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ISAIAH 44: 1 Yet listen now, Jacob my servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen.

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This chapter, besides promises of redemption, of the effusion of the Spirit, and success of the Gospel, Isa 44:1-5, sets forth, in a very sublime manner, the supreme power and foreknowledge, and absolute eternity, of the one true God; and exposes the folly and absurdity of idolatry with admirable force and elegance, Isa 44:6-20. And to show that the knowledge of future events belongs only to Jehovah, whom all creation is again called to adore for the deliverance and reconciliation granted to his people, Isa 44:21-23, the prophet concludes with setting in a very strong point of view the absolute impotence of every thing considered great and insurmountable in the sight of men, when standing in the way of the Divine counsel; and mentions the future deliverer of the Jewish nation expressly by name, nearly two hundred years before his birth, Isa 44:24-28.

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ISAIAH 44: 2 This is what the LORD who made you, and formed you from the womb, who will help you says: "Don't be afraid, Jacob my servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

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#### Verse 2

Jesurun - Jeshurun means Israel. This name was given to that people by Moses, Deu 32:15; Deu 33:5, Deu 33:26. The most probable account of it seems to be that in which the Jewish commentators agree; namely, that it is derived from *ישר* *yashar*, and signifies upright. In the same manner, Israel, as a people, is called *משולם* *meshullam*, perfect, Isa 42:19, They were taught of God, and abundantly furnished with the means of rectitude and perfection in his service and worship. Grotius thinks that *ישרון* *yeshurun* is a diminutive of *ישראל* *yishrael*, Israel; expressing peculiar fondness and affection; *Ἰσραηλιδίων*, O little Israel.

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ISAIAH 44: 3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit on your seed, and my blessing on your offspring:

ISAIAH 44: 4 and they will spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses.

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#### Verse 4

They shall spring up as among the grass "They shall spring up as the grass among the waters" - *בבין חציר* *bebeyn chatsir*, "They shall spring up to the midst of, or rather, in among, the grass." This cannot be right: eleven MSS., and thirteen editions, have *בבין* *kebeyn*, or *כבן* *keben*. Twenty-four MSS. read it without the *י* *yod*, *בבן* *beben*, in the son of the grass; and so reads the Chaldee; *בבן* *beben*, in the son of the grass.

Twenty-four MSS. of Dr. Kennicott's, thirty-three of De Rossi's, and one of my own, with six editions, have this reading. The Syriac, *מבין* *mibbeyn*. The true reading is in all probability *בבין* *kebeyn*; and the word *מים* *mayim*, which should have followed it, is lost out of the text: but it is happily supplied by the Septuagint, *ὡς ἀνα μεσσην ὕδατος*, as among the water "In every place where there is water,

there is always grass; for water makes every thing grow in the east." Sir John Chardin's note on 1Kgs 17:5. Harmer's Observations 1:64.

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ISAIAH 44: 5 One will say, 'I am the LORD's;' and another will be called by the name of Jacob; and another will write with his hand 'to the LORD,' and honour the name of Israel."

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Verse 5

Shall call himself "Shall be called" - Passive, אִקָּרֵא יִקָּרֵא; κληθησεται, Symmachus.

Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord "This shall inscribe his hand to Jehovah" - Καὶ ἕτερος ἐπιγραψέει χεὶρι (χεῖρα, Ag., Sym.) αὐτοῦ, Του Θεου εἰμι. "And another shall write upon his hand, I belong to God." - Sept. They seem to have read here, as before, אֲנִי לַיהוָה laihovah ani, I belong to Jehovah. But the repetition of the same phrase without any variation is not elegant. However, they seem to have understood it rightly, as an allusion to the marks, which were made by punctures rendered indelible, by fire or by staining, upon the hand or some other part of the body, signifying the state or character of the person, and to whom he belonged. The slave was marked with the name of his master, the soldier, of his commander; the idolater, with the name or ensign of his god: Στιγματα ἐπιγραφομένα δια τῶν στρατευομένων ἐν ταῖς χερσίν. "Punctual inscriptions made by the soldiers on their hands." Aetius apud Turnebum Advers. Isa 24:12. Victuris in cute punctis milites scripti et matriculis inserti jurare solent. "The soldiers having indelible inscriptions on their skin, and inserted in the muster-rolls, are accustomed to make oath." Vegetius, Isa 2:6. And the Christians seem to have imitated this practice, by what Procopius says on this place of Isaiah: Το δε ΤΗ ΧΕΙΡΙ, δια το στιζειν ἰσως πολλους ἐπι καρπῶν, ἢ βραχιονῶν, ἢ του σταυρου σημειον, ἢ την Χριστου προσηγοριαν. "Because many marked their wrists, or their arms, with the sign of the cross, or with the name of Christ." See Rev 20:4; Spencer, De Leg. Hebr. lib. ii., cap. 20.

