
ISAIAH 41: 1 "Keep silent before me, islands, and let the peoples renew their strength. Let them come near, then let them speak. Let's meet together for judgement.

The prophet, having intimated the deliverance from Babylon, and the still greater redemption couched under it, resumes the subject. He begins with the Divine vocation of Abraham, the root of the Israelitish family, and his successful exploits against the idolaters, Isa 41:1-7. He then recurs to the Babylonish captivity, and encourages the seed of Abraham, the friend of God, not to fear, as all their enemies would be ultimately subdued under them, Isa 41:8-16; and every thing furnished necessary to refresh and comfort them in their passage homewards through the desert, Isa 41:17-20. The prophet then takes occasion to celebrate the prescience of God, from his knowledge of events so very distant as instanced in the prediction concerning the messenger of glad tidings which should be given to Jerusalem to deliver her from all her enemies; and challenges the idols of the heathen to produce the like proof of their pretended divinity, Isa 41:21-27. But they are all vanity, and accursed are they that choose them, Isa 41:28, Isa 41:29.

Verse 1

Keep silence before me, O islands "Let the distant nations repair to me with new force of mind" - Εγκαινιζεσθε, Septuagint. For החרישו hacharishu, be silent, they certainly read in their copy החדישו hachadishu, be renewed; which is parallel and synonymous with יחלפו כח yechalephu coach, "recover their strength;" that is, their strength of mind, their powers of reason; that they may overcome those prejudices by which they have been so long held enslaved to idolatry. A MS. has הר har, upon a rasure. The same mistake seems to have been made in this word, Zep 3:17. For יחריש yacharish beahabatho, silebit in directions sua, as the Vulgate renders it; which seems not consistent with what immediately follows, exultabit super te in laude; the Septuagint and Syriac read יחדיש yachadish beahabatho, "he shall be renewed in his love." אלי elai, to me, is wanting in one of De Rossi's MSS. and in the Syriac.

ISAIAH 41: 2 Who has raised up one from the east? Who called him to his foot in righteousness? He hands over nations to him, and makes him rule over kings. He gives them like the dust to his sword, like the driven stubble to his bow.

Verse 2

The righteous man - The Chaldee and Vulgate seem to have read צדיק tsaddik. But Jerome, though his translation has justum, appears to have read צדק tsedek; for in his comment he expresses it by justum, sive justitiam. However, I think all interpreters understand it of a person. So the Septuagint in MS. Pachom. ἐκάλεσεν αὐτον, "he hath called him;" but the other copies have αὐτην, her. They are divided in ascertaining this person; some explain it of Abraham, others of Cyrus. I rather think that the former is meant; because the character of the righteous man, or righteousness, agrees better with Abraham than with Cyrus. Besides, immediately after the description of the success given by God to Abraham and his posterity, (who, I presume, are to be taken into the account), the idolaters are introduced as greatly alarmed at this event. Abraham was called out of the east; and his posterity were introduced into the land of Canaan, in order to destroy the idolaters of that country,

and they were established there on purpose to stand as a barrier against the idolatry then prevailing, and threatening to overrun the whole face of the earth. Cyrus, though not properly an idolater or worshipper of images, yet had nothing in his character to cause such an alarm among the idolaters, Isa 41:5-7. Farther, after having just touched upon that circumstance, the prophet with great ease returns to his former subject, and resumes Abraham and the Israelites; and assures them that as God had called them, and chosen them for this purpose, he would uphold and support them to the utmost, and at length give them victory over all the heathen nations, their enemies; Isa 41:8-16. Kimchi is of the same mind and gives the same reasons.

He gave them as the dust to his sword "Hath made them like the dust before his sword" - The image is strong and beautiful; it is often made use of by the sacred poets; see Psa 1:4; Psa 35:6; Job 21:18, and by Isaiah himself in other places, Isa 17:13; Isa 29:5. But there is great difficulty in making out the construction. The Septuagint read קשתם חרבם kashtam, charbam, their sword, their bow, understanding it of the sword and bow of the conquered kings: but this is not so agreeable to the analogy of the image, as employed in other places. The Chaldee paraphrast and Kimchi solve the difficulty by supposing an ellipsis of לפני liphney before those words. It must be owned that the ellipsis is hard and unusual: but I choose rather to submit to this, than, by adhering with Vitringa to the more obvious construction, to destroy entirely both the image and the sense. But the Vulgate by gladio ejus, to his sword, and arcui ejus, to his bow, seems to express לחרבו lecharbo, to his sword, and לקשתו lekashto, to his bow, the admission of which reading may perhaps be thought preferable to Kimchi's ellipsis.

ISAIAH 41: 3 He pursues them, and passes by safely, Even by a way that he had not gone with his feet.

Verse 3

And passed safely "He passeth in safety" - The preposition seems to have been omitted in the text by mistake; the Septuagint and Vulgate seem to have had it in their copies; εν ειρηνη, to pace, בשלום beshalom, "prosperously." It is so in one of De Rossi's MSS.

ISAIAH 41: 4 Who has worked and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last, I am he."

