

## **The Providence of God (10) God's Special Acts of Providence toward His Elect (part 2)**

Today we will consider God's acts of providence with respect to His people, those whom He has purposed to save from their sins. In doing so we will also show how God foretold through the Old Testament prophets the salvation that we presently enjoy in Jesus Christ. We affirm today what Peter declared in his epistle that the Old Testament is Christian scripture. He wrote:

<sup>10</sup>Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, *who prophesied of the grace that would come to you* (i.e. NT Christians), <sup>11</sup>searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup>To them it was revealed that, *not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you* through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Pet. 1:10ff)

Let us turn to the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. I would like us to read Isaiah 35, but only after we establish the historical, literary, and prophetic context of our passage.

Isaiah was an 8<sup>th</sup> century BC prophet of God to His rebellious people, Israel/Judah. He brought the Word of God to them when they were under the sentence of God's judgment for having broken their covenant relationship with their God. Isaiah declared God's judgment on both the northern kingdom of Israel, comprised of ten tribes, and upon the southern kingdom of Judah, which was the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Through Isaiah God had declared that He would destroy Israel and remove the survivors from their land. As a result of God's judgment, the Jews were dispersed throughout the world, which is known as *the diaspora*.<sup>1</sup> This came to pass in 722 BC. God also revealed His word of judgment upon Judah that He would destroy using Babylon. This judgment fell upon Judah and Jerusalem in 587 BC. But God had not purposed to extinguish Judah entirely. He purposed to preserve for Himself a remnant in Babylon, survivors of Babylon's invasion and subjugation of the land and the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple. This remnant of Jews would endure exile for a period of 70 years. God would then overthrow Babylon by the armies of Cyrus the king of Persia, which would facilitate the return of the remnant to Palestine.

These events regarding Judah were also foretold through Jeremiah, as we read in **Jeremiah 25:1-14**.

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), <sup>2</sup>which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: <sup>3</sup>"From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the LORD has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. <sup>4</sup>And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. <sup>5</sup>They said, 'Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. <sup>6</sup>Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.' <sup>7</sup>Yet you have not listened to Me," says the LORD, "that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.

<sup>8</sup>"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, <sup>9</sup>behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will

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<sup>1</sup> The *diaspora* commonly refers to the Jews who were scattered to the nations after the Assyrian invasion (8<sup>th</sup> c. BC), the Babylonian invasion (6<sup>th</sup> c. BC), and also after Rome's defeat of Jerusalem (AD 70). James 1:1, however, depicts those of the diaspora as being the elect of God scattered throughout the world, a people comprised of both elect Jews and elect Gentiles whom God has purposed to save from their sins unto Himself.

utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. <sup>10</sup>Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. <sup>11</sup>And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

<sup>12</sup>‘Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,’ says the LORD; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation. <sup>13</sup>So I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied concerning all the nations. <sup>14</sup>(For many nations and great kings shall be served by them also; and I will repay them according to their deeds and according to the works of their own hands.)’”

God preserved for Himself a remnant of Jews in Babylon through 70 years of exile. And then after 70 years, the Lord enabled this remnant to return to Palestine. There they would experience God’s great work of redemption. He would send to them His Servant, Who would redeem them from their sins and restore them to God through establishing a new covenant between God and His people<sup>2</sup>, God purposed to restore them and would cause them to become a faithful, obedient, people, who serve God in holiness and would eventually dwell with God in a new heavens and earth.

God conveyed through His prophet Isaiah, that the return of God’s remnant of Jews to experience salvation through the promised Messiah was as *a new Exodus*. In the days of Moses God had first rescued Israel from bondage from Egypt. He had established a covenant with His people Israel at Mount Sinai. God then led His people through the wilderness unto the Promised Land, the earthly Canaan. But Isaiah foretold that God would once again bring His people out of bondage and into His “land.” He would redeem them from their sins, establish them in an everlasting covenant relationship with Himself, and bring them to “Zion”, which later became an emblem for the people of God living in the city of God in new heavens and new earth. We read of this in Isaiah 65 and 66. The Lord had said:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;  
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

<sup>18</sup>But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;  
For behold, I create Jerusalem *as* a rejoicing,  
And her people a joy.

