

CHAPTER 35

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 35

This chapter is a prediction of the glory and flourishing estate of the Gospel church, and of the blessings received by it from Christ. Its flourishing state is expressed by the fruitfulness of the desert, being made like to Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon; and by the inhabitants of it seeing the glory and excellency of Christ, (^{238U}Isaiah 35:1,2) the ministers of the word are directed and exhorted to strengthen the weak, and comfort the feeble minded, by assuring them of the coming of Christ to save them, (^{238B}Isaiah 35:3,4) when miracles, both in nature and grace, should be wrought; and great alterations should be made in the wilderness, by the power of God, (^{238E}Isaiah 35:5-7) when a way should be cast up, described; and the persons that should walk in it are pointed at; and the end it should bring them to, everlasting joy and happiness, (^{238B}Isaiah 35:8-10).

Ver. 1. *The wilderness, and the solitary place, shall be glad for them,* &c.] Either for the wild beasts, satyrs, owls, and vultures, that shall inhabit Edom or Rome, and because it shall be an habitation for them: or they shall be glad for them, the Edomites, and for the destruction of them; that is, as the Targum paraphrases it,

“they that dwell in the wilderness, in the dry land, shall rejoice;”

the church, in the wilderness, being obliged to fly there from the persecution of antichrist, and thereby become desolate as a wilderness; and so called, in allusion to the Israelites in the wilderness, (^{407B}Acts 7:38) shall now rejoice at the ruin of Rome, and the antichristian states; by which means it shall come into a more flourishing condition; (see ⁶⁶²⁴Revelation 12:14 18:20 19:1,2):

and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose; or “as the lily”, as the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions; and so the Targum,

“as the lilies:”

not Judea or Jerusalem, as the Jewish writers, become like a desert, through the devastations made in it by the king of Assyria's army; and now made glad, and become flourishing, upon the departure of it from them: rather the Gentile world, which was like a wilderness, barren and unfruitful, before the Gospel came into it; but by means of that, which brought joy with it, and was attended with fragrantcy, it diffusing the savour of the knowledge of Christ in every place, it became fruitful and flourishing, and of a sweet odour, and looked delightful, and pleasant: though it seems best to understand it of the Gentile church in the latter day, after the destruction of antichrist, when it shall be in a most desirable and comfortable situation. These words stand in connection with the preceding chapter (²³⁰Isaiah 34:1-17), and very aptly follow upon it.

Ver. 2. *It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing, &c.*] A redundancy of words, to express the very flourishing estate of the church, and the great joy there shall be on that occasion, as well as because of the destruction of their enemies, and deliverance from them:

the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it; a mountain in Judea, famous for its choice and tall cedars, which were the glory of it; signifying hereby, that the church of God, which had been in a desolate condition, should abound with choice and excellent Christians, comparable to the cedars of Lebanon. Jarchi interprets it of the sanctuary or temple; which may be so called, because built of the wood of Lebanon. This was an emblem and type of the Gospel church; and the glory of it lay not only in its outward form and building, but in those things which were in the holy places of it, especially the most holy, which were all typical of spiritual things in Gospel times; so that all the glory of the Jewish church state and temple is brought into the Gentile church, into the Christian or Gospel church state; and which will still more appear in the latter day, when the temple of God will be opened in heaven, and the ark of the testament; (see ⁶¹¹⁹Revelation 11:19):

the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; two places in the land of Judea, famous for fruitfulness and pasturage; and so denote the very great fruitfulness of the Gospel church; the word and ordinances of which are as green pastures for the sheep of Christ to feed upon, and by which they become fat and flourishing:

they shall see the glory of our Lord, [and] the excellency of our God; the Targum introduces this clause thus,

“the house of Israel, to whom these things are said, they shall see,”
&c.;

but not Israel in a literal sense is here meant, but the Gentile church, formerly in the wilderness; or, however, converted persons, be they Jews or Gentiles, in the latter day, who shall see the glory of divine power, in the destruction of their enemies; and the excellency and beauty of divine grace, in the blessings of it bestowed upon them; they shall see the glory of the Lord, which shall then be risen upon them, (~~2811~~ Isaiah 60:1,2) the Lord our God is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Lord and God; the glory and excellency of whose person and offices, and of his righteousness and salvation, is seen in the Gospel, by those whose eyes are enlightened by the Spirit of God; and will be more clearly discerned, when there will be a greater effusion of the Spirit, as a spirit, of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; and to this sight of the glory and excellency of Christ, the joy and fruitfulness of the church will be greatly owing. The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, “my people shall see”, &c.

