

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

This chapter begins with a denunciation of the approaching ruin of the Israelites by Shalmaneser, whose power is compared to a tempest or flood, and his keenness to the avidity with which one plucks and swallows the grape that is soonest ripe, Isaiah 28:1-4. It then turns to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who were to continue a kingdom after the final captivity of their brethren; and gives first a favorable prognostication of their affairs under Hezekiah, Isaiah 28:5, Isaiah 28:6; but soon changes to reproofs and threatenings for their intemperance and their profaneness, Isaiah 28:7, Isaiah 28:8. They are introduced as not only scornfully rejecting, but also mocking and ridiculing, the instructions of the prophet, Isaiah 28:9, Isaiah 28:10. To this God immediately retorts in terms alluding to their own mocking, but differently applied, Isaiah 28:11-13. The prophet then addresses these scoffers, Isaiah 28:14; who considered themselves as perfectly secure from every evil, Isaiah 28:15; and assures them that there was no method under heaven but one, by which they could be saved, Isaiah 28:16; that every other vain resource should fail in the day of visitation, Isaiah 28:17, Isaiah 28:18. He then farther adds, that the judgments of God were particularly levelled against them; and that all the means to which they trusted for warding them off should be to no purpose, Isaiah 28:19, Isaiah 28:20; as the Almighty, who, on account of his patience and long-suffering, is amiably described as unacquainted with punishing, had nevertheless determined to punish them, Isaiah 28:21, Isaiah 28:22. The prophet then concludes with a beautiful parable in explanation and defense of God's dealing with his people, Isaiah 28:23-29.

Verse 1

Wo to the crown of pride - By the crown of pride, etc., Samaria is primarily understood. "Sebaste, the ancient Samaria, is situated on a long mount of an oval figure, having first a fruitful valley, and then a ring of hills running round about it;" Maundrell, p. 58. "regione horum ruderum mons est peramoenus, planitie admodum frugifera circumseptus, super quem olim Samaria urbs condita fuit;" Furer's Itinerarium, p. 93. The city, beautifully situated on the top of a round hill, and surrounded immediately with a rich valley and a circle of other hills beyond it, suggested the idea of a chaplet or wreath of flowers worn upon their heads on occasions of festivity, expressed by the proud crown and the fading flower of the drunkards. That this custom of wearing chaplets in their banquets prevailed among the Jews, as well as among the Greeks and Romans, appears from the following passage of the book of The Wisdom of Solomon: - "Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, And let no flower of the spring pass by us: Let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they are withered." The Wisdom of Song of Solomon 2:7,8.

Verse 2

Behold the Lord hath a mighty and strong one "Behold the mighty one, the exceedingly strong one" - "x̄x̄x̄x̄ x̄x̄x̄x̄" (ammit's ladonai), fortis Domino, i.e., fortissimus, a Hebraism. For "x̄x̄x̄x̄ x̄x̄x̄x̄" (ladonai), to the Lord, thirty-eight MSS. Of Dr. Kennicott's and many of De Rossi's, with some of my own, and two editions, read "x̄x̄x̄x̄x̄" (laihovah), to Jehovah.

Verse 3

The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim "The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim" - I read "x̄x̄x̄x̄x̄" (ataroth), crowns, plural, to agree with the verb "x̄x̄x̄x̄x̄" (teramasnah), "shall be trodden down."

Verse 4

The hasty fruit before the summer "The early fruit before the summer" - "No sooner doth the (boccore), (the early fig), draw near to perfection in the middle or latter end of June, than the (kermez) or summer fig begins to be formed, though it rarely ripens before August; about which time the same tree frequently throws out a third crop, or the winter fig, as we may call it. This is usually of a much longer shape and darker complexion than the (kermez), hanging and ripening upon the tree even after the leaves are shed; and, provided the winter proves mild and temperate, is gathered as a delicious morsel in the spring;" Shaw, Travels, p. 370, fol. The image was very obvious to the inhabitants of Judea and the neighboring countries, and is frequently applied by the prophets to express a desirable object; by none more elegantly than by Hosea 9:10: - "Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel; Like the first ripe fig in her prime, I saw your fathers."

Which when he that looketh upon it seeth "Which whoso seeth, he plucketh it immediately" - For "x̄x̄x̄x̄x̄" (yireh), which with "x̄x̄x̄x̄" (haroe'h) makes a miserable tautology, read, by a transposition of a letter, "x̄x̄x̄x̄x̄"

d
d x©x• x-xçx™x'' x©x• x-xçx™x''

d
d (sham) (zeeir) (sham) (zeeir)

d
d
For, - Command to command, command to command.
Line to line, line to line.
A little there, a little there.

Kimchi says x!x• (tsau), precept, is used here for xžx!x•x'' (mitsuah), command, and is used in no other place for it but here. x!x• (tsau) signifies a little precept, such as is suited to the capacity of a child; see Isaiah 28:9. xšx• (kau) signifies the line that a mason stretches out to build a layer of stones by. After one layer or course is placed, he raises the line and builds another; thus the building is by degrees regularly completed. This is the method of teaching children, giving them such information as their narrow capacities can receive; and thus the prophet dealt with the Israelites. See Kimchi in loc., and see a fine parallel passage, Hebrews 5:12-14, by which this may be well illustrated.

My old MS. Bible translates oddly: -
For sende efter sende, sende efter sende:
Abide efter abiide, abide efter abiide:
Lytyl ther, lytyl ther.