<sup>19</sup>I will rejoice in Jerusalem,  
And joy in My people;  
The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her,  
Nor the voice of crying. (Isa. 65:17-19)

We would assert that the “journey” of the remnant returning to Zion that the prophets foretold has been taking place for the past 2500 years. The people who are “returning to the Lord” are “marching to Zion”, as the old hymn of Isaac Watts celebrated:

Come, we that love the Lord,  
And let our joys be known;  
Join in a song with sweet accord,  
Join in a song with sweet accord  
And thus surround the throne,  
And thus surround the throne.

We’re marching to Zion,  
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;  
We’re marching upward to Zion,  
The beautiful city of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jeremiah 31:31ff.

Gentiles who believe on Jesus Christ have joined with the remnant of Jews, as they are all journeying together, in a life-long, actually age-long pilgrimage. He is leading us through the “wilderness” of this world. And one day each of us arrive to the “Jordan River”, which is an emblem of death, and when we pass through this river of death we enter into the blessedness of eternal life, for then we will join all of the people of God through history, enjoying the full realization of our salvation, our relationship with God and His people. This is in accordance with the teaching of **John Bunyan** in his *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Toward the end of Part One of his story, Bunyan describes his characters, Christian and Hopeful, as they came within site of the gate of the Celestial City. Here Bunyan sought to relate how Christians face and encounter death differently. Here is their encounter with death:

So I saw in my dream that they went on together, until they came in sight of the gate.

Now, I further saw, that between them and the gate was a river, but there was no bridge to go over: the river was very deep. At the sight, therefore, of this river, the Pilgrims were much stunned; but the men that went in with them said, ‘You must go through, or you cannot come at the gate.’

The Pilgrims then began to inquire if there was no other way to the gate; to which they answered, ‘Yes; but there hath not any, save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah, been permitted to tread that path since the foundation of the world, nor shall, until the last trumpet shall sound.’

The Pilgrims then, especially Christian, began to despond in their minds, and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them by which they might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the waters were all of a depth. They said, ‘No;’ yet they could not help them in that case; ‘for,’ said they, ‘you shall find it deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the place.’

They then addressed themselves to the water and, entering, Christian began to sink, and crying out to his good friend Hopeful, he said, ‘I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head; all his waves go over me. Selah.’

Then said the other, ‘Be of good cheer, my brother: I feel the bottom, and it is good.’

Then said Christian, ‘Ah, my friend, the sorrows of death hath compassed me about; I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey.’

And with that a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian, so that he could not see before him. Also here he in great measure lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his pilgrimage. But all the words that he spake still tended to discover that he had horror of mind, and heart fears that he should die in that river, and never obtain entrance in at the gate. Here also, as they that stood by perceived, he was much in the troublesome thoughts of the sins that he had committed, both since and before he began to be a pilgrim. It was also observed that he was troubled with apparitions of hobgoblins and evil spirits, for ever and anon he would intimate so much by words. Hopeful, therefore, here had much ado to keep his brother's head above water; yea, sometimes he would be quite gone down, and then, ere a while, he would rise up again half dead. Hopeful also would endeavour to comfort him, saying, ‘Brother, I see the gate, and men standing by to receive us;’ but Christian would answer, ‘It is you, it is you they wait for; you have been Hopeful ever since I knew you.’

‘And so have you,’ said he to Christian.

‘Ah, brother,’ said Christian, ‘surely if I was right he would now arise to help me; but for my sins he hath brought me into the snare, and hath left me.’

Then said Hopeful, ‘My brother, you have quite forgot the text, where it is said of the wicked, “There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men” (Psalm 73:4, 5). These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God hath forsaken you; but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind that which heretofore you have received of his goodness, and live upon him in your distresses.’

