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Adam Clarke Commentary Isaiah 9

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

This chapter contains an illustrious prophecy of the Messiah. He is represented under the glorious figure of the sun, or light, rising on a benighted world, and diffusing joy and gladness wherever he sheds his beams, Isaiah 9:1-3. His conquests are astonishing and miraculous, as in the day of Midian; and the peace which they procure is to be permanent, as denoted by the burning of all the implements of war, Isaiah 9:4, Isaiah 9:5. The person and character of this great Deliverer are then set forth in the most magnificent terms which the language of mankind could furnish, Isaiah 9:6. The extent of his kingdom is declared to be universal, and the duration of it eternal, Isaiah 9:7. The prophet foretells most awful calamities which were ready to fall upon the Israelites on account of their manifold impieties, Isaiah 9:8-21.

Verse 1

Dimness "Accumulated darkness― - Either מ× x"x—x" (menuddechah), fem. to agree with וx¤xœx" (aphelah); or x•x¤xœ x"xžx x"x— (aphel hammenuddach), alluding perhaps to the palpable Egyptian darkness, Exodus 10:21.

The land of Zebulun - Zebulun, Naphtali, Manasseh, that is, the country of Galilee all round the sea of Gennesareth, were the parts that principally suffered in the first Assyrian invasion under Tiglath-pileser; see 2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chronicles 5:26. And they were the first that enjoyed the blessings of Christâ€s preaching the Gospel, and exhibiting his miraculous works among them. See Medeâ€s Works, p. 101, and 457. This, which makes the twenty-third verse of chap. 8 in the Hebrew, is the first verse in chap. 9 in our authorized version. Bishop Lowth follows the division in the Hebrew.

Verse 3

And not increased the joy "Thou hast increased their joy― - Eleven MSS. of Kennicottâ€⁻s and six of De Rossâ€⁻s, two ancient, read xœx• (Io), it, according to the Masoretical correction, instead of xœx• (Io), not. To the same purpose the Targum and Syriac.

The joy in harvest - x;x⊚xžx—x² x'x§x¦x™x" (kesimchath bakkatsir). For x'x§x¦x™x" (bakkatsir) one MS. of Kennicott†and one of De Rossi†have x§x¦x™x" (katsir), and another x"x§x¦x™x" (hakkatsir), "the harvest;― one of which seems to be the true, reading, as the noun preceding is in regimine.

Verse 5

Every battle of the warrior "The greaves of the armed warrior― - x⊚x•x•xÿ x⊙x•x•xÿ (seon soen). This word, occurring only in this place, is oaf very doubtful signification. Schindler fairly tells us that we may guess at it by the context. The Jews have explained it, by guess I believe, as signifying battle, conflict: the Vulgate renders it violenta praedatio. But it seems as if something was rather meant which was capable of becoming fuel for the fire, together with the garments mentioned in the same sentence. In Syriac the word, as a noun, signifies a shoe, or a sandal, as a learned friend suggested to me some years ago. See Luke 15:22; Acts 12:8. I take it, therefore, to mean that part of the armor which covered the legs and feet, and I would render the two words in Latin by caliga caligati. The burning of heaps of armor, gathered from the field of battle, as an offering made to the god supposed to be the giver of victory, was a custom that prevailed among some heathen nations; and the Romans used it as an emblem of peace, which perfectly well suits with the design of the prophet in this place. A medal struck by Vespasian on finishing his wars both at home and abroad represents the goddess Peace holding an olive branch in one hand, and, with a lighted torch in the other, setting fire to a heap of armor. Virgil mentions the custom: -

" - Cum primam aciem Praeneste sub ipsa
Stravi, scutorumque incendi victor acervos.―
Aen. lib. viii., ver. 561.
"Would heaven, (said he), my strength and youth recall,
Such as I was beneath Praenesteâ€s wall Then when I made the foremost foes retire
And set whole heaps of conquered shields on fire.―
Dryden.

See Addison on Medals, Series 2:18. And there are notices of some such practice among the Israelites, and other nations of the most early times. God promises to Joshua victory over the kings of Canaan. "To-morrow I will deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire,― Joshua 11:6. See also Nahum 2:13. And the psalmist employs this image to express

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complete victory, and the perfect establishment of peace: -"He maketh wars to cease, even to the end of the land: He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; And burneth the chariots in the fire.

