Adam Clarke Commentary Isaiah 4

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Introduction
The havoc occasioned by war, and those other calamities which the prophet had been describing in the preceding chapter, are represented as so terribly great that seven women should be left to one man, Isaiah 4:1. Great blessedness of the remnant that shall be accounted worthy to escape these judgments, Isaiah 4:2-4. The privileges of the Gospel set forth by allusions to the glory and pomp of the Mosaic dispensation, Isaiah 4:5, Isaiah 4:6.

Verse 1
And seven women - The division of the chapters has interrupted the prophetâ€˜s discourse, and broken it off almost in the midst of the sentence. â€œThe numbers slain in battle shall be so great, that seven women shall be left to one man.â€• The prophet has described the greatness of this distress by images and adjuncts the most expressive and forcible. The young women, contrary to their natural modesty, shall become suitors to the men: they will take hold of them, and use the most pressing importunity to be married. In spite of the natural suggestions of jealousy, they will be content with a share only of the rights of marriage in common with several others; and that on hard conditions, renouncing the legal demands of the wife on the husband, (see Exodus 21:10), and begging only the name and credit of wedlock, and to be freed from the reproach of celibacy. See Isaiah 54:4, Isaiah 54:5. Like Marcia, on a different occasion, and in other circumstances: -
Da tantum nomen inane
Connubii: liceat tumulo scripsisse, Catonis Marcia.
Lucan, 2:342.

â€œThis happened,â€• says Kimchi, â€œin the days of Ahaz, when Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judea one hundred and twenty thousand men in one day; see 2 Chronicles 18:6. The widows which were left were so numerous that the prophet said, â€¹They are multiplied beyond the sand of the sea,â€˜â€• Jeremiah 15:8.

In that day - These words are omitted in the Septuagint, and MSS.

Verse 2
The branch of the Lord â€œthe branch of Jehovahâ€• - The Messiah of Jehovah, says the Chaldee. And Kimchi says, The Messiah, the Son of David. The branch is an appropriate title of the Messiah; and the fruit of the land means the great Person to spring from the house of Judah, and is only a parallel expression signifying the same; or perhaps the blessings consequent upon the redemption procured by him. Compare Isaiah 45:8 (note), where the same great event is set forth under similar images, and see the note there.

Them that are escaped of Israel â€œthe escaped of the house of Israelâ€• - A MS. has ×‘×™×ª ×™×©×¨×•×œ (beith yisrael), the house of Israel.

Verse 3
Written among the living - That is, whose name stands in the enrolment or register of the people; or every man living, who is a citizen of Jerusalem. See Ezekiel 13:9, where, â€œthey shall not be written in the writing of the house of Israel,â€• is the same with what immediately goes before, â€œthey shall not be in the assembly of my people.â€• Compare Psalm 69:28; Psalm 87:6; Exodus 32:32. To number and register the people was agreeable to the law of Moses, and probably was always practiced; being, in sound policy, useful, and even necessary. Davidâ€˜s design of numbering the people was of another kind; it was to enroll them for his army. Michaelis Mosaisches Recht, Part iii., p. 227. See also his Dissert. de Censibus Hebraeorum.

Verse 4
The spirit of burning - Means the fire of Godâ€˜s wrath, by which he will prove and purify his people; gathering them into his furnace, in order to separate the dross from the silver, the bad from the good. The severity of Godâ€˜s judgments, the fiery trial of his servants, Ezekiel (Ezekiel 22:18-22) has set forth at large, after his manner, with great boldness of imagery and force of expression. God threatens to gather them into the midst of Jerusalem, as into the furnace; to blow the fire upon them, and to melt them. Malachi, Malachi 3:2, Malachi 3:3, treats the same subject, and represents the same event, under the like images: -
â€œBut who may abide the day of his coming?
And who shall stand when he appeareth?
For he is like the fire of the refiner,
And like the soap of the fullers.
And he shall sit refining and purifying the silver;

And he shall purify the sons of Levi;
And cleanse them like gold, and like silver;
That they may be Jehovahâ€˜s ministers,
Presenting unto him an offering in righteousness.â€•

This is an allusion to a chemist purifying metals. He first judges of the state of the ore or adulterated metal. Secondly, he kindles the proper degree of fire, and applies the requisite test; and thus separates the precious from the vile.

Verse 5
And the Lord will create - One MS., the Septuagint, and the Arabic, have ×™×‘×™×• (yabi), He shall bring: the cloud already exists; the Lord will bring it over. This is a blessed promise of the presence of God in all the assemblies of his people.

Every dwelling place â€œthe stationâ€• - The Hebrew text has, every station: but four MSS. (one ancient) omit ×›×œ (col), all; very rightly, as it should seem: for the station was Mount Zion itself, and no other. See Exodus 15:17. And the Septuagint, Arabic, and MSS., add the same word ×›×œ (col), before ×ž×§×¨×•×” (mikraeha), probably right: the word has only changed its place by mistake. ×ž×§×¨×•×™×” (mikrayeh), â€œthe place where they were gathered together in their holy assemblies,â€• says Sal ben Melech. But twenty-five of Kennicottâ€˜s MSS., and twenty-two of De Rossiâ€˜s fifty-three editions, besides the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic, have the word in the plural number.

A cloud and smoke by day - This is a manifest allusion to the pillar of a cloud and of fire which attended the Israelites in their passage out of Egypt, and to the glory that rested on the tabernacle, Exodus 13:21; Exodus 40:38. The prophet Zechariah, Zechariah 2:5, applies the same image to the same purpose: -
â€œAnd I will be unto her a wall of fire round about;
And a glory will I be in the midst of her.â€•

That is, the visible presence of God shall protect her. Which explains the conclusion of this verse of Isaiah; where the (makkaph) between ×›×œ (col), and ×›×‘×•×“ (cabod), connecting the two words in construction, which ought not to be connected, has thrown an obscurity upon the sentence, and misled most of the translators.

For upon all the glory shall be a defense - Whatever God creates, he must uphold, or it will fail, Every degree of grace brings with it a degree of power to maintain itself in the soul.

Verse 6
A tabernacle - In countries subject to violent tempests, as well as to intolerable heat, a portable tent is a necessary part of a travellerâ€˜s baggage, for defense and shelter. And to such tents the words of the text make evident allusion. They are to be met with in every part of Arabia and Egypt, and in various other places in the East.