Then I saw in my dream, that Christian was as in a muse a while. To whom also Hopeful added this word, ‘Be of good cheer; Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.’ And with that Christian brake out with a loud voice, ‘Oh, I see him again; and he tells me, **“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee”** (Isaiah 43:2). Then they both took courage, and the enemy was after that as still as a stone, until they were gone over. Christian therefore presently found ground to stand upon, and so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow. Thus they got over.

Now, upon the bank of the river, on the other side, they saw the two shining men again, who there waited for them; wherefore, being come out of the river, they saluted them, saying, 'We are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those that shall be heirs of salvation.' Thus they went along towards the gate.

Now, now look how the holy pilgrims ride,  
Clouds are their Chariots, Angels are their guide;  
Who would not here for Him all hazards run,  
That thus provides for His when this world's done.

This idea of the Jordan River as an end of the Christian's pilgrimage of faith is a common one. **Fanny Crosby** wrote a hymn entitled, "Rest Over Jordan."

'Tis a blessed hope, and it cheers my soul,  
I shall rest by and by over Jordan;  
When my work is done and my crown is won,  
I shall rest, sweetly rest over Jordan.

Over Jordan, over Jordan, I shall rest  
Sweetly rest by and by;  
'Tis a precious hope, 'tis a blessed hope,  
I shall rest, sweetly rest over Jordan.

We might say a further word about the inclusion of the Gentiles who join with the Jewish remnant in this pilgrimage of faith to Zion. We spoke of this at different time in our study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In Romans 9 Paul had quoted several verses from the prophecy of Hosea. One reference was Hosea 2:23. It is recorded in Romans 9:25, "***As indeed He says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"***" The direct context is God pronouncing and foretelling through His prophet His judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. The ten tribes of Israel were essentially dispersed into the Gentile world. Whereas they had formerly been God's people, God rejected them, for they had broken their covenant relationship with God. God no longer knew them as *His* people. Through God's judgment and rejection of them, they had become as Gentiles. Therefore, when the prophet declared in Hosea 2:23, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved'", Paul could apply it as a prophecy of Gentile conversion in this present church age. **James Montgomery Boice** made the point in his exposition of this passage regarding the dispersed 10 tribes:

...they (the Jews of Israel) actually ceased to be God's people when, in fact, they were. Rather it means that they actually ceased to be God's people in a special sense. That is, they became "Gentiles" so far as their relationship to God was concerned. So it is not actually of Jews that the words "I will call them 'My people' who are not My people" are spoken but of those who have become "Gentiles" by their rejection of God. It is from these Gentiles, both ethnic Gentiles and ethnic Jews who have thus actually become "Gentiles," that the new people of God is formed.

Using other words Charles Hodge put it like this: "The ten tribes were in a heathenish state, relapsed into idolatry, and, therefore, what was said of them is, of course, applicable to others in like circumstances or of like character."

Likewise Calvin: "When the Jews were banished from the family of God, they were thereby reduced to a common level with the Gentiles. The distinction between Jew and Gentile has been removed, and the mercy of God now extends indiscriminately to all the Gentiles."<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah also included Gentiles in "the return" from the nations of the world along with the Jewish remnant. We read in **Isaiah 42:1-7** of the Gentiles' place among the people of God.

"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,

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<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Volume 3, God and History, Romans 9-11* (Baker Books, 1993), pp. 1119f.

My Elect One in whom My soul delights!  
I have put My Spirit upon Him;  
He will bring forth justice to *the Gentiles*.

<sup>2</sup>He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,  
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

<sup>3</sup>A bruised reed He will not break,  
And smoking flax He will not quench;  
He will bring forth justice for truth.

<sup>4</sup>He will not fail nor be discouraged,  
Till He has established justice in the earth;  
And *the coastlands* shall wait for His law.”

<sup>5</sup>Thus says God the LORD,  
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,  
Who gives breath to the people on it,  
And spirit to those who walk on it:

<sup>6</sup>“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,  
And will hold Your hand;  
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,  
As a light to *the Gentiles*,

<sup>7</sup>To open blind eyes,  
To bring out prisoners from the prison,  
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

The “Servant” (v. 1) is of course the Lord Jesus. This passage is quoted in Matthew’s Gospel to describe the Lord Jesus. We read in Matthew 12:15ff:

And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. <sup>16</sup>Yet He warned them not to make Him known, <sup>17</sup>that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

<sup>18</sup>“Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,  
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!  
I will put My Spirit upon Him,  
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.