Ver. 3. *Strengthen ye the weak hands*, &c.] These are the words of the prophet, as the Targum,

“the prophet said, strengthen the weak hands;”

or rather of God, by the prophet, to the converted Gentiles, to those who saw the glory of the Lord; particularly to the ministers of the Gospel, who have to do with weak and feeble persons, who can scarcely lift up their hands, or stand upon their legs, under a sense of sin, in a view of wrath, and immediate ruin and destruction, ready to sink and faint, because of their enemies, or through want of food; and their business is to comfort and strengthen them, by preaching the Gospel, and pointing out the promises of it to them:

and confirm the feeble knees; that so they may keep their ground against their enemies; shake off their fears and trembling; go on their way courageously and rejoicing; run, and not be weary; walk, and not faint: “hands” and “knees” are mentioned particularly, because a man’s strength lies greatly in them; and his weakness is seen by the languor and trembling of them.

Ver. 4. *Say to them [that are] of a fearful heart*, &c.] Or, “hasty of heart”¹⁶⁷⁶; are at once for flying from the enemy; “hasty” in drawing black conclusions upon themselves and their state; “inconsiderate” of the

promises made unto them; ready to doubt of, and call in question, the performance of the above things, respecting the fruitful and flourishing estate of the church: wherefore it must be said to them,

Be strong, fear not; be strong in faith, fear not the enemy, nor doubt of the fulfilment of divine promises, relating to their ruin and your safety:

behold, your God will come [with] vengeance; Christ, who is God in our nature, God manifest in the flesh, and who came by the assumption of human nature; and when he first came, he came with vengeance, and took vengeance on Satan and his works; on him, and his principalities, and powers, whom he spoiled and destroyed, as well as made an end of sin and abolished death; (see ²³⁶⁰²Isaiah 61:2 63:4) so likewise he came in his kingdom and power, and took vengeance on the Jewish nation, for their disbelief and rejection of him; and which time is expressly called the days of vengeance, (⁴²¹²²Luke 21:22) and at the time of his spiritual coming he will destroy antichrist with the brightness of it, and avenge the blood of his servants, (⁶⁶⁸³¹Revelation 18:20 19:2) and at his personal coming he will take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not his Gospel, (⁵¹⁰⁰⁸2 Thessalonians 1:8) and the words are so expressed as to take in the several times of his coming: and since he has already come, and taken vengeance in some instances, this may serve to encourage, and perhaps the design of it is to encourage, the faith of God's people, with respect to his future coming, and the end and issue of it:

[even] God [with a] recompence: or, “the God of recompence”^{f677}; and so the Targum,

“the Lord of recompences;”

both to the wicked a just recompence of reward or punishment for their sins, it being just with him to recompense tribulation to them that trouble his people; and to the saints, the time of his spiritual reign being the time, as to destroy them that destroy the earth, so to give a reward to his servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear his name, (⁶¹¹⁸Revelation 11:18):

he will come and save you; the end of his first coming was to save his people from sin, the curse and condemnation of the law, from hell, wrath, ruin, and destruction; and the end of his spiritual coming, at the latter day, will be to save his people from their antichristian enemies, from idolatry, superstition, and slavery.

Ver. 5. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, &c.*] Which was literally fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, (^{<402>}Matthew 9:27 12:22 20:30) (^{<401>}John 9:1,30) and spiritually, both among Jews and Gentiles; especially the latter, under the ministry of the apostles, when those who were blind as to spiritual things had no knowledge of God in Christ; nor of the way of salvation by him; nor of the plague of their own hearts; nor of the work of the Spirit of God upon the soul; nor of the truths of the Gospel; through the power of divine grace had the eyes of their understanding opened, so as to see their sinfulness and vileness; their emptiness of all that is good, and their impotency to do anything that is spiritual; their want of righteousness; their need of Christ, and the fulness and suitableness of him as a Saviour; and to have some light into the truths of the Gospel, and a glimpse of heaven and eternal glory: and this will still have a greater accomplishment in the latter day, when the blind Jews are converted, and the fulness of the Gentiles brought in:

