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Introduction

Prophecy concerning Cyrus, the first king of the Persians. Every obstruction shall be removed out of his way, and the treasures taken from his enemies shall be immense, Isaiah 45:1-3, To whom, and on what account, Cyrus was indebted for his wonderful success, Isaiah 45:4-6. The prophet refutes the absurd opinion of the Persians, that there were two supreme beings, an evil and a good one, represented by light and darkness, here declared to be only the operation of the One true God, Isaiah 45:7; and makes a transition to the still greater work of God displayed in the dispensation of the Gospel, Isaiah 45:8. Great impiety of those who call in question the mysterious providence of God towards his children, Isaiah 45:9-12. The remaining part of this chapter, interspersed with strictures on the absurdity of idolatry and some allusions to the dark lying oracles of the heathens, may partly refer to the deliverance begun by Cyrus, but chiefly to the salvation by the Messiah, which, it is declared, shall be of universal extent and everlasting duration, Isaiah 45:13-25.

Verse 1

Loose the loins of kings - See the note on Isaiah 5:27. Xenophon gives the following list of the nations conquered by Cyrus: the Syrians, Assyrians, Arabians, Cappadocians, both the Phrygians, Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, Babylonians. He moreover reigned over the Bactrians, Indians, Cilicians, the Sacae Paphlagonians, and Idariandyni. - Cyrop., lib. 1 p. 4, Edit. Hutchinson, Quarto. All these kingdoms he acknowledges, in his decree for the restoration of the Jews, to have been given to him by Jehovah, the God of heaven. Ezra 1:2.

To open before him the two leaved gates, etc. - That I may open before him the valves; and the gates shall not be shut - The gates of Babylon within the city leading from the streets to the river, were providentially left open, when Cyrus's forces entered the city in the night through the channel of the river, in the general disorder occasioned by the great feast which was then celebrated; otherwise, says Herodotus, 1:191, the Persians would have been shut up in the bed of the river, and taken as in a net, and all destroyed. And the gates of the palace were opened imprudently by the king's orders, to inquire what was the cause of the tumult without; when the two parties under Gobrias and Gadatas rushed in, got possession of the palace, and slew the king. - Xenoph., Cyrop. 7 p. 528.

Verse 2

The crooked places - The mountains - For *hōdurim* (crooked places, a word not easily accounted for in this place, the Septuagint read *hararim*), *ἡ, ἱ, ἰ, ἴ, ἵ, ἶ*, the mountains. Two MSS. have *hadarim*, without the *vau*, which is hardly distinguishable from the reading of the Septuagint. The Divine protection that attended Cyrus, and rendered his expedition against Babylon easy and prosperous is finely expressed by God's going before him, and making the mountains level. The image is highly poetical: -
At vos, qua veniet, tumidi subsidite montes,
Et faciles curvis vallibus este viae.
Ovid, Amor. 2:16.
Let the lofty mountains fall down,
and make level paths in the crooked valleys.

The gates of brass - The valves of brass - Abydenus, apud, Euseb. Praep. Evang. 9:41, says, that the wall of Babylon had brazen gates. And Herodotus, i, 179. more particularly: - In the wall all round there are a hundred gates, all of brass; and so in like manner are the sides and the lintels. The gates likewise within the city, opening to the river from the several streets, were of brass; as were those also of the temple of Belus. - Herod. i., 180,181.

Verse 3

I will give thee the treasures of darkness - Sardes and Babylon, when taken by Cyrus, were the wealthiest cities in the world. Croesus, celebrated beyond all the kings of that age for his riches, gave up his treasures to Cyrus, with an exact account in writing of the whole, containing the particulars with which each wagon was loaded when they were carried away; and they were delivered to Cyrus at the palace of Babylon. - Xenoph. Cyrop. lib. 7 p. 503,515,540.

Pliny gives the following account of the wealth taken by Cyrus in Asia. Jam Cyrus devicta Asia, pondo 34 millia auri invenerat; praeter vasa aurea, aurumque factum, et in eo folia, ac platanum, vitemque. Qua victoria argenti quingenta millia talentorum reportavit; et craterem Semiramidis, cuius pondus quindecim talents colligebat. Talentum autem Aegyptium pondolxxx. patere 50 capere Varro tradit. - Nat. Hist. 33:15. - When Cyrus conquered Asia, he found thirty-four thousand pounds weight of gold, besides golden vessels and articles in

gold; and leaves, (folia, perhaps solia, bathing vessels, Hol.), a plane, and vine tree, (of gold.) By which victory he carried away fifteen thousand talents of silver; and the cup of Semiramis, the weight of which was fifteen talents. The Egyptian talent, according to Varro, was eighty pounds. This cup was the crater, or large vessel, out of which they filled the drinking cups at great entertainments. Evidently it could not be a drinking vessel, which, according to what Varro and Pliny say, must have weighed 1,200 pounds!

The gold and silver estimated by weight in this account, being converted into pounds sterling, amount to one hundred and twenty-six millions two hundred and twenty-four thousand pounds. - Brerewood, De Ponderibus, cap. x.

Treasures of darkness may refer to the custom of burying their jewels and money under the ground in their house floors, fearing robbers.

