let them go. They plead both might and right. Proud men think all their own that they can lay their hands on and their title good if they have but the longest sword. Or,

2. By their friends, either in a way of distrust, despairing of the deliverance (“for who is able to deal with those that detain us, either by force of arms or a treaty of peace?”), or in a way of thankfulness, admiring the deliverance. “Who would have thought that ever the prey should be *taken from the mighty*? Yet it is done.” This is applicable to our redemption by Christ. As to Satan, we were a prey in the hand of the mighty, and yet delivered even from him that had the power of death, by him that had the power of life. As to the justice of God, we were lawful captives, and yet delivered by a price of inestimable value.

II. This objection answered by an express promise, and a further promise; for God's promises being all yea, and amen, they may well serve to corroborate one another.

1. Here is an express promise with a *non-obstante* — *notwithstanding* to the strength of the enemy (v. 25): “*Even the captives of the mighty*, though they are mighty, shall be taken away, and it is to no purpose for them to oppose it; *and the prey of the terrible*, though they are terrible, shall be delivered; and, as they cannot with all their strength outforce, so they cannot with all their impudence outface, the deliverance, and the counsels of God concerning it.” *The Lord saith thus*, who, having all power and all hearts in his hands is able to make his words good.

2. Here is a further promise, showing how, and in what way, God will bring about the deliverance. He will bring judgments upon the oppressors, and so will work salvation for the oppressed: “*I will contend with him that*

contends with thee, will plead thy cause against those that justify themselves in oppressing thee; whoever it be, though but a single person, that contends with thee, he shall know that it is at his peril, and thus *I will save thy children.*” The captives shall be delivered by *leading captivity captive*, that is, sending those into captivity that had held God's people captive, ⁽⁶³⁾ Revelation 13:10. Nay, they shall have blood for blood (v. 26): *“I will feed those that oppress thee with their own flesh, and they shall be drunken with their own blood.* The proud Babylonians shall become not only an easy, but an acceptable, prey to one another. God will send a dividing spirit among them, and their ruin, which was begun by a foreign invasion, shall be completed by their intestine divisions. They shall *bite and devour one another*, till they are *consumed one of another*. They shall greedily and with delight prey upon those that are their own flesh and blood.” God can make the oppressors of his church to be their own tormentors and their own destroyers. The New-Testament Babylon, having made herself drunk with the blood of the saints, shall have *blood given her to drink, for she is worthy*. See how cruel men sometimes are to themselves and to one another: indeed those who are so to others are so to themselves, for God's justice and men's revenge will mete to them what they have measured to others. They not only thirst after blood, but drink it so greedily that they are drunken with it, and with as much pleasure as if it were sweet wine. If God had not more mercy on sinners than they would have one upon another were their passions let loose, the world would be soon an *Aceldama*, nay, a desolation.

III. See what will be the effect of Babylon's ruin: *All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour.* God will make it to appear, to the conviction of all the world, that, though Israel seem lost and cast off, they have a Redeemer, and, though they are made a prey to the mighty, Jacob has a mighty One, who is able to deal with all his enemies. God intends, by the deliverances of his church, both to notify and to magnify his own name.