- Psalm 46:9.

x¢x'xœx•x^a (agaloth), properly plausira, impedimenta, the baggage-wagons: which however the Septuagint and Vulgate render scuta, "shields;― and the Chaldee, "round shields,― to show the propriety of that sense of the word from the etymology; which, if admitted, makes the image the same with that used by the Romans.

Ezekiel, Ezekiel 39:8-10, in his bold manner has carried this image to a degree of amplification which I think hardly any other of the Hebrew poets would have attempted. He describes the burning of the arms of the enemy, in consequence of the complete victory to be obtained by the Israelites over Gog and Magog: -

"Behold, it is come to pass, and it is done,

Saith the Lord Jehovah.

This is the day of which I spoke:

And the inhabitants of the cities of Israel shall go forth.

And shall set on fire the armor, and the shield,

And the buckler, and the bow, and the arrows,

And the clubs and the lances;

And they shall set them on fire for seven years.

And they shall not bear wood from the field;

Neither shall they hew from the forest:

For of the armor shall they make their fires;

And they shall spoil their spoilers.

And they shall plunder their plunderers.―

R. D. Kimchi, on this verse says this refers simply to the destruction of the Assyrians. Other battles are fought man against man, and spear against spear; and the garments are rolled in blood through the wounds given and received: but this was with burning, for the angel of the Lord smote them by night, and there was neither sword nor violent commotion, nor blood; they were food for the fire, for the angel of the Lord consumed them.

Verse 6

The government shall be upon his shoulder - That is, the ensign of government; the scepter, the sword, the key, or the like, which was borne upon or hung from the shoulder. See note on Isaiah 22:22.

And his name shall be called - x•xœ x'x'x•x" (El gibbor), the prevailing or conquering God.

The everlasting Father "The Father of the everlasting age― - Or x•x'x™ x¢x" (Abi ad), the Father of eternity. The Septuagint have μεγαλÎ-Ï, βοÏ...λÎ-Ï, ΑγγελοÏ, , "the Messenger of the Great Counsel.― But instead of x•x'x™ x•x" (Abi ad), a MS. of De Rossi has x•x'x¢x−x" (Abezer), the helping Father; evidently the corruption of some Jew, who did not like such an evidence in favor of the Christian Messiah.

Prince of Peace - x©x" x©xœx•x• (sar shalom), the Prince of prosperity, the Giver of all blessings.

A MS. of the thirteenth century in Kennicottâ€s collection has a remarkable addition here. "He shall be a stumbling-block, x"xžx;x©xœx"; the government is on his shoulder.― This reading is nowhere else acknowledged, as far as I know.

Verse 7

Of the increase - In the common Hebrew Bibles, and in many MSS., this word is written with the close or final xœxžx¨x'x" x•. But in twelve of Kennicott s MSS., and twelve of De Rossi s, it is written with the open xž (mem); but here it is supposed to contain mysteries, viz., that Jerusalem shall be shut up, closed, and confined, till the days of the Messiah.

This is an illustrious prophecy of the incarnation of Christ, with an enumeration of those characters in which he stands most nearly related to mankind as their Savior; and of others by which his infinite majesty and Godhead are shown. He shall appear as a child, born of a woman, born as a Jew, under the law, but not in the way of ordinary generation. He is a Son given - the human nature, in which the fullness of the Godhead was to dwell, being produced by the creative energy of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin. See Matthew 1:20, Matthew 1:21, Matthew 1:23, Matthew 1:25, and Luke 1:35, and Isaiah 7:14, and the notes on those passages. As being God manifested in the flesh, he was wonderful in his conception, birth, preaching, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension; wonderful in his person, and wonderful in his working. He is the Counsellor that

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expounds the law; shows its origin, nature, and claims; instructs, pleads for the guilty; and ever appears in the presence of God for men. He is the mighty God; God essentially and efficiently prevailing against his enemies, and destroying ours. He is the Father of eternity; the Origin of all being, and the Cause of the existence, and particularly the Father, of the spirits of all flesh. The Prince of peace - not only the Author of peace, and the Dispenser of peace, but also he that rules by peace, whose rule tends always to perfection, and produces prosperity. Of the increase of his government - this Prince has a government, for he has all power both in heaven and in earth: and his government increases, and is daily more and more extended, and will continue till all things are put under his feet. His kingdom is ordered - every act of government regulated according to wisdom and goodness; is established so securely as not to be overthrown; and administered in judgment and justice, so as to manifest his wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and truth. Reader, such is that Jesus who came into the world to save sinners! Trust in Him!

