
ISAIAH 57: 1 The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, no one considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil.

After mentioning the removal of righteous persons as an awful symptom of the approach of Divine judgments, Isa 57:1, Isa 57:2, the prophet goes on to charge the nation in general with idolatry, and with courting the unprofitable alliance of idolatrous kings, Isa 57:3-12. In opposition to such vain confidence, the prophet enjoins trust in God, with whom the penitent and humble are sure to find acceptance, and from whom they should obtain temporal and spiritual deliverances, Isa 57:13-19. Awful condition of the wicked and finally impenitent, Isa 57:20, Isa 57:21.

I shall give Bishop Lowth's translation of the two first verses, and give the substance of his criticisms with additional evidence. Isa 57:1. The righteous man perisheth, and no one considereth; And pious men are taken away, and no one understandeth, That the righteous man is taken away because of the evil. Isa 57:2. He shall go in peace: he shall rest in his bed; Even the perfect man: he that walketh in the straight path.

Verse 1

The righteous perisheth - הצדק אבד hattsadik abad. There is an emphasis here which seems intended to point out a particular person. See below. Perisheth - As the root אבד abad signifies the straying of cattle, their passing away from one pasture to another, I feel inclined to follow the grammatical meaning of the word "perish," pereo. So the Vulgate, justus perit, from per, By or Through, and eo, to Go. In his death the righteous man may be said to have passed through life, and to have passed by men, i.e., gone or passed before them into the eternal world. A similar mode of speech is used by our Saxon ancestors to express death: he went out of sight; and he went away; and to fare forth, to die.

There are very few places in Isaiah where Jesus Christ is not intended; and I am inclined to think that He is intended here, That Just One; and perhaps Stephen had this place in view, when he thus charged the Jews, "Ye denied τον ἅγιον και δικαιο, that Holy and Just One," Act 3:14. That his death was not laid to heart by the wicked Jewish people, needs no proof.

Merciful men - If the first refers to Christ, this may well refer to the apostles. and to others of the primitive Christians, who were taken away, some by death and martyrdom, and others by a providential escape from the city that they knew was devoted to destruction.

The evil to come - That destruction which was to come upon this disobedient people by the Romans.

ISAIAH 57: 2 He enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walks in his uprightness.

Verse 2

He shalt enter into peace "He shall go in peace" - יבוא שלום yabo shalom; the expression is elliptical, such as the prophet frequently uses. The same sense is expressed at large and in full terms, Gen

15:15 : בשלום : ואתה תבא אל אבותיך בשלום : veattah libbo al abotheycha beshalom, "and thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace."

They shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness "He shall rest in his bed; even the perfect man" - This obscure sentence is reduced to a perfectly good sense, and easy construction by an ingenious remark of Dr. Durell. He reads על משכבו תם ינוח yanuach al mishcabo tam, "the perfect man shall rest in his bed." Two MSS. (one of them ancient) have ינוח yanuach, singular; and so the Vulgate renders it, requiescat, "he shall rest." The verb was probably altered to make it plural, and so consistent with what follows after the mistake had been made in the following words, by uniting משכבו mishcabo and תם tam into one word. See Merrick's Annotations on the Psalms, Addenda; where the reader will find that J. S. Moerlius, by the same sort of correction, and by rescuing the adjective תם tam, which had been swallowed up in another word in the same manner, has restored to a clear sense a passage before absolutely unintelligible: - למו חרצבות אין כי - lemo chartsubboth ein ki ובריא אולם ulam ubari tham "For no distresses happen to them;

Perfect and firm is their strength." Psa 73:4.

To follow on my application of this to our Lord: - He, the Just One, shall enter into peace - the peaceable, prosperous possession of the glorious mediatorial kingdom. They shall rest upon their beds - the hand of wrong and oppression can reach these persecuted followers of Christ no more. (But see below.) The perfect man walking in his uprightness. This may be considered as a general declaration. The separated spirit, though disunited from its body walking in conscious existence in the paradise of God, reaping the fruit of righteousness. The word which we render their beds, משכבותם mishkebotham, the learned bishop supposes to be two words; and to be compounded of משכבו mishkabo, his bed, and תם tam, the upright or perfect man. This is the reading both of the Syriac and Vulgate, and it is favored by the Chaldee: and one of De Rossi's MS. has משכבו mishkabo, his bed, without the word תם tam, which has been added by a later hand. Bishop Lowth, as we have seen, adopts this separation of the word and for ינוחו yanuchu, they shall rest, reads ינוח yanuach, he shall rest, which is supported by two of Dr. Kennicott's MSS., and by the Vulgate, Septuagint, and Arabic. The word תם tam, taken from משכבותם mishkebotham, should begin the latter clause of the verse; and then the interpolated words, each one, which our translators supplied, may be very well spared. The verse may be then read and paraphrased thus; -

He shall enter into peace: he shall rest upon his bed;

The perfect man walking in his uprightness.