<sup>19</sup>He will not quarrel nor cry out,  
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.

<sup>20</sup>A bruised reed He will not break,  
And smoking flax He will not quench,  
Till He sends forth justice to victory;

<sup>21</sup>And in His name Gentiles will trust.” (Matt. 12:15-21)

Now that we have set the historic, literary, and prophetic context of Isaiah’s prophecy and how the return of the Exiles from “Babylon” through “the wilderness” of this world, travelling to worship the Lord, and with view to returning to “Zion” the city, or rather, the people of God, let us read Isaiah 35. Here we see the people of faith travelling from the Gentile world unto the Lord and His people.

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,  
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;

<sup>2</sup>It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,  
Even with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
The excellence of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
The excellency of our God.

<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
 And make firm the feeble knees.  
<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are fearful-hearted,  
 “Be strong, do not fear!  
 Behold, your God will come with vengeance,  
 With the recompense of God;  
 He will come and save you.”

<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
 And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.  
<sup>6</sup>Then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
 And the tongue of the dumb sing.  
 For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,  
 And streams in the desert.  
<sup>7</sup>The parched ground shall become a pool,  
 And the thirsty land springs of water;  
 In the habitation of jackals, where each lay,  
 There shall be grass with reeds and rushes.  
<sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there, and a road,  
 And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.  
 The unclean shall not pass over it,  
 But it shall be for others.  
 Whoever walks the road, although a fool,  
 Shall not go astray.  
<sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there,  
 Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;  
 It shall not be found there.  
 But the redeemed shall walk there,  
<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
 And come to Zion with singing,  
 With everlasting joy on their heads.  
 They shall obtain joy and gladness,  
 And sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa.35:1-10)

Here we read of our Lord enabling His people to travel on this pilgrimage through a “wilderness” likened to Israel travelling from Egypt onto Mount Sinai and then onto the Promised Land. We who are believers in Jesus Christ are presently among this throng of believers, travelling in faith unto our heavenly Zion. It is a difficult journey, but our God helps us.

For those of you who are attentive to biblical language and imagery probably recognize both the idea and the language of Isaiah 35 in the New Testament Epistle of Hebrews. There we have confirmed everything we have said today about the Christian life being a journey of faith travelling to our heavenly Zion. We read in Hebrews 12 these words:

<sup>12</sup> Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, <sup>13</sup>and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

<sup>14</sup>Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: <sup>15</sup>looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; <sup>16</sup>lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. <sup>17</sup>For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. <sup>18</sup>For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, <sup>19</sup>and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. <sup>20</sup>(For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast

touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” <sup>21</sup>And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” <sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, <sup>23</sup>to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, <sup>24</sup>to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Heb. 12:12-24)

In this passage we see parallels with Isaiah 35. In Hebrews 12:3 we read the same words as in Isaiah 35:3.

<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
And make firm the feeble knees.

We also see that Hebrews 12 describes a “spiritual journey”, as does Isaiah 35. We read in Isaiah 35:8

<sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there, and a road,  
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.  
The unclean shall not pass over it,  
But it shall be for others.

This is not a prophecy of physical Jews returning from Babylon irrespective of their faith. Only those redeemed by the Lord travel on this Highway of Holiness. Isaiah was described this “journey” as being a spiritual highway on which only those who are living holy may travel. We read that “the unclean”, that would be ones who are still in the guilt and pollution of their sins, are not permitted to journey with the people of God. Only those regarded as “clean” before the Lord are travelling this Highway. And then we also read that the Lord will see to it that everyone on this pilgrimage of faith, who are characterized by holy living, will arrive to their destination. Isaiah 35:8 reads, “Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.” God will protect and preserve His people on their journey of faith. He will not lose one of them. Even the “fool” will arrive, for the Lord is bringing them “home.” Isaiah 35:9ff read,