and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; which was literally true of some when Christ came in the flesh, (^{<411>}Matthew 11:5 ^{<407>}Mark 7:32,35) and spiritually of many who had not ears to hear in a spiritual sense; stopped what ears they had to the charming voice of the Gospel; and, though they might externally hear, did not understand it: yet these having ears given them to hear, and their ears and hearts opened by the Spirit of God, heard the Gospel spiritually, profitably, pleasantly, comfortably, and with wonder and astonishment; and a multitude of such instances there will be in the latter day glory. Jarchi interprets it of such who were blind as to the knowledge of the fear of God, and deaf to the voice of the prophets.

Ver. 6. *Then shall the lame [man] leap as an hart. &c.*] As the lame man did healed by Peter, (^{<401>}Acts 3:1,8) there were many instances of such persons cured by Christ when here on earth, (^{<405>}Matthew 15:30,31 21:14 ^{<401>}John 5:7-9) and in a spiritual sense this was verified in many who were impotent to that which is good; had neither will nor power to go to Christ for life and salvation, nor to walk by faith in him, nor to walk in his ways; who yet, by the mighty power of the Spirit and grace of God, became able and willing to go to him, and venture their souls on him; walked on in him as they had received him; and not only walked in his ways, but ran in the ways of his commandments, and leaped for joy for what they saw and heard of him, and received from him; and innumerable will be the instances of such mighty grace at the spiritual coming and reign of Christ:

and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; this had its accomplishment, in a literal sense, at the first coming of Christ, (⁴⁰⁸²Matthew 9:32,33) (⁴¹²²Matthew 12:22 15:30,31) and, in a spiritual sense, in many who before had nothing to say to God in prayer, nor in praise; nothing to say of Christ, or for him; or of the blessed Spirit, and his divine operations; but now, by divine grace, are made to speak unto God, both in a petitionary way, and in a way of thankfulness; and of Christ, and of the blessed Spirit; and of the great things each have done for them; and even to sing for joy, because of the wondrous blessings of grace they were made partakers of; and many more such there will be in the latter day, when the Spirit is poured down from on high. Kimchi interprets all this of the Israelites, who were in captivity as blind, deaf, lame, and dumb. So the Targum of this and the preceding verse (²³⁸⁵Isaiah 35:5),

“then shall the eyes of the house of Israel be opened, who were as blind men as to the law; and the ears of them that are as deaf men, to attend to the words of the prophets shall hear; then when they shall see the captives of Israel gathered to go up to their own land as the swift harts, and not tarry,” &c.;

but it may be better applied to their present state, and to their case when they shall be turned to the Lord in the latter day:

for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert; not literally, but mystically; and may be understood both of the doctrines of the Gospel breaking out in the ministry of them, in such places as were like unto the wilderness and desert, quite barren, and destitute of the knowledge, grace, and fear of God; (see ²⁹¹⁸Joel 3:18 ³⁸⁴⁸Zechariah 14:8) and of the abundance of grace, and the efficacy of it, making the word effectual to the conversion and fruitfulness of multitudes of souls, bringing along with it a vast variety of spiritual blessings; (see ⁴⁰⁷⁵John 7:37,38) to both which, the one as the means, and the other as the cause, all the above wonderful things are owing.

Ver. 7. *And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water, &c.*] Such persons who have been like the parched earth, barren and unfruitful, or like the earth scorched with the sun, filled with a sense of divine wrath, and thirsting, like the dry earth, after the grace of God, Christ, and his righteousness, shall be comforted and refreshed, and filled with the grace of God: or such who have been scorched and parched

with the heat of persecution, from the antichristian party, and have been thirsting after deliverance from it, shall now enjoy peace and prosperity:

in the habitation of dragons, where each lay; in kingdoms, cities, and towns, inhabited by men, comparable to dragons for their poison and cruelty; where the great red dragon Satan had his seat; and the Pagan emperors, and Papal powers, who have exercised the authority, power, and cruelty of the dragon, dwell; (see ^{661B}Revelation 12:3,4,9,15,17 13:11,12):

[shall be] grass, with reeds and rushes; persons shall spring up, partakers of the grace of God, who, for their number and flourishing estate, shall be like the green grass; and others, still more eminent for their gifts and usefulness, like reeds, or canes and rushes; (see ^{234B}Isaiah 44:3 ^{660B}Revelation 9:4).