The bed must signify the grave; the walking in uprightness after death, the conscious existence of the happy spirit, and its eternal progression in happiness and perfection: נכחו nechcho, straight before him; proceeding into the unlimited extent of eternal glory, increasing in happiness, and increasing in perfection.

My old MS. Bible translates very nervously: -

The rigtwise man perishith,

And there is not that bethinke in his herte.

And men of mercy ben gedrid,

For there is not that understonde:

From the face of malice,

Gedreid is the rigtwise.

Cumm pese: reste it in his bed

That geede in his rigt rewlinge.

It has been often remarked that, previously to the execution of God's judgments upon a wicked place, he has removed good men from it, that they might not suffer with the wicked. When great and good men are removed by death, or otherwise, from any place, the remaining inhabitants have much cause to tremble.

ISAIAH 57: 3 "But draw near here, you sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the prostitute.

ISAIAH 57: 4 Against whom do you sport yourselves? Against whom do you make a wide mouth, and stick out your tongue? Aren't you children of disobedience, a seed of falsehood,

ISAIAH 57: 5 you who inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every green tree; who kill the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?

ISAIAH 57: 6 Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they are your lot; you have even poured a drink offering to them. You have offered an offering. Shall I be appeased for these things?

Verse 6

Among the smooth stones of the stream "Among the smooth stones of the valley" - The Jews were extremely addicted to the practice of many superstitious and idolatrous rites, which the prophet here inveighs against with great vehemence. Of the worship of rude stones consecrated, there are many testimonials of the ancients. They were called βαιτυλοι and βαιτυλια· probably from the stone which Jacob erected at Beth-el, pouring oil upon the top of it. This practice was very common in different ages and places. Arnobius, lib. i., gives an account of his own practice in this respect before he became a Christian: *Si quando conspexeram lubricatum lapidem, et ex olivi unguine sordidatum; tanquam inesset vis praesens, adulabar, affabar, et beneficia poscebam nihil sentiente de trunco.* "When I have met with a smooth stone, smeared with oil, supposing a spiritual power to be connected with it, I worshipped it, paid my addresses to it, and requested blessings," etc. Clemens Alex., Strom. lib. vii., speaks of a worshipper of every smooth stone in a proverbial way, to denote one given up to superstition. And accordingly Theophrastus has marked this as one strong feature in the character of the superstitious man: *Και των λιπαρων λιθων των εν ταις τριοδοις παριων, εκ της ληκυθου ελαιου καταχειν, και επι γονατα πεσων και προσκυνησας απαλλαττεσθαι.* "Passing by the anointed stones in the streets, he takes out his phial of oil, and pours it on them; and having fallen on his knees, and made his adorations, he departs." Kimchi says: "When they found a beautiful polished stone in a brook or river, they paid Divine adoration to it." This idolatry is still prevalent among the Hindoos. The stone which is the object of their adoration is called salgram. They are found about eighty miles from the source of the river Sown, in the viceroyalty of Bahar, on the coast of Bengal. Ayeen Akbery vol. 2 p. 29.

ISAIAH 57: 7 On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed; there also you went up to offer sacrifice.

ISAIAH 57: 8 Behind the doors and the posts you have set up your memorial: for you have uncovered to someone besides me, and have gone up; you have enlarged your bed, and made you a covenant with them: you loved their bed where you saw it.

Verse 8

Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance "Behind the door, and the door-posts, hast thou set up thy memorial" - That is, the image of their tutelary gods, or something dedicated to them; in direct opposition to the law of God, which commanded them to write upon the door-posts of their house, and upon their gates, the words of God's law; Deu 6:9; Deu 11:20. If they chose for them such a situation as more private, it was in defiance of a particular curse denounced in the law against the man who should make a graven or a molten image, and put it in a secret place; Deu 27:15. An ancient MS., with another, has אַחַר achar, without the conjunction וּvau, and.

ISAIAH 57: 9 You went to the king with oil, and increased your perfumes, and sent your ambassadors far off, and debased yourself even to Sheol.

Verse 9

And thou wentest to the king with ointment "And thou hast visited the king with a present of oil" - That is, the king of Assyria, or Egypt. Hosea, chap, Hos 12:1, reproaches the Israelites for the same practice: - "They make a covenant with Assyria,

And oil is carried to Egypt."

It is well known, that in all parts of the east, whoever visits a great person must carry him a present. "It is counted uncivil," says Maundreg, p. 26, "to visit in this country without an offering in hand. All great men expect it as a tribute due to their character and authority; and look upon themselves as affronted, and indeed defrauded, when the compliment is omitted." Hence שׁוּר shur, to visit a person, is equivalent to making him a present; and תְּשׁוּרָה teshurah signifies a present made on such occasions; as our translators have rightly rendered it, 1Sam 9:7; on which Jarchi says Menachem exponit תְּשׁוּרָה teshurah, quod significat oblationem sive manus, ut aliquis aspiciat faciem regis, aut alicuius magnatis. "Menachem expounds תְּשׁוּרָה teshurah of an offering or gift which is presented in order to be admitted into the presence of the king or some great man."