“No lion shall be there,  
Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;  
It shall not be found there.  
But the redeemed shall walk there,  
<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
And come to Zion with singing,  
With everlasting joy on their heads.  
They shall obtain joy and gladness,  
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa.35:1-10)

The way that we have presented this passage is consistent with that of the older reformed commentators. Here is **Matthew Henry**’s summary of much of Isaiah 35:

As after a prediction of God's judgments upon the world (Isa. 34) follows a promise of great mercy to be had in store for his church (Isa. 35), so here after a black and dreadful scene of confusion in the foregoing chapter we have, in this, a bright and pleasant one, which, though it foretells the flourishing estate of Hezekiah’s kingdom in the latter part of his reign, yet surely looks as far beyond that as the prophecy in the foregoing chapter does beyond the destruction of the Edomites; both were typical, and it concerns us most to look at those things which they were typical of, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. When the world, which lies in wickedness, shall be laid in ruins, and the Jewish church, which persisted in infidelity, shall become a desolation, then the gospel church shall be set up and made to flourish. I. The Gentiles shall be brought into it, verses 1, 2, 7. II. The well-wishers to it, who were weak and timorous, shall be encouraged, verses 3, 4. III. Miracles shall be wrought both on the souls and on the bodies of men, verses 5, 6. IV. The gospel church shall be conducted in the way of holiness, verses 8, 9. V. It shall be brought at last

to endless joys, verse 10. Thus do we find more of Christ and heaven in this chapter than one would have expected in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup>

Now let us bring all of this into the discussion of God's providence. Last Lord's Day in our study of God's providence we sought to distinguish between *God's ordinary works of providence*, that which God does ordinarily with respect to all people indiscriminately, and *God's special works of providence*, that which God does on behalf of His elect. We sought to underscore that God deals differently with those that are within God's covenant of grace and those outside His covenant. God has a loving care and concern for those in the Covenant of Grace because they are in Jesus Christ. Even before we had come to faith in Christ, God loved us with a love that was shown in His concern for our lost condition, His desire to save us from our sin, and His purpose to do whatever was necessary to secure our salvation.

*First, even when we were lost in our sin, He had compassion upon us.* God does not have compassion on all who are in their sin. We read of God as sovereign in choosing in whom He will have compassion. Romans 9:15 reads, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Our Lord Jesus taught this on the first occasion of Him preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth.

<sup>25</sup>But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup>and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. <sup>27</sup>And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

<sup>28</sup>When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. <sup>29</sup>And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. (Luke 4:25-29)

We also read of God's compassion toward His people whom He regards in covenant relation with Himself, when we look how He was concerned for His people Israel, when they were in bondage to the Egyptians. We read in Exodus 2: these words:

<sup>23</sup>During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. *Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.* <sup>24</sup>*And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.* <sup>25</sup>*God saw the people of Israel--and God knew.* (Exod. 2:23f)

Second, when we were in our sin *there was a special providence of God protecting and preserving us from* death or perhaps from anything that would have rendered our eventual coming to faith not possible. In this regard we might speak of God's angels that He has dispatched to care for and protect His elect. Our Lord spoke concerning angels watching over children. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10). We read in Hebrews 1 that angels are protectors of the elect. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

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<sup>4</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, PDF Version, vol. 4, p. 355. In contrast to this view, *The New Scofield Study Bible* has the caption over Isaiah 35 as "Kingdom Blessings for Regathered Israel" (i.e. it is a prophecy of a future 1000 year Jewish millennium. *The MacArthur Study Bible* similarly has the caption for Isaiah 35 as "The Future Glory of Zion"; which again would indicate he saw a Jewish millennium prophesied here. He wrote of Isaiah 35:1-4, "In contrast to luxuriant Edom that is to become a desert (34:1-17), during the Messiah's reign on earthy the whole world is to become a flourishing garden and this will offer encouragement to the weak" (p. 1006). And *The Ryrie Study Bible* has the caption, "The Kingdom and Its Blessings" (35:1-10). He also has a footnote that reads, "This chapter is one of the great descriptions of the millennial kingdom, the period that follows the judgments described in chapter 34" (p. 1064). Dispensational interpreters fail or refuse to see the prophets foretelling the conditions of the Messiah's reign in this church age, even though the New Testament declared that "And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed *these days*" (Acts 3:24); i.e. the days of this church age.