Isaiah 9:8-10:4

This whole passage reduced to its proper and entire form, and healed of the dislocation which it suffers by the absurd division of the chapters, makes a distinct prophecy, and a just poem, remarkable for the regularity of its disposition and the elegance of its plan. It has no relation to the preceding or following prophecy; though the parts, violently torn asunder, have been, on the one side and the other, patched on to them. Those relate principally to the kingdom of Judah, this is addressed exclusively to the kingdom of Israel. The subject of it is a denunciation of vengeance awaiting their crimes. It is divided into four parts, each threatening the particular punishment of some grievous offense - of their pride, of their perseverance in their vices, of their impiety, and of their injustice. To which is added a general denunciation of a farther reserve of Divine wrath, contained in a distich, before used by the prophet on a like occasion, Isaiah 5:25, and here repeated after each part. This makes the intercalary verse of the poem; or, as we call it, the burden of the song.

"Post hoc comma (cap. Isaiah 9:4) interponitur spatium unius lineae, in Cod. 2 et 3: idemque observaturin 245. in quo nullum est spatium ad finem capitis 9.― Kennicott, Var. Lect.

"After this clause (Isaiah 9:4) is interposed the space of one line in Cod. 2 and 3. The same is likewise observed in Cod. 245, in which no space exists at the end of chap. 9.―

Verse 8

Lord "Jehovah― - For x•x"x x™ (Adonai), thirty MSS. of Kennicottâ€̃s, and many of De Rossiâ€̃s, and three editions, read x™x"x•x" (Yehovah).

Verse 9

Pride and stoutness of heart "Carry themselves haughtily― - x•x™x "x¢x• (veyadeu), "and they shall know;― so ours and the Versions in general. But what is it that they shall know? The verb stands destitute of its object; and the sense is imperfect. The Chaldee is the only one, as far as I can find, that expresses it otherwise. He renders the verb in this place by x•x•x³x"x'x"x'v (veithrabrabu), "they exalt themselves, or carry themselves haughtily; the same word by which he renders x'x'x"x• (gabehu), Isaiah 3:16. He seems, therefore, in this place to have read x•x™x"x'x"x• (vaiyigbehu), which agrees perfectly well with what follows, and clears up the difficulty. Archbishop Secker conjectured x•x™x"x'x"x• (vayedabberu), referring it to xœx•xžx" (lemor), in the next verse, which shows that he was not satisfied with the present reading. Houbigant reads x•x™x"x¢x• (vaiyereu), et pravi facti sunt, they are become wicked, which is found in a MS.; but I prefer the reading of the Chaldee, which suits much better with the context.

Houbigant approves of this reading; but it is utterly unsupported by any evidence from antiquity: it is a mere mistake of x" (resh) for x" (daleth); and I am surprised that it should be favored by Houbigant.

Verse 10

The bricks - "The eastern bricks,― says Sir John Chardin, (see Harmer‴s Observ. I., p. 176), "are only clay well moistened with water, and mixed with straw, and dried in the sun.― So that their walls are commonly no better than our mud walls; see Maundrell, p. 124. That straw was a necessary part in the composition of this sort of bricks, to make the parts of the clay adhere together, appears from Exodus 5. These bricks are properly opposed to hewn stone, so greatly superior in beauty and durableness. The sycamores, which, as Jerome on the place says, are timber of little worth, with equal propriety are opposed to the cedars. "As the grain and texture of the sycamore is remarkably coarse and spongy, it could therefore stand in no competition at all (as it is observed, Isaiah 9:10) with the cedar, for beauty and ornament.― - Shaw, Supplement to Travels, p. 96. We meet with the same opposition of cedars to sycamores, 1 Kings 10:27, where Solomon is said to have made silver as the stones, and cedars as the sycamores in the vale for abundance. By this mashal, or figurative and sententious speech, they boast that they shall easily be able to repair their present losses, suffered perhaps by the first Assyrian invasion under Tiglath-pileser; and to bring their affairs to a more flourishing condition than ever.

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Some of the bricks mentioned above lie before me. They were brought from the site of ancient Babylon. The straw is visible, kneaded with the clay; they are very hard, and evidently were dried in the sun; for they are very easily dissolved in water.

