
ISAIAH 47: 1 "Come down, and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of the Chaldeans: for you shall no more be called tender and delicate.

The destruction of Babylon is denounced by a beautiful selection of circumstances, in which her prosperous is contrasted with her adverse condition. She is represented as a tender and delicate female reduced to the work and abject condition of a slave, and bereaved of every consolation, Isa 47:1-4. And that on account of her cruelty, particularly to God's people, her pride, voluptuousness, sorceries, and incantations, Isa 47:5-11. The folly of these last practices elegantly exposed by the prophet, Isa 47:12-15. It is worthy of observation that almost all the imagery of this chapter is applied in the book of the Revelation, (in nearly the same words), to the antitype of the illustrious capital of the Chaldean empire, viz., Babylon the Great.

Verse 1

Come down, and set in the dust "Descend, and sit on the dust" - See note on Isa 3:26, and on Isa 52:2 (note).

ISAIAH 47: 2 Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove your veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers.

Verse 2

Take the millstones, and grind meal "Take the mill, and grind corn" - It was the work of slaves to grind the corn. They used hand-mills: water-mills were not invented till a little before the time of Augustus, (see the Greek epigram of Antipater, which seems to celebrate it as a new invention, Anthol. Cephalae, 653); wind-mills, not until long after. It was not only the work of slaves, but the hardest work; and often inflicted upon them as a severe punishment: -

Molendum in pistrino; vapulandum; habendae compedes.

Terent. Phorm. 2:1. 19.

Hominem pistrino dignum.

Id. Heaut. 3:2. 19.

To grind in the mill, to be scourged, to be put in the stocks, were punishments for slaves. Hence a delinquent was said to be a man worthy of the mill. The tread-mill, now in use in England, is a revival of this ancient usage. But in the east grinding was the work of the female slaves. See Exo 11:5; Exo 12:29, (in the version of the Septuagint;) Mat 24:41; Homer, Odyss. 20:105-108. And it is the same to this day. "Women alone are employed to grind their corn;" Shaw's Algiers and Tunis, p. 287. "They are the female slaves, that are generally employed in the east at those hand-mills for grinding corn; it is extremely laborious, and esteemed the lowest employment in the house;" Sir J. Chardin, Harmer's Observ. i., p. 153. The words denote that state of captivity to which the Babylonians should be reduced.

Make bare the leg, uncover the thigh - This is repeatedly seen in Bengal, where there are few bridges, and both sexes, having neither shoes nor stockings, truss up their loose garments, and walk across, where the waters are not deep. In the deeper water they are obliged to truss very high, to which there seems a reference in the third verse: Thy nakedness shall be uncovered.

ISAIAH 47: 3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and will spare no man."

Verse 3

I will not meet thee as a man "Neither will I suffer man to intercede with me" - The verb should be pointed, or written, אִפְּגִיָּע aphgia, in Hiphil.

ISAIAH 47: 4 Our Redeemer, the LORD of Armies is his name, the Holy One of Israel.

Verse 4

Our Redeemer "Our Avenger" - Here a chorus breaks in upon the midst of the subject, with a change of construction, as well as sentiment, from the longer to the shorter kind of verse, for one distich only; after which the former subject and style are resumed. See note on Isa 45:16 (note).

ISAIAH 47: 5 "Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.

ISAIAH 47: 6 I was angry with my people, I profaned my inheritance, and gave them into your hand: you showed them no mercy; on the aged you have very heavily laid your yoke.

Verse 6

I was wroth with my people - God, in the course of his providence, makes use of great conquerors and tyrants as his instruments to execute his judgments in the earth; he employs one wicked nation to scourge another. The inflicter of the punishment may perhaps be as culpable as the sufferer; and may add to his guilt by indulging his cruelty in executing God's justice. When he has fulfilled the work to which the Divine vengeance has ordained him, he will become himself the object of it; see Isa 10:5-12. God charges the Babylonians, though employed by himself to chastise his people, with cruelty in regard to them. They exceeded the bounds of justice and humanity in oppressing and destroying them; and though they were really executing the righteous decree of God, yet, as far as it regarded themselves, they were only indulging their own ambition and violence. The Prophet Zechariah sets this matter in the same light: "I was but a little angry and they helped forward the affliction;" Isa 1:15. - L.