Verse 7

I form the light, and create darkness - It was the great principle of the Magian religion, which prevailed in Persia in the time of Cyrus, and in which probably he was educated, that there are two supreme, co-eternal, and independent causes always acting in opposition one to the other; one the author of all good, the other of all evil. The good being they called Light; the evil being, Darkness. That when Light had the ascendant, then good and happiness prevailed among men; when Darkness had the superiority, then evil and misery abounded. An opinion that contradicts the clearest evidence of our reason, which plainly leads us to the acknowledgment of one only Supreme Being, infinitely good as well as powerful. With reference to this absurd opinion, held by the person to whom this prophecy is addressed, God, by his prophet, in the most significant terms, asserts his omnipotence and absolute supremacy: -

â€œI am Jehovah, and none else;

Forming light, and creating darkness,

Making peace, and creating evil:

I Jehovah am the author of all these things.â€•

Declaring that those powers whom the Persians held to be the original authors of good and evil to mankind, representing them by light and darkness, as their proper emblems, are no other than creatures of God, the instruments which he employs in his government of the world, ordained or permitted by him in order to execute his wise and just decrees; and that there is no power, either of good or evil, independent of the one supreme God, infinite in power and in goodness.

There were, however, some among the Persians whose sentiments were more moderate as to this matter; who held the evil principle to be in some measure subordinate to the good; and that the former would at length be wholly subdued by the latter. See Hyde, De Relig. Vet. Pers. cap. xxii.

That this opinion prevailed among the Persians as early as the time of Cyrus we may, I think, infer not only from this passage of Isaiah, which has a manifest reference to it, but likewise from a passage in Xenophon's Cyropaedia, where the same doctrine is applied to the human mind. Araspes, a noble young Persian, had fallen in love with the fair captive Panthea, committed to his charge by Cyrus. After all his boasting that he was superior to the assaults of that passion, he yielded so far to it as even to threaten violence if she would not comply with his desires. Awed by the reproof of Cyrus, fearing his displeasure, and having by cool reflection recovered his reason; in his discourse with him on this subject he says: â€œO Cyrus, I have certainly two souls; all this piece of philosophy I have learned from that wicked sophist, Love. For if I had but one soul, it would not be at the same time good and evil, it would not at the same time approve of honorable and base actions; and at once desire to do, and refuse to do, the very same things. But it is plain that I am animated by two souls, and when the good soul prevails, I do what is virtuous; and when the evil one prevails, I attempt what is vicious. But now the good soul prevails, having gotten you for her assistant, and has clearly gained the superiority.â€• Lib. 6 p. 424.

I make peace, and create evil - Evil is here evidently put for war and its attendant miseries. I will procure peace for the Israelites, and destroy Babylon by war. I form light, and create darkness. Now, as darkness is only the privation of light, so the evil of war is the privation of peace.

Verse 8

Drop down, ye heavens - The eighty-fifth psalm is a very elegant ode on the same subject with this part of Isaiah's prophecies, the restoration of Judah from captivity; and is, in the most beautiful part of it, a manifest imitation of this passage of the prophet: -

â€œVerily his salvation is nigh unto them that fear him,

That glory may dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth have met together;

Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring from the earth,

Verse 14

The labor of Egypt - The wealth of Egypt - This seems to relate to the future admission of the Gentiles into the Church of God. Compare Psalm 68:32; Psalm 72:10; Psalm 60:6-9. And perhaps these particular nations may be named, by a metonymy common in all poetry, for powerful and wealthy nations in general. See note on Isaiah 60:1.

The Sabeans, men of stature - The Sabeans, tall of stature - That the Sabeans were of a more majestic appearance than common, is particularly remarked by Agatharchides, an ancient Greek historian quoted by Bochart, Phaleg, 2:26. So also the Septuagint understand it, rendering it tall men. And the same phrase, (anshey middah), is used for persons of extraordinary stature, Numbers 13:32, and 1 Chronicles 20:6.

They shall make supplication unto thee - They shall in suppliant guise address thee - The conjunction (vau) is supplied by the ancient Versions, and confirmed by fifteen MSS. of Kennicott's, (seven ancient), thirteen of De Rossi's, and six editions, (veelayich). Three MSS. (two ancient) omit the (vau) before (elaylch) at the beginning of the line.

Verse 15

Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself - At present, from the nations of the world.

O God of Israel, the Savior - While thou revealest thyself to the Israelites and savest them.

Verse 16

They shall be ashamed - They are ashamed - The reader cannot but observe the sudden transition from the solemn adoration of the secret and mysterious nature of God's counsels in regard to his people, to the spirited denunciation of the confusion of idolaters, and the final destruction of idolatry; contrasted with the salvation of Israel, not from temporal captivity, but the eternal salvation by the Messiah, strongly marked by the repetition and augmentation of the phrase, to the ages of eternity. But there is not only a sudden change in the sentiment, the change is equally observable in the construction of the sentences; which from the usual short measure, runs out at once into two distichs of the longer sort of verse. See Prelim. Dissert. p. 66, etc. There is another instance of the same kind and very like to this, of a sudden transition in regard both to the sentiment and construction in Isaiah 42:17.