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ISAIAH 44: 6 This is what the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of Armies, says: "I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God.

ISAIAH 44: 7 Who is like me? Who will call, and will declare it, and set it in order for me, since I established the ancient people? Let them declare the things that are coming, and that will happen.

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Verse 7

Let them show unto them "Let them declare unto us" - For לָמוּ lamo, unto them, the Chaldee reads לָנוּ lanu, unto us The Septuagint read לָכֶם lachem, unto you; which is preferable to the reading of the text. But לָמוּ lamo, and לָנוּ lanu, are frequently mistaken one for the other, see Isa 10:29; Psa 80:7; Psa 64:6.

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ISAIAH 44: 8 Don't fear, neither be afraid. Haven't I declared it to you long ago, and shown it? You are my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? Indeed, there is not. I don't know any other Rock."

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## Verse 8

Fear ye not - תרהו - to tirehu never occurs. Perhaps it should be תיראו tireu, fear ye. Two MSS. read תיראו tirehu, and one of mine תהרו taharu.

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ISAIAH 44: 9 Everyone who makes an engraved image is vain. The things that they delight in will not profit. Their own witnesses don't see, nor know, that they may be disappointed.

## Verse 9

That they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god "That every one may be ashamed, that he hath formed a god" - The Bodleian MS., one of the first extant for its antiquity and authority, instead of מי mi, at the beginning of the tenth verse, has כי ki, which greatly clears up the construction of a very obscure passage. Doederlein approves of this reading. The Septuagint likewise closely connect in construction the end of Isa 44:9 with the beginning of Isa 44:10; and wholly omit the interrogative מי mi, which embarrasses the sentence: Αισχυθησονται οι πλασσοντες Θεον, και γλυφοντες παντες ανωφελη· "But they shall be confounded that make a god; and they who engrave unprofitable things;" agreeably to the reading of the MS. above mentioned.

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ISAIAH 44: 10 Who has fashioned a god, or moulds an image that is profitable for nothing?

ISAIAH 44: 11 Behold, all his fellows will be disappointed; and the workmen are mere men. Let them all be gathered together. Let them stand up. They will fear. They will be put to shame together.

## Verse 11

His fellows - חבריו chaberaiv: but עבדיו abadaiv, his servants or worshippers, is the reading of one of De Rossi's MSS., and of the Chaldee.

And the workmen, they are of men "Even the workmen themselves shall blush" - I do not know that any one has ever yet interpreted these words to any tolerably good sense: וחרשים המה מאדם vecharashim hemmah meadam. The Vulgate and our translators, have rendered them very fairly, as they are written and pointed in the text: Fabri enim sunt ex hominibus. "And the workmen they are of men." Out of which the commentators have not been able to extract any thing worthy of the prophet. I have given another explanation of the place; agreeable enough to the context, if it can be deduced from the words themselves. I presume that אדם adam, rubuit, may signify erubuit, to be red through shame, as well as from any other cause; though I cannot produce any example of it in that particular sense; and the word in the text I would point מֵאֲדָם meoddam; or if any one should object to the irregularity of the number, I would read מֵאֲדָמִים meoddamim. But I rather think that the irregularity of the construction has been the cause of the obscurity, and has given occasion to the mistaken punctuation. The singular is sometimes put for the plural. See Psa 68:31; and the participle for the future tense, see Isa 40:11. - L.

ISAIAH 44: 12 The blacksmith takes an axe, works in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with his strong arm. He is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water, and is faint.

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Verse 12

The smith with the tongs, etc. "The smith cutteth off a portion of iron" - מַעֲצָד meatstsed, Participium Pihel of עָצַד atsad, to cut; still used in that sense in the Arabic. See Simonis Lex. Hebrews The Septuagint and Syriac take the word in this form: but they render it sharpeneth the iron. See Castell. Lex. in voce.