Verse 4

Who hath wrought and done it "Who hath performed and made these things" - A word is here lost out of the text. It is supplied by an ancient MS., אלה elleh, "these things; and by the Septuagint, ταυτα; and by the Vulgate, haec; and by the Chaldee, אֵלִין elin; all of the same meaning.

ISAIAH 41: 5 The islands have seen, and fear. The ends of the earth tremble. They approach, and come.

Verse 5

Were afraid "And they were terrified" - Three MSS. have ויחרדו vaiyecheridu, adding the conjunction I vau, which restores the second member of the sentence to its true poetical form.

ISAIAH 41: 6 Everyone helps his neighbour. They say to their brothers, "Be strong!"

ISAIAH 41: 7 So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith. He who smoothes with the hammer encourages him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, "It is good"; and he fastens it with nails, that it might not totter.

Verse 7

That it should not be moved "That it shall not move" - Five MSS., (two ancient), and the ancient Versions, add the conjunction I vau, "and, "reading ולא velo, "and not, "which seems to be right.

ISAIAH 41: 8 "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend,

ISAIAH 41: 9 You whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called from its corners, and said to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you away;'

Verse 9

And called thee from the chief men thereof "And called from the extremities thereof" - אציל מאציליה - atsil meatsileyha, signifies the arm, ascilla, ala; and is used like כנף canaph, "the wing, "for any thing extended from the extremity of another, or joined on to it. It is here parallel with and synonymous to מקצות mikkatsoth, "from the ends, "in the preceding member.

ISAIAH 41: 10 Don't you be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.

Verse 10

Be not dismayed - ואל תשתע veal tishta, "And be not dismayed. "The I vau is added by twenty-one of Dr. Kennicott's MSS., thirty of De Rossi's, and one of my own, and three editions. It makes the sense more complete.

ISAIAH 41: 11 Behold, all those who are incensed against you will be disappointed and confounded. Those who strive with you will be like nothing, and shall perish.

ISAIAH 41: 12 You will seek them, and won't find them, even those who contend with you. Those who war against you will be as nothing, as a non-existent thing.

ISAIAH 41: 13 For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Don't be afraid. I will help you.'

ISAIAH 41: 14 Don't be afraid, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel. I will help you," says the LORD, "and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

Verse 14

Fear not, thou worm Jacob - In the rabbinical commentary on the five books of Moses, Yelamedenu, it is asked, Why are the Israelites called a worm? To signify, that as the worm does not smite, that is, gnaw the cedars, but with its mouth, which is very tender, yet it nevertheless destroys the hard wood; so all the strength of the Israelites is in prayer, by which they smite the wicked of this world, though strong like the cedars, to which they are compared, Eze 31:3.

ISAIAH 41: 15 Behold, I have made you into a new sharp threshing instrument with teeth. You will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills like chaff.

Verse 15

A new sharp threshing instrument having teeth "A threshing wain; a new corn-drag armed with pointed teeth" - See note on Isa 28:27-28.

Thou shalt thresh the mountains - Mountains and hills are here used metaphorically for the kings and princes of the Gentiles. - Kimchi.

ISAIAH 41: 16 You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away, and the whirlwind will scatter them. You will rejoice in the LORD. You will glory in the Holy One of Israel.

ISAIAH 41: 17 The poor and needy seek water, and there is none. Their tongue fails for thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

ISAIAH 41: 18 I will open rivers on the bare heights, and springs in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

ISAIAH 41: 19 I will put cedar, acacia, myrtle, and oil trees in the wilderness. I will set fir trees, pine, and box trees together in the desert;

Verse 19

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar - The two preceding verses express God's mercy to them in their passage through the dry deserts, in supplying them with abundant water, when distressed with thirst, in allusion to the exodus. This verse expresses the relief afforded to them, fainting with heat in their journey through that hot country, destitute of shelter, by causing shady trees, and those of the tallest and most beautiful kinds, to spring up for their defense. The apocryphal Baruch, speaking of the return from Babylon, expresses God's protection of his people by the same image: "Even the woods and every sweet-smelling tree shall overshadow Israel by the commandment of God." 5:8.

The oil tree - This, Kimchi says, is not to be understood of the olive tree, for the olive is distinguished, Neh 8:15; but it means the pine or fir, from which pitch is extracted.

ISAIAH 41: 20 that they may see, know, consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Verse 20

And consider - The verb ישימו yasimu, without לב leb added, cannot signify to apply the heart, or to attend to a thing, as Houbigant has observed; he therefore reads ישמו yashshemu, they shall wonder. The conjecture is ingenious; but it is much more probable that the word לב leb is lost out of the text; for all the ancient versions render the phrase to the same sense, as if it were fully expressed, לב ישימו yasimu leb; and the Chaldee renders it paraphrastically, yet still retaining the very words in his paraphrase, ושוון דחלתי על לבהון vishavvun dechalti al lebehon, "that they may put my fear in their heart." See also Isa 41:22, where the same phrase is used.

