

ISAIAH 43

PROMISES FOR FIRE AND FLOOD

This chapter has a plain connection with the close of the foregoing chapter, but a very surprising one! It was there said that God's people would not walk in His ways; and that when He corrected them for their disobedience, they were stubborn. And now one would think that He would here declare that He would utterly abandon and destroy them. But no! His next words are, "But now, fear not, O Jacob! O Israel! I have redeemed thee, and thou art mine!" Although many among them were rebellious and incorrigible, yet God would continue His love and His care for His people. Those among them who truly belonged to the Lord would still be reserved for mercy. The expressions of His favor and goodwill to His people (which are given in the first seven verses) are very high, and speak an abundance of comfort to all the spiritual descendants of Jacob. To us are these Gospel-words preached, as well as unto the Jews who were captives in Babylon! Although Jacob and Israel were in a sinful and miserable condition, the Lord promised that they would still be looked after. He had redeemed them out of the land of Egypt; he redeemed them out of Babylonian bondage; and in His love and His pity, He has redeemed many more sons and daughters with the blood of His own dear Son. And not only has He mercifully redeemed His people, but He also promises further displays of His care and kindness. He will be present with them in their greatest difficulties and dangers (verse 2). "When thou passest through the waters and the rivers, and through the fire and the flame; I will be with thee!" says the Lord. Although His people go through fire and water and the valley of the shadow of death – yet as long as they have God with them, they need not fear any evil.

In verses 8 and 9, we are still in the midst of the vast assembly that Jehovah called in chapter 41, in which the whole world was summoned to decide whether He or some idol should henceforth be regarded as the supreme Deity. In the arena, we behold the rows of helpless images – rich in paint and tinsel, but silently waiting to be carried home by their priests. But before the assembly disperses, Jehovah must vindicate His claims; and therefore, He calls His chosen people into the witness-box, so that they may tell forth what they know, and testify as to what they have seen. The Church and the Holy Spirit together bear joint-witness to the death, resurrection, and eternal life of Christ, the Divine Man. And this is also the function of the individual believer. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord" (verse 10). There are three points upon which the believ-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Precious promises for God's people in the midst of affliction – verses 1-7
- ❖ The Lord's people are called to be witnesses for Him – verses 8-13
- ❖ They are encouraged to hope for deliverance from Babylon – verses 14-21
- ❖ They are reminded of their sins so that they might repent and find mercy – verses 22-28

er is called to give witness: the Lord's *love*, which never tires; His *purpose*, which never falters; and His *deliverance*, which never disappoints. And by the way, the witness-box where we are to give our evidence is our home, our place of employment, the public streets, and anywhere and everywhere that the Lord's cause is being travestied and misunderstood. There, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to be witnesses for our God, and to endeavor to lead others to know and believe His power, truth, and love!

The faith and hope of God's people in Babylon were brought to such a low ebb that they needed recurring declarations to assure them that they would indeed be released out of their captivity; and therefore, He graciously repeated the assurances of it very often. In verses 14-21, He spoke very expressly and encouragingly. He assured them that He would provide a way to break the power of their oppressors who held them captives. He reminded them of the great things that He had done for their forefathers when He brought them out of the land of Egypt, and He promised to do even greater things for them than He had done in the days of old. Not only would He deliver them out of Babylon, but He would also conduct them safely and comfortably to their own homeland.



Let us not fail to overlook the very great tenderness of the Lord's exhortation which He makes with His people. What did He look for and expect from them? Evidently, from what is here said in verses 22-24, He was displeased that they were not calling upon Him. Jacob, their forefather, was remarkable for keeping up acquaintance with the Lord by prayer and communion. And the Lord had never said to Jacob's praying descendants, "Seek ye my face in vain." But it seems that the children did not follow after their ancestor. They neglected to come to the mercy-seat; they grew shy of the Lord; they did not bring the tokens of love in their sacrifices and offerings. And are we not equally guilty? Have we not requited Jesus' amazing love with indifference? Alas! We have indeed. But what a verse of mercy and grace is here! "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins!" Can it be? After what the Lord had said in the preceding paragraph, one might justly expect that punishment and correction would have followed for such ingratitude. Our first father Adam broke the covenant, and we have all copied his example. We have no reason to expect pardon unless we seek it by faith in Christ alone. But truly, as the Apostle has said, "where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound!" (Rom. 5:20) Indeed, all the ways of His grace constrain every soul that becomes a rich partaker of them to cry out, with the prophet Micah, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" (Mic. 7:18-19)

Lord, we praise You for Your mercy, grace, and goodness; for You blot out our great and grievous transgressions, and You do not remember our sins! Amen.