The sacred writers are generally large and eloquent upon the subject of idolatry; they treat it with great severity, and set forth the absurdity of it in the strongest light. But this passage of Isaiah, Isa 44:12-20, far exceeds any thing that ever was written upon the subject, in force of argument, energy of expression, and elegance of composition. One or two of the apocryphal writers have attempted to imitate the prophet, but with very ill success; Wisd. 13:11-19; 15:7, etc.; Baruch 6, NAB (editor's note: some translations treat this as Letter to Jeremiah), especially the latter, who, injudiciously dilating his matter, and introducing a number of minute circumstances, has very much weakened the force and effect of his invective. On the contrary a heathen author, in the ludicrous way, has, in a line or two, given idolatry one of the severest strokes it ever received: -

Olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum,

Cum faber incertus, scamnum faceretne

Priapum, Maluit esse Deum. Deus inde ego.

Horat. Satyr, lib. 1. sat. viii. "Formerly I was the stump of a fig tree, a useless log; when the carpenter, after hesitating whether to make me a god or a stool, at last determined to make me a god. Thus I became a god!"

From the tenth to the seventeenth verse, a most beautiful strain of irony is carried on against idolatry. And we may naturally think that every idolater, who either read or heard it, must have been for ever ashamed of his own devices. - L.

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ISAIAH 44: 13 The carpenter stretches out a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes. He marks it out with compasses, and shapes it like the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to reside in a house.

ISAIAH 44: 14 He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak, and strengthens for himself one among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain nourishes it.

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Verse 14

He heweth him down "He heweth down" - For לִכְרוֹת lichroth, the Septuagint and Vulgate read כָּרַת carath or יִכְרוֹת yichroth.

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ISAIAH 44: 15 Then it will be for a man to burn; and he takes some of it, and warms himself. Yes, he burns it, and bakes bread. Yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down to it.

ISAIAH 44: 16 He burns part of it in the fire. With part of it, he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. Yes, he warms himself, and says, "Aha! I am warm. I have seen the fire."

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Verse 16

With part "And with part" - Twenty-three MSS., the Septuagint, and Vulgate add the conjunction וּvau, and ועל veal.

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ISAIAH 44: 17 The rest of it he makes into a god, even his engraved image. He bows down to it and worships, and prays to it, and says, "Deliver me; for you are my god!"

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Verse 17

He falleth down unto it - There were four forms of adoration used among the Hebrews:

1. השתחוה Hishtachavah, The prostration of the whole body.
  2. קדד Kadad, The bowing of the head.
  3. כרע Cara, The bending of the upper part of the body down to the knees.
  4. ברך Barach, Bowing the knee, or kneeling. See on Isa 49:23 (note).
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ISAIAH 44: 18 They don't know, neither do they consider: for he has shut their eyes, that they can't see; and their hearts, that they can't understand.

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Verse 18

He hath shut their eyes "Their eyes are closed up" - The Septuagint, Chaldee, and Vulyate, for נו tach, read טו tachu. See note on Isa 6:10.

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ISAIAH 44: 19 No one thinks, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned part of it in the fire. Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I bow down to a tree trunk?"

ISAIAH 44: 20 He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside; and he can't deliver his soul, nor say, "Isn't there a lie in my right hand?"

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Verse 20

He feedeth on ashes - He feedeth on that which affordeth no nourishment; a proverbial expression for using ineffectual means, and bestowing labor to no purpose. In the same sense Hosea says, "Ephraim feedeth on wind." Hos 12:1.

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ISAIAH 44: 21 Remember these things, Jacob and Israel; for you are my servant. I have formed you. You are my servant. Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.

ISAIAH 44: 22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.

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#### Verse 22

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins "I have made thy transgressions vanish away like a cloud, and thy sins like a vapor" - Longinus admired the sublimity of the sentiment, as well as the harmony of the numbers, in the following sentence of Demosthenes: Τουτο το ψηφισμα τον τοτε τη πολει τερισταντα κινδυνον παρελθειν εποιησεν ωσπερ νεφος. "This decree made the danger then hanging over the city pass away like a cloud." Probably Isaiah alludes here to the smoke rising up from the sin-offering, dispersed speedily by the wind. and rendered invisible. He who offered his sacrifice aright was as sure that the sin for which he offered it was blotted out, as that the smoke of the sacrifice was dispersed by the wind, and was no longer discernible.