Third, the Lord deals with us according to His special works of providence in bringing us to salvation. The apostle Paul alluded to this in his own conversion. In Galatians 1:15f we read:

**But *when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me***, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood...

God had intervened when it was in His timing and according to His purpose. God in His providence had Paul traveling that day on the road to Damascus, for God had determined that then and there He would bring Paul unto Himself. God had established the day of our physical birth; God had also determined the day of our spiritual birth. When that day arrived, He brought all things to coincide and coalesce resulting in Him bringing us to repentance and faith.

We may consider the parable of the Prodigal Son in respect to God's special work of providence. Now this is a parable. The Lord created the details. But we see hinted in these words the special providence of God in bringing the son to repentance. It illustrates the kinds of means that God may employ in dealing with His people. We read in Luke 15:1ff

<sup>11</sup>Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. <sup>13</sup>And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. <sup>14</sup>But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. <sup>15</sup>Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup>And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup>"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, <sup>19</sup>and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:11-19)

Our Lord described this young man going off to a "far country", where he perhaps would not have the resources available to him had he stayed near home. The son wasted his living, exhausting his resources. Upon spending all, a famine arose. He had no more resources to meet the difficulty that then came upon him. "He began to be in want." He had no other option than to go into fields and to feed swine. That itself would be humiliating. But it was only when he had lost all and had no resources at his disposal, and "no one gave him anything", and he was on his knees eating with the swine, that he finally "came to himself."

The Lord in His special providence will bring us to an end of ourselves in order to humble us, in order that we would look to Him alone for our deliverance.

**Psalm 119:67.** "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word."

**Psalm 119:71.** "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."

**Psalm 119:75.** "I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me."

And after we come to salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord continues to preserve His people through the agency of angels. God had sent His angel to rescue Lot and his daughters from the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:15). Psalm 91 speaks to God's protection of His people through angels.

<sup>9</sup>Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge,  
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,

<sup>10</sup>No evil shall befall you,  
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

<sup>11</sup>For He shall give His angels charge over you,  
To keep you in all your ways.  
<sup>12</sup>In their hands they shall bear you up,  
Lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Psa. 91:9-12)

All of these actions of our God, these special works of providence, are born of God's everlasting love for us because of our identity with, our union with Jesus Christ in the mind and heart of God. It is not because we are less sinful or more righteous than those on whom these acts of providence are not manifest, but it is solely due to the purpose and ability of God to bring to pass His purposes in our lives.

We will close with a passage that speaks of God's special works of providence for His elect as set forth by **Isaiah 46:3-13**.

“Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,  
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
***Who have been upheld by Me*** from birth,  
***Who have been carried from the womb:***  
<sup>4</sup>***Even to your old age, I am He,***  
And even to gray hairs ***I will carry you!***  
***I have made, and I will bear;***  
***Even I will carry, and will deliver you.***

<sup>8</sup>“Remember this, and show yourselves men;  
Recall to mind, O you transgressors.  
<sup>9</sup>Remember the former things of old,  
For I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like Me,  
<sup>10</sup>Declaring the end from the beginning,  
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,  
Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,  
And I will do all My pleasure,’  
<sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east,<sup>5</sup>  
The man who executes My counsel, from a far country.  
Indeed I have spoken it;  
I will also bring it to pass.  
I have purposed it;  
I will also do it.

<sup>12</sup>“Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted,  
Who are far from righteousness:  
<sup>13</sup>I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off;  
My salvation shall not linger.  
And I will place salvation in Zion,  
For Israel My glory.

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“Known to God from eternity are all His works” (Act 15:18)

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<sup>5</sup> This is a prophecy of King Cyrus, the Persian King, who would defeat Babylon and effect the release of the Jews to return to Judah and Jerusalem.