ISAIAH 41: 21 Produce your cause," says the LORD. "Bring out your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob.

Verse 21

Bring forth your strong reasons "Produce these your mighty powers" - "Let your idols come forward which you consider to be so very strong." Hieron. in loc. I prefer this to all other interpretations of this place; and to Jerome's own translation of it, which he adds immediately after, Afferte, si quid forte habetis. "Bring it forward, if haply ye have any thing." The false gods are called upon to come forth and appear in person; and to give evident demonstration of their foreknowledge and power by foretelling future events, and exerting their power in doing good or evil.

ISAIAH 41: 22 "Let them announce, and declare to us what shall happen. Declare the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come.

ISAIAH 41: 23 Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and see it together.

Verse 23

That we may be dismayed, and behold it together "Then shall we be struck at once with admiration and terror" - The word ונרא venire is written imperfectly in the Hebrew text; the Masoretes supply ה he at the end; and so it is read in twenty-two MSS. and four editions; that is, ונראה venireh, and we shall see. But the true reading seems to be ונראה venira, and we shall fear, with י yod supplied, from ירא yara.

ISAIAH 41: 24 Behold, you are of nothing, and your work is of nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination.

Verse 24

Your work of naught "Your operation is less than naught" - For מאפע meepha, read מאפס meephes; so the Chaldee and Vulgate. A manifest error of the text; compare Isa 40:17. The rabbins acknowledge no such error, but say that the former word signifies the same with the latter, by a change of the two letters ו samech and פ ain. - Sal ben Melec in loc.

ISAIAH 41: 25 "I have raised up one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun, one who calls on my name; and he shall come on rulers as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay.

Verse 25

I have raised up one from the north - "That is, "says Kimchi, "the Messiah. The king of Assyria placed the ten tribes in Chalach and Chabar by the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, 2Kgs 17:6, which lands lie northerly and easterly."

He shall come upon princes "He shall trample on princes" - For יבא yabo, Le Clerc reads יבס yebes, from the Chaldee, who seems to read both words. "Forte legend. ויבס vaiyebes vel וירמס vaiyirmos: sequitur ו." "This should perhaps be read ויבס vaiyebes, or וירמס vaiyirmos: a ו samech follows." - Secker. See Nah 3:14.

ISAIAH 41: 26 Who has declared it from the beginning, that we may know? And before, that we may say, 'He is right?' Surely, there is no one who declares. Surely, there is no one who shows. Surely, there is no one who hears your words.

Verse 26

Your word - אמרתים imrnttheychem; but, instead of this, one of my most ancient MSS. has דבריכם dibreychem. The meaning is nearly the same: but in this reading this His. is singular.

ISAIAH 41: 27 I am the first to say to Zion, 'Behold, look at them;' and I will give one who brings good news to Jerusalem.

Verse 27

The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them "I first to Zion gave the word, Behold they are here" - This verse is somewhat obscure by the transposition of the parts of the sentence, and the peculiar manner in which it is divided into two parallel lines. The verb at the end of the sentence belongs to

both parts; and the phrase, Behold, they are here! is parallel to the messenger of glad tidings; and stands like it, as the accusative case to the verb. The following paraphrase will explain the form and the sense of it. "I first, by my prophets, give notice of these events, saying, Behold, they are at hand! and I give to Jerusalem a messenger of glad tidings."

ISAIAH 41: 28 When I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor who, when I ask of them, can answer a word.

Verse 28

Among them "Among the idols" - For ומאלה umeelleh, I read ומאלים umeellim, with the Septuagint, και απο των ειδωλων, "and from or among the idols. "See Exo 15:11; Isa 57:5.

R. D. Kimchi has many good observations on this chapter. Bishop Lowth follows him in applying it to Abraham, and not to Cyrus; the whole being spoken in the past tense, which is not used, or rarely, in such a case for the future. Almost the whole of the rabbins understand it of Abraham. On Kimchi's plan, the following is a paraphrase.

The righteous man - Abram, from the east - the land of his nativity, called the land of the children of the east, Gen 29:1.

Brought him to his feet - Whithersoever his feet went, he preached righteousness and truth; as it is written, "There he proclaimed in the name of Jehovah," Gen 21:31. And he called it ויקראהו vaiyikraehu - that is, צדק tsedek, righteousness, to his feet, enabled him to hold it forth wherever he went.

He called the nations - To leave their idols and worship him who made the universe. He taught them the way of righteousness, truth, and faith. Was there ever a prodigy like to this? A man who had been an idolater, rising up against all the nations of the earth, reproving their faith, and not fearing before them nor their kings! Who stirred up his heart to do this? Was it not the Lord?

Gave the nations before him - And made him rule over kings - Chedorlaomer, and the kings which were with him: whom the Lord gave as dust to his sword, and stubble to his bow.

He pursued them - He and his three hundred and eighteen servants.

He passed safely - שלום shalom for בשלום beshalom, in safety; so said, because he lost not one of his men in this expedition. See Kimchi.

ISAIAH 41: 29 Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nothing. Their molten images are wind and confusion.