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ISAIAH 44: 23 Sing, you heavens, for the LORD has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth! Break out into singing, you mountains, O forest, all of your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will glorify himself in Israel.

ISAIAH 44: 24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and he who formed you from the womb:

"I am the LORD, who makes all things; who alone stretches out the heavens; who spreads out the earth by myself;

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#### Verse 24

By myself - Thirteen MSS., six ancient, confirm the reading of the Keri, מַאֲתִי meittai.

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ISAIAH 44: 25 who frustrates the signs of the liars, and makes diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish;

ISAIAH 44: 26 who confirms the word of his servant, and performs the counsel of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, 'She will be inhabited;' and of the cities of Judah, 'They will be built,' and 'I will raise up its waste places;'

ISAIAH 44: 27 who says to the deep, 'Be dry,' and 'I will dry up your rivers;'

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## Verse 27

That saith to the deep, Be dry "Who saith to the deep, Be thou wasted" - Cyrus took Babylon by laying the bed of the Euphrates dry, and leading his army into the city by night through the empty channel of the river. This remarkable circumstance, in which the event so exactly corresponded with the prophecy, was also noted by Jeremiah, Jer 50:38; Jer 51:36. "A drought shall be upon her waters, and they shall be dried up: -

I will lay her sea dry

And I will scorch up her springs."

It is proper here to give some account of the means and method lay which the stratagem of Cyrus was effected.

The Euphrates in the middle of the summer, from the melting of the snows on the mountains of Armenia, like the Nile, overflows the country. In order to diminish the inundation, and to carry off the waters, two canals were made by Nebuchadnezzar a hundred miles above the city; the first on the eastern side called Naharmalca, or the Royal River, by which the Euphrates was let into the Tigris; the other on the western side, called Pallacopas, or Naharaga, (נהר אגם nahar agam, The river of the pool), by which the redundant waters were carried into a vast lake, forty miles square, contrived, not only to lessen the inundation, but for a reservoir, with sluices, to water the barren country on the Arabian side. Cyrus, by turning the whole river into the lake by the Pallacopas, laid the channel, where it ran through the city, almost dry; so that his army entered it, both above and below, by the bed of the river, the water not reaching above the middle of the thigh. By the great quantity-of water let into the lake, the sluices and dams were destroyed; and being never repaired afterwards, the waters spread over the whole country below, and reduced it to a morass, in which the river is lost. *Ingens modo et navigabilis, inde tenuis rivus, despectus emoritur; et nusquam manifesto exitit effluit, ut alii omnes, sed deficit.* "And thus a navigable river has been totally lost, it having no exit from this morass. No wonder then that the geographical face of this country is completely changed;" Mela Jer 3:8; Herod. 1:186, 190; Xenophon, Cyrop. vii.; Arrian vii.

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ISAIAH 44: 28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure,' even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

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## Verse 28

That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd "Who saith to Cyrus, Thou art my shepherd" - *Pastor meus es; Vulg.* The true reading seems to be רעי אתה *roi attah*; the word אתה *attah*, has probably been dropped out of the text. The same word is lost out of the text, Psa 119:57. It is supplied in the Septuagint by the word εἶ, thou art.

Saying to Jerusalem - For ולאמר *velemor*, the Septuagint and Vulgate read האומר *haomer*.

And to the temple - ולהיכל *uleheychal*, as לירושלם *lirushalayim*, before; the preposition is necessary, and the Vulgate seems to read so. - Houbigant.

That saith of Cyrus, He is, or thou art, my shepherd - Saying to Jerusalem, "Thou shalt be built;" and to the Temple, "Thy foundation shall be laid." - There is a remarkable beauty and propriety in this verse.

1. Cyrus is called God's shepherd. Shepherd was an epithet which Cyrus took to himself; and what he gave to all good kings.

2. This Cyrus should say to the temple: "Thy foundation shall be laid." Not - thou shalt be built. The fact is, only the foundation was laid in the days of Cyrus, the Ammonites having prevented the building; nor was it resumed till the second year of Darius, one of his successors. There is often a precision in the expressions of the prophets which is as honorable to truth, as it is unnoticed by careless readers.