Ver. 8. *And an highway shall be there, and a way, &c.*] Not two ways, but one; the way shall be a highway, a way cast up, raised, and “elevated”^{f678}; this is to be understood principally of Christ, the only way of life and salvation; and of the lesser paths of duty and ordinances: and the meaning is, that in those desert places, where Christ and his Gospel had not been preached, at least for many ages, here he should be made known, as the way, the truth, and the life; his Gospel preached, and his ordinances administered; and multitudes, both of Jews and Gentiles, should be directed and enabled to walk here. Christ is a highway to both; a way cast up by sovereign grace, which is raised above the mire and dirt of sin, and carries over it, and from it; a way visible and manifest, clearly pointed to and described in the everlasting Gospel; it is the King’s highway, the highway of the King of kings, which he has ordered and appointed, and is common to all his subjects, high and low, rich and poor, stronger or weaker believers, all may walk in this way; it is an old beaten path, which saints in all ages, from the beginning of the world, have walked in; it is the good old way, the more excellent, the most excellent one; all obstructions and impediments are removed, cast in by sin, Satan, the law, and the world; nor is anyone to be stopped and molested in this way, and all in it shall come safe to their journey’s end:

and it shall be called The way of holiness; or, “a holy way”^{f679}; Christ is perfectly holy in nature and life, and the holiness of both is imputed to those that are in this way; all in this way are sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God; this way leads to perfect holiness in heaven, and none but holy persons walk here: salvation by Christ no ways discourages the

practice of holiness, but is the greatest motive and incentive to it. Christ leads his people in paths of righteousness; in the paths of truth, of ordinances, and of worship, public and private, all which are holy; and in the path of Gospel conversation and godliness: this way is so holy, that

the unclean shall not pass over it; all men are unclean by nature; some are cleansed by the grace of God and blood of Christ; and though, as sanctified, they are not free from sin and the pollution of it, yet, as justified, they are “the undefiled in the way”; and none but such can pass over, or pass through this way to heaven, (⁶¹⁷Revelation 21:27):

but it [shall be] for those; for holy men, not for the unclean; for Israel only, as Kimchi, for such who are Israelites indeed; for those who are before mentioned, (²³⁵Isaiah 35:5,6) as Jarchi; it is for those to walk in who have been blind, but now see, and these are led in a way that they knew not before; for the deaf, who now hear the voice behind them, saying, this is the way; for the lame man, that leaps like a hart, to walk and run in; for the dumb, now made to sing, and go on in it rejoicing; it is for the redeemed to walk in, as in the following verse. This clause may be rendered, “and he shall be with them”^{f680}; that is, God shall be with them; they shall have his company and gracious presence in the way; he will be with them, to guide and direct them, to supply all their wants, and furnish them with everything convenient for them; to support and strengthen them, on whom they may lean and stay themselves; to guard and protect them from all their enemies; and being with them they shall not miss their way, or fail of coming to the end. Hence it follows,

the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein; or travellers; such the saints are, they are strangers, pilgrims, and sojourners here; they have no continuance here; they are like wayfaring men, that abide but for a night; they are bound for another country, a better, even a heavenly one, and at last shall arrive thither: now these, though they have been “fools” in their unregenerate state, with respect to spiritual things; or though they may not have that sharpness of wit, and quickness of natural parts, as some men have; and though they may not have that clear and distinct knowledge of Gospel truths as others, at least of some of them, yet shall not err as to the way of salvation; and though they may err or mistake in some things, yet not in the main, not fundamentally, nor finally; the way of salvation by Christ is so plain a way, that he that has any spiritual understanding of it shall not err in it.