Verse 11

The adversaries of Rezin against him "The princes of Retsin against him― - For x¦x"x™ (tsarey), enemies, Houbigant, by conjecture, reads x©x"x™ (sarey), princes; which is confirmed by thirty of Kennicottâ€s and De Rossiâ€s MSS., (two ancient), one of my own, ancient; and nine more have x¦ (tsaddi), upon a rasure, and therefore had probably at first x©x"x™ (sarey). The princes of Retsin, the late ally of Israel, that is, the Syrians, expressly named in the next verse, shall now be excited against Israel.

The Septuagint in this place give us another variation; for x"x|x™xŸ (Retsin), they read x"x" x|x™x•xŸ (har tsiyon), οÏ•Ĩ¿Ï, Σιων, Mount Sion, of which this may be the sense; but Jehovah shall set up the adversaries of Mount Sion against him, (i.e., against Israel), and will strengthen his enemies together; the Syrians, the Philistines, who are called the adversaries of Mount Sion. See Simonis Lex. in voce x¡x›xš (sachach).

Verse 12

With open mouth "On every side― - x'xxœ x¤x" (bechol peh), in every corner, in every part of their country, pursuing them to the remotest extremities, and the most retired parts. So the Chaldee x'xxœ x•x²x" (bechol athar), in every place.

Verse 14

In one day - Thirteen MSS. of Kennicott and De Rossi read x'x™x•x• beyond in a day; and another has a rasure in the place of the letter x' (beth).

Verse 17

The Lord "Jehovah― - For וx"× ×™ (Adonai), a great number of MSS. read ×™x"x•x" (Yehovah).

Verse 18

For wickedness - Wickedness rageth like a fire, destroying and laying waste the nation: but it shall be its own destruction, by bringing down the fire of Godâ€s wrath, which shall burn up the briers and the thorns; that is, the wicked themselves. Briers and thorns are an image frequently applied in Scripture, when set on fire, to the rage of the wicked; violent, yet impotent, and of no long continuance. "They are extinct as the fire of thorns,― Psalm 118:12. To the wicked themselves, as useless and unprofitable, proper objects of Godâ€s wrath, to be burned up, or driven away by the wind. "As thorns cut up they shall be consumed in the fire,― Isaiah 33:12. Both these ideas seem to be joined in Psalm 58:9: -

"Before your pots shall feel the thorn,

As well the green as the dry, the tempest shall bear them away.―

The green and the dry is a proverbial expression, meaning all sorts of them, good and bad, great and small, etc. So Ezekiel: "Behold, I will kindle a fire, and it shall devour every green tree, and every dry tree,― Ezekiel 20:47. D†Herbelot quotes a Persian poet describing a pestilence under the image of a conflagration: "This was a lightning that, falling upon a forest, consumed there the green wood with the dry.― See Harmer†Sobservations, Vol. II., p. 187.

Verse 20

The flesh of his own arm "The flesh of his neighbor― - " ΤοÏ... βݕαφι¿Î½¸İ; Ï,"οÏ... αΠελφοÏ... αÎ ... αÎ ... ΆÎ; ελφοÏ... αÎ ... ΆÎ; ελφοÏ... αÎ ... ΆÎ; ελφοÏ... αΠελφοÏ... αΠελφοÏ... } Genesis 43:33. Recte ni fallor.― - Secker. I add to this excellent remark, that the Chaldee manifestly reads x¨x¢x• (reo), his neighbor, not x−x¨x¢x• (zeroo), his arm; for he renders it by x§x¨x™x′x™x″ (karibeyh), his neighbor. And Jeremiah has the very same expression: x•x•x™x© x′x©x¨ x¨x¢x™x•x·xœx• (veish besar reehu yochelu), "and every one shall eat the flesh of his neighbor,― Jeremiah 19:9. This observation, I think, gives the true reading and sense of this place: and the context strongly confirms it by explaining the general idea by particular instances, in the following verse: "Every man shall devour the flesh of his neighbor;― that is, they shall harass and destroy one another. "Manasseh shall destroy Ephraim, and Ephraim, Manasseh;― which two tribes were most closely connected both in blood and situation as brothers and neighbors; "and both of them in the midst of their own dissensions shall agree in preying upon Judah.― The common reading, "shall devour the flesh of his own arm,― in connection with what follows, seems to make either an inconsistency, or an anticlimax; whereas by this correction the following verse becomes an elegant illustration of the foregoing. - L.