ISAIAH 47: 7 You said, 'I shall be a mistress forever;' so that you did not lay these things to your heart, nor did you remember the latter end of it.

Verse 7

So that thou didst not "Because thou didst not" - For עַד ad, read עַל al; so two MSS., and one edition. And for, אַחֲרֵיתָהּ acharithah, "the latter end of it," read אַחֲרֵיתֶךָ acharithecha, "thy latter end;" so thirteen MSS., and two editions, and the Vulgate. Both the sixth and seventh verses are wanting in one of my oldest MSS.

ISAIAH 47: 8 "Now therefore hear this, you who are given to pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children:'

ISAIAH 47: 9 but these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; in their full measure shall they come on you, in the multitude of your sorceries, and the great abundance of your enchantments.

Verse 9

These two things shall come to thee in a moment - That is, suddenly. Belshazzar was slain; thus the city became metaphorically a widow, the husband - the governor of it, being slain. In the time in which the king was slain, the Medes and Persians took the city, and slew many of its inhabitants, see Dan 5:30, Dan 5:31. When Darius took the city, he is said to have crucified three thousand of its principal inhabitants.

In their perfection "On a sudden" - Instead of בְּתַמָּם bethummam, "in their perfection," as our translation renders it, the Septuagint and Syriac read, in the copies from which they translated, פְּתָאִים pithom, suddenly; parallel to רְגַע rega, in a moment, in the preceding alternate member of the sentence. The concurrent testimony of the Septuagint and Syriac, favored by the context, may be safely opposed to the authority of the present text.

For the multitude "Notwithstanding the multitude" - בְּרֹב־ berob. For this sense of the particle בְּ beth, see Num 14:11.

ISAIAH 47: 10 For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, No one sees me; your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you, and you have said in your heart, I am, and there is no one else besides me.

ISAIAH 47: 11 Therefore evil will come on you; you won't know when it dawns: and mischief will fall on you; you will not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come on you suddenly, which you don't know.

Verse 11

Thou shalt not know from whence it riseth "Thou shalt not know how to deprecate" - שחרה shachrah; so the Chaldee renders it, which is approved by Jarchi on the place; and Michaelis Epim. in Praelect. xix.; see Psa 78:34.

Videtur in fine hujus commatis deesse verbum, ut hoc membrum prioribus respondeat. "A word appears to be wanting at the end of this clause to connect it properly with the two preceding." - Secker.

In order to set in a proper light this judicious remark, it is necessary to give the reader an exact verbal translation of the whole verse: - "And evil shall come upon thee, thou shalt not know how to deprecate it;

And mischief shall fall upon thee, thou shalt not be able to expiate it;

And destruction shall come suddenly upon thee, thou shalt not know" -

What? how to escape, to avoid it, to be delivered from it? perhaps צאת ממנה tseth mimmennah, "they could not go out from it," Jer 11:11. I am persuaded that a phrase is here lost out of the text. But as the ancient versions retain no traces of it, and a wide field lies open to uncertain conjecture, I have not attempted to fill up the chasm, but have in the translation, as others have done before me, palliated and disguised the defect, which I cannot with any assurance pretend to supply. - L.

ISAIAH 47: 12 "Stand now with your enchantments, and with the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have laboured from your youth; if so be you shall be able to profit, if so be you may prevail.

ISAIAH 47: 13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels: let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save you from the things that shall come on you.

Verse 13

From these things "What are the events" - For מאשר measher, read מה אשר mah asher, so the Septuagint, "what is to happen to thee."

ISAIAH 47: 14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before.

ISAIAH 47: 15 Thus shall the things be to you in which you have laboured: those who have trafficked with you from your youth shall wander everyone to his quarter; there shall be no one to save you.

Verse 15

To his quarter "To his own business" - לעברו leebro. Expositors give no very good account of this word in this place. In a MS. it was at first לעבדו leabdo, to his servant or work, which is probably the true reading. The sense however is pretty much the same with the common interpretation: "Every one shall turn aside to his own business; none shall deliver thee."