Ver. 9. *No lion shall be there*, &c.] That is, in the way before described; no wicked persons, comparable to lions for their savage and cruel dispositions towards the people of God; for those who have been as such, as Saul before conversion, yet when brought into this way become as tame as lambs. The Targum interprets it of tyrannical kings and princes,

“there shall not be there a king doing evil, nor an oppressive governor;”

and Jarchi applies it to Nebuchadnezzar, as in (~~2417~~ Jeremiah 4:7) and the sense may be, that when this way shall be more known on earth, in the latter day, there will be no persecutor of the church and people of God: or else Satan, the roaring lion, is here meant, who has no part nor lot in this way of salvation; and all that are in it are out of his reach; and though he may disturb in the paths of duty and ordinances, yet he can never destroy those who are in Christ the way:

nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; upon the high way; the same may be intended as before:

it shall not be found there; walking, ravaging, and destroying:

but the redeemed shall walk there; without fear, as Kimchi adds, since no lion, or any beast of prey, shall be found upon it: the “redeemed” are the redeemed of the Lord, and by him, and are peculiarly his, being bought with his precious blood, redeemed from among men, and unto God, and from sin, the law, its curse, and condemnation; these “shall walk” in the way of life and salvation by Christ, in consequence of their being redeemed; which supposes life, strength, and wisdom, which are given them, and a proficiency or going forward: they “shall” walk here; though they have been blind, their eyes shall be opened to see this way; and, though weak, they shall have strength to walk in it; and, though foolish, they shall have wisdom to guide their feet with discretion; and, though they may stumble and fall, they shall rise again, and shall keep on walking to the end.

Ver. 10. *And the ransomed of the Lord shall return*, &c.] The same with the “redeemed” in (~~2389~~ Isaiah 35:9) these shall return, or be converted, as the Vulgate Latin version; they are in the same state and condition with other men by nature, but, by virtue of their being ransomed by Christ, they are by the grace of God turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God; they are returned from the paths in which they had been

straying to Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, in order to walk in his ways,

and come to Zion with songs; being called by grace, and converted, they turn their backs on the world, and the men of it, and ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherwards, even to the church of God; and they find their way, being directed and brought there by the Lord himself; where they come readily and willingly, not only to hear the Gospel, but to submit to all ordinances, and become members of a Gospel church; (see ⁵⁸²⁰Hebrews 12:20) and hither they “come with songs”, for electing, redeeming, calling, justifying, and pardoning grace; everyone of which blessings requires a song, and with which they are now affected, seeing their interest in them, and cannot forbear speaking of them to the glory of divine grace:

and everlasting joy upon their heads; seen in their countenances, and by the lifting up of their heads; and which oil of gladness, is poured upon them, and diffused all over them, like the ointment on Aaron’s head: and this is “everlasting”: not as to the exercise of it, which is often interrupted by sin, temptation, and desertion; but as to the ground and foundation of it, the everlasting love of God, the everlasting covenant of his grace, and the everlasting righteousness and salvation by Christ; and, as to the principle and habit of it, which can never be lost, nor any man take it away:

they shall obtain joy and gladness; by having the presence of God, and communion with him; through his love being shed abroad in their hearts; by being favoured with views of Christ, and interest in him, and with the gracious influences of the blessed Spirit:

and sorrow and sighing shall flee away; which before attended them, through convictions of sin, but now removed by the discoveries and applications of pardoning grace and mercy; or what was occasioned by want of the divine Presence, now enjoyed; being come to Zion, they are made joyful in the house of prayer, and are satisfied with the marrow and fatness of Gospel ordinances, and continually hear the joyful sound of the Gospel itself: all this may be applied to the state of the saints in heaven; for the highway before described not only leads to Zion the church below, but to the Zion above, to the heavenly glory; and all the redeemed, all that walk in this way, shall come thither; at death their souls “return” to God that gave them, and are in immediate happiness with Christ; and in the resurrection shall return from their dusty beds, and shall appear before God in Zion above; and “with songs” to Father, Son, and Spirit, for what each

have done for them, in election, redemption, and conversion; and for persevering grace, and for being safely brought over Jordan's river, and from the grave; (see ^{f654}1 Corinthians 15:54-57), they shall then enter into joy, which will never end; there will be nothing to interrupt it to all eternity; it will be "everlasting joy" indeed; and this will be "upon their heads", visible and manifest, and be upon them as a crown of life, righteousness, and glory, that shall never fade away; they shall then "obtain joy and gladness", in all the fulness thereof, their joy in the Lord will be complete; which these several words and phrases used are expressive of; and then there will be no more "sorrow and sighing"; for there will be no more sin and unbelief, or any other corruption of nature; no more darkness and desertion; no more of any of Satan's temptations; no more distresses, inward or outward; and so no more sighing within, nor sorrowing without; all tears will be wiped away. The Jews ^{f681} apply this passage to the world to come.