Coverdale is also singular: -
Commande that may be commanded;
Byd that maye be bydden:
Foorbyd that maye be forbydden;
Kepe backe that maye be kepte backe:
Here a litle, there a litle.

Verse 12

This is the rest â€œThis is the true restâ€• - The sense of this verse is: God had warned them by his prophets that their safety and security, their deliverance from their present calamities and from the apprehensions of still greater approaching, depended wholly on their trust in God, their faith and obedience; but they rejected this gracious warning with contempt and mockery.

Verse 15

A covenant with death - To be in covenant with, is a kind of proverbial expression to denote perfect security from evil and mischief of any sort: -
â€œFor thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field;
And the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.â€•
Job 5:23.
â€œAnd I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field. And with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground.â€•
Hosea 2:18.

That is, none of these shall hurt them. But Lucan, speaking of the Psylli, whose peculiar property it was to be unhurt by the bite of serpents, with which their country abounded, comes still nearer to the expression of Isaiah in this place: -

Gens unica terras
Incolit a saevo serpentum innoxia morsu
Marmaridae Psylli. -
Pax illis cum morte data est.
Pharsal. 9:891.
â€œOf all who scorching Africâ€™s sun endure,
None like the swarthy Psyllians are secure:
With healing gifts and privileges graced,
Well in the land of serpents were they placed:
Truce with the dreadful tyrant death they have,
And border safely on his realm the grave.â€•
Rowe.

We have made a covenant with death and with hell are we at agreement - $\text{אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (asinu chozeh), we have made a vision, we have had an interview, struck a bargain, and settled all preliminaries. So they had made a covenant with hell by diabolic sacrifice, $\text{אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (carathnu beritth). $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ We have cut the covenant sacrifice; $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ they divided it for the contracting parties to pass between the separated victim; for the victim was split exactly down the middle, so that even the spinal marrow was exactly divided through its whole length; and being set opposite to each other, the contracting parties entered, one at the head part, the other at the feet; and, meeting in the center, took the covenant oath. Thus, it is intimated, these bad people made an agreement with $\text{אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (sheol), with demons, with whom they had an interview; i.e., meeting them in the covenant sacrifice! To such a pitch had the Israelitish idolatry reached at that time!

Verse 16

Behold, I lay in Zion - See the notes on Genesis 49:32; Psalm 118:22 (note); Matthew 21:42 (note); Acts 4:11 (note); Romans 9:33 (note); Romans 10:11 (note); Ephesians 2:20 (note); 1 Peter 2:6-8 (note). Kimchi understands this of Hezekiah; but it most undoubtedly belongs to Jesus Christ alone; and his application of it to himself, even the Jews could not contest.

Verse 18

Your covenant with death shall be disannulled $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ - Your covenant with death shall be broken $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ - For $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (caphar), which seems not to belong to this place, the Chaldee reads $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (taphar), which is approved by Houbigant and Secker. See Jeremiah 33:21, where the very same phrase is used. See Prelim. Dissert. p. I.

Verse 20

For the bed is shorter - A (mashal) or proverbial saying, the meaning of which is, that they will find all means of defense and protection insufficient to secure them, and cover them from the evils coming upon them. $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (massek), Isaiah 22:8, the covering, is used for the outworks of defense, the barrier of the country; and here, in the allegorical sense, it means much the same thing. Their beds were only mattresses laid on the floor; and the coverlet a sheet, or in the winter a carpet, laid over it, in which the person wrapped himself. For $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (kehithcannes), it ought probably to be $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (mehithcannes). Houbigant, Secker.

Verse 21

As in Mount Perazim - $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (kehar); but $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (bahar), In the mount, is the reading of two of Kennicott's, one of De Rossi's, and one of my own MSS.

Verse 22

The Lord God - $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ (Adonai Jehovah). Adonai is omitted by four of Kennicott's MSS., and in the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic.

Verse 23

Give ye ear, and hear my voice $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ - Listen ye, and hear my voice $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ - The foregoing discourse, consisting of severe reproofs, and threatenings of dreadful judgments impending on the Jews for their vices, and their profane contempt of God's warnings by his messengers, the prophet concludes with an explanation and defense of God's method of dealing with his people in an elegant parable or allegory; in which he employs a variety of images, all taken from the science of agriculture. As the husbandman uses various methods in preparing his land, and adapting it to the several kinds of seeds to be sown, with a due observation of times and seasons; and when he hath gathered in his harvest, employs methods as various in separating the corn from the straw and the chaff by different instruments, according to the nature of the different sorts of grain; so God, with unerring wisdom, and with strict justice, instructs, admonishes, and corrects his people; chastises and punishes them in various ways, as the exigence of the case requires; now more moderately, now more severely; always tempering justice with mercy; in order to reclaim the wicked, to improve the good, and, finally, to separate the one from the other.

Verse 26

For his God doth instruct him - All nations have agreed in attributing agriculture, the most useful and the most necessary of all sciences, to the invention and to the suggestions of their deities. $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ The Most High hath ordained husbandry, $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ saith the son of Sirach, Sirach 7:15.

Namque Ceres fertur fruges, Liberque liquoris

Vitigeni laticem mortalibus instituisse.

Lucretius, 5:14.

$\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$ Ceres has taught mortals how to produce fruits; and Bacchus has taught them how to cultivate the vine. $\text{אֲנִי מִתְּכַוֵּן אִתְּךָ אֶת־הַמָּוֶת}$

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