His adversaries - This line, to the great diminution of the beauty of the distich, is imperfect in the present text: the subject of the proposition is not particularly expressed, as it is in the line following. The version of the Septuagint happily supplies the word that is lost: his adversaries, the original word was (tsarav). - L.

Verse 18

He formed it to be inhabited - For he formed it to be inhabited - An ancient MS. has (ki) before (lashebeth); and so the ancient Versions.

Verse 19

I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth - In opposition to the manner in which the heathen oracles gave their answers, which were generally delivered from some deep and obscure cavern. Such was the seat of the Cumean Sybil: - Excisus Euboicae latus ingens rupis in antrum. Virg. Aen. 6:42. A cave cut in the side of a huge rock.

Such was that of the famous oracle at Delphi; of which, says Strabo, lib. ix., the oracle is said to be a hollow cavern of considerable depth, with an opening not very wide. And Diodorus, giving an account of the origin of this oracle, says that there was in that place a great chasm or cleft in the earth; in which very place is now situated what is called the Adytum of the temple. Adytum means a cavern, or the hidden part of the temple.

I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right - I am Jehovah, who speak truth, who give direct answers - This also is said in opposition to the false and ambiguous answers given by the heathen

oracles, of which there are many noted examples; none more so than that of the answer given to Croesus when he marched against Cyrus, which piece of history has some connection with this part of Isaiah's prophecies. Let us hear Cicero's account of the Delphic answers in general, and of this in particular: Sed jam ad te venio, O sancte Apollo, qui umbilicum certum terrarum obsides, Unde superstitiosa primum saeva evasit vox fera.

Tuis enim oraculis Chrysippus totum volumen implevit, partim falsis, ut ego opinor; partim casu veris, ut fit in omni oratione saepissime; partim flexiloquis et obscuris, ut interpretes egeat interprete, et sors ipsa ad sortes referenda sit; partim ambiguus, et quae ad dialecticum deferenda sint. Nam cum sors illa edita est opulentissimo regi Asiae, Croesus Halym penetrans magnam pervertet opum vim: hostium vim sese perversurum putavit; pervertit autem suam. Utrum igitur eorum accidisset, verum oraculum fuisset. De Divinat. 2:56. Mountainous countries, and those which abounded in chasms, caves, and grottos, were the places in which oracles were most frequent. The horror and gloom inspired by such places were useful to the lying priests in their system of deception. The terms in which those oracles were conceived, (they were always ambiguous, or equivocal, or false, or illusory), sometimes the turn of a phrase, or a peculiarity in idiom or construction which might be turned pro or con, contained the essence of the oracular declaration. Sometimes, in the multitude of guesses, one turned out to be true; at other times, so equivocal was the oracle, that, however the thing fell out, the declaration could be interpreted in that way, as in the above to Croesus, from the oracle at Delphi, which was: If Croesus march against Cyrus, he shall overthrow a great empire: he, supposing that this promised him success, fought, and lost his own, while he expected to destroy that of his enemy. Here the quack demon took refuge in his designed ambiguity. He predicted the destruction of a great empire, but did not say which it was; and therefore he was safe, howsoever the case fell out. Not one of the predictions of God's prophets is conceived in this way.

Verse 21

Bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together - For $\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (yoatsu) or (yivvaatsu), let them consult, the Septuagint read $\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (yedau), let them know. but an ancient MS. has $\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (yoedu), let them come together by appointment; which may probably be the true reading.

Verse 22

Look unto me, and be ye saved, etc. - This verse and the following contain a plain prediction of the universal spread of the knowledge of God through Christ; and so the Targum appears to have understood it; see Romans 14:11; Philemon 2:10. The reading of the Targum is remarkable, viz., $\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}$ $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (ithpeno lemeymri), look to my Word, $\text{á}\frac{1}{2}\text{á}$ $\text{â}\text{â}\text{â}\text{â}\text{â}\text{â}$, the Lord Jesus.

Verse 23

I have sworn by myself - $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (bemeymri), by my Word: and the word - $\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}$ (pithgam), or saying, to distinguish it from the personal substantial Word (meymra), mentioned before. See the Targum.

The word is gone out of my mouth - Truth is gone forth from my mouth; the word - So the Septuagint distinguish the members of the sentence, preserving the elegance of the construction and the clearness of the sense.

Verse 24

Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength - Saying, Only to Jehovah belongeth salvation and power - A MS. omits $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (li), unto me; and instead of $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (li amar), he said or shall say unto me, the Septuagint read, in the copy which they used, $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (lemor), saying. For $\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (yabo), He shall come, in the singular, twelve MSS. three ancient) read $\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (yabeu), plural; and a letter is erased at the end of the word in two others: and so the Alexandrine copy of the Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read it. For $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (tsedakoth) plural, two MSS. read $\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}\text{x}^{\text{c}}$ (tsidkath), singular; and so the Septuagint, Syriac, and Chaldee.

Probably these are the words of Cyrus, who acknowledged that all his success came from Jehovah. And this sentiment is in effect contained in his decree or proclamation, Ezra 1:2: - Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, etc.