

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The prophet exhorts the children of Abraham to trust in the Lord; and briefly, but beautifully, describes the great blessedness which should be the consequence, Isaiah 51:1-3. Then, turning to the Gentiles, encourages them to look for a portion in the same salvation, Isaiah 51:4, Isaiah 51:5; the everlasting duration of which is majestically described, Isaiah 51:6. And as it is everlasting, so is it sure to the righteous, notwithstanding all the machinations of their enemies, Isaiah 51:7, Isaiah 51:8. The faithful, then, with exultation and joy, lift their voices, reminding God of his wondrous works of old, which encourage them to look now for the like glorious accomplishment of these promises, Isaiah 51:9-11. In answer to this the Divinity is introduced comforting them under their trials, and telling them that the deliverer was already on his way to save and to establish them, Isaiah 51:12-16. On this the prophet turns to Jerusalem to comfort and congratulate her on so joyful a prospect. She is represented, by a bold image, as a person lying in the streets, under the intoxicating effects of the cup of the Divine wrath, without a single person from among her own people appointed to give her consolation, and trodden under the feet of her enemies; but, in the time allotted by the Divine providence, the cup of trembling shall be taken out of her hand, and put into that of her oppressors; and she shall drink it no more again for ever, Isaiah 51:17-22.

Verse 1

Ye that follow after righteousness - The people who, feeling the want of salvation, seek the Lord in order to be justified.

The rock - Abraham.

The hole of the pit - Sarah; as explained in Isaiah 51:2.

Verse 2

I called him alone - As I have made out of one a great nation; so, although ye are brought low and minished, yet I can restore you to happiness, and greatly multiply your number.

Verse 4

By people - O my nation - O ye peoples - O ye nations - For $\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}$ (ammi), my people, the Bodleian MS. and another read $\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\bullet}$ (ammim), ye peoples; and for $\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}$ (leumi), my nation, the Bodleian MS. and eight others, (two of them ancient), and four of De Rossi's, read $\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\bullet}$ (leummim), ye nations; and so the Syriac in both words. The difference is very material; for in this case the address is made not to the Jews, but to the Gentiles, as in all reason it ought to be; for this and the two following verses express the call of the Gentiles, the islands, or the distant lands on the coasts of the Mediterranean and other seas. It is also to be observed that God in no other place calls his people $\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}$ (leummi), my nation. It has been before remarked that transcribers frequently omitted the final xz (mem) of nouns plural, and supplied it, for brevity's sake, and sometimes for want of room at the end of a line, by a small stroke thus $/\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}$; which mark, being effaced or overlooked, has been the occasion of many mistakes of this kind.

A law shall proceed from me - The new law, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Kimchi says, "After the war with Gog and Magog the King Messiah will teach the people to walk in the ways of the Lord."

Verse 5

My righteousness is near - The word $\text{x}\text{i}\text{x}'\text{x}\text{z}$ (tsedek), righteousness, is used in such a great latitude of signification, for justice, truth, faithfulness, goodness, mercy, deliverance, salvation, etc., that it is not easy sometimes to give the precise meaning of it without much circumlocution; it means here the faithful completion of God's promises to deliver his people.

Verse 6

My salvation shall be for ever - Aben Ezra says, From this verse divines have learnt the immortality of the soul. Men shall perish as the earth does, because they are formed from it; but they who are filled with the salvation of God shall remain for ever. See Kimchi.

Verse 11

They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away - Nineteen MSS. and the two oldest editions have $\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}'\text{x}^{\bullet}$ (yasigu); and forty-six MSS. of Kennicott's and ten of De Rossi's, and the same two editions, and agreeably to them the Chaldee and Syriac, have $\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}\text{x}$ (venasu); and so both words

Plato had an idea something like this: "Suppose," says he, "God had given to men a medicating potion inducing fear, so that the more any one should drink of it, so much the more miserable he should find himself at every draught, and become fearful of every thing both present and future; and at last, though the most courageous of men, should be totally possessed by fear: and afterwards, having slept off the effects of it, should become himself again." De Leg. i., near the end. He pursues at large this hypothesis, applying it to his own purpose, which has no relation to the present subject. Homer places two vessels at the disposal of Jupiter, one of good, the other of evil. He gives to some a potion mixed of both; to others from the evil vessel only: these are completely miserable. Iliad 24:527-533.

Two urns by Jove's high throne have ever stood,
The source of evil one, and one of good;
From thence the cup of mortal man he fills,
Blessings to these, to those distributes ill;
To most he mingles both: the wretch decreed
To taste the bad unmixed, is cursed indeed:
Pursued by wrongs, by meagre famine driven,
He wanders outcast both of earth and heaven.

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Verse 23

Them that afflict thee - Them who oppress thee - The Septuagint, Chaldee, Syriac, and Vulgate appear to have read xz*x xTMxš (monayich), as in Isaiah 40:26. - Secker.

Which have said to thy soul, Bow down - Who say to thee, Bow down thy body - A very strong and most expressive description of the insolent pride of eastern conquerors; which, though it may seem greatly exaggerated, yet hardly exceeds the strict truth. An example has already been given of it in the note to Isaiah 49:23. I will here add one or two more. Joshua called for all the men of Israel; and said unto the captains of the men of war that went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings, Joshua 10:24. Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: As I have done, so hath God required me, Judges 1:7. The Emperor Valerianus, being through treachery taken prisoner by Sapor king of Persia, was treated by him as the basest and most abject slave: for the Persian monarch commanded the unhappy Roman to bow himself down, and offer him his back, on which he set his foot, in order to mount his chariot or horse whenever he had occasion. - Lactantius, De Mort. Persec. cap. 5. Aurel. Victor. Epitome, cap. xxxii. - L.