ISAIAH 57: 10 You were wearied with the length of your way; yet you didn't say, 'It is in vain.' You found a reviving of your strength; therefore you weren't faint.

Verse 10

Yet saidst thou not, There is no hope "Thou hast said, There is hope" - In one of the MSS. at Koningsberg, collated by Lilienthal, the words לא אמרת lo amarta, are left in the text unpointed, as suspected; and in the margin the corrector has written ותאמר vattomari. Now if we compare Jer 2:25 and Jer 18:12, we shall find that the subject is in both places quite the same with this of Isaiah; and the sentiment expressed, that of a desperate resolution to continue at all hazards in their idolatrous practices; the very thing that in all reason we might expect here. Probably, therefore, the latter is the true reading in this place. - L.

ISAIAH 57: 11 "Of whom have you been afraid and in fear, that you lie, and have not remembered me, nor laid it to your heart? Haven't I held my peace even of long time, and you don't fear me?"

Verse 11

For laid it to thy heart "Nor revolved it in thy hand" - Eight MSS., (four ancient), and the two oldest editions, with another, add the conjunction ו vau, ולא velo: which is confirmed by all the ancient Versions.

Even of old "And winked" - For ומעולם umeolam, which makes no good sense or construction in this place, twenty-three MSS. (seven ancient) and three editions have מעלים (to be thus pointed מעלים malim); Παρορω, Septuagint; quasi non videns, "as if not seeing," Vulgate. See Psa 10:1. The truth of this reading, so confirmed, admits of no doubt. In one of my own MSS. the ו vau has been written, but afterwards struck out. Is it not because I was silent, and winked?

ISAIAH 57: 12 I will declare your righteousness; and as for your works, they shall not profit you.

Verse 12

Thy righteousness "My righteousness" - For צדקתך tsidkathach, Thy righteousness, the Syriac, Septuagint, MSS. Alex. and Pachom., and 1. D. II., and Marchal. and οὐ Γ, and the Arabics read צדקי tsidki, My righteousness.

ISAIAH 57: 13 When you cry, let those who you have gathered deliver you; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry them all away: but he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain."

Verse 13

Let thy companies deliver thee "Let thine associates deliver thee" - Thirty-nine MSS. (ten ancient) of Dr. Kennicott's, and two of my own, and the two oldest editions have יצילכּו yatstsiluchu, plural.

ISAIAH 57: 14 He will say, "Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people."

 Verse 14

And shall say "Then will I say" - ואמר vaomer, to be pointed as the first person future. They are the words of God, as it is plain from the conclusion of the verse; my people, עמי ammi.

ISAIAH 57: 15 For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Verse 15

For thus saith the high and lofty One "For thus saith Jehovah, the high and the lofty" - A MS. adds יהוה Yehovah, after אמר amar, and edition Prag. 1518. So the Septuagint, Alex., and Arabic. An ancient MS. adds יה Yah.

With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit - Twelve MSS. have את eth, without the conjunction ו vau. Pro ואת veeth, forte legendum וארה veerah: confer Psa 113:5, et Psa 138:6. - Secker. "We should perhaps read וארה veerah, instead of ואת veeth. See Psa 113:5, and Psa 138:6."

ISAIAH 57: 16 For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always angry; for the spirit would faint before me, and the souls who I have made.

Verse 16

For I will not contend for ever - The learned have taken a great deal of pains to little purpose on the latter part of this verses which they suppose to be very obscure. After all their labors upon it, I think the best and easiest explication of it is given in the two following elegant passages of the Psalms, which I presume are exactly parallel to it, and very clearly express the same sentiment. "But he in his tender mercy will forgive their sin

And will not destroy them;

Yea, oftentimes will he turn away his wrath,

And will not rouse up his indignation:

For he remembereth that they are but flesh,

A breath that passeth, and returneth not." Psa 78:38, Psa 78:39. "He will not always contend

Neither will he for ever hold his wrath:

As a father yearneth towards his children,

So is Jehovah tenderly compassionate towards them that fear him For he knoweth our frame;

He remembereth that we are but dust." Psa 103:9, Psa 103:13, Psa 103:14.

In the former of these two passages the second line seems to be defective both in measure and sense. I suppose the word אֹתָם otham, then is lost at the end; which seems to be acknowledged by the Chaldee and Vulgate, who render as if they had read וְלֹא יִשְׁחִית אֹתָם velo yaschith otham. - L.

For the spirit - רוּחַ ruach, the animal life.

And the souls - נְשָׁמוֹת neshamoth, the immortal spirits. The Targum understands this of the resurrection. I will restore the souls of the dead, i.e., to their bodies.

ISAIAH 57: 17 For the iniquity of his covetousness was I angry, and struck him; I hid myself and was angry; and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.

Verse 17

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth "Because of his iniquity for a short time was I wroth" - For בצעו bitso, I read בצע betsa, a little while, from בצע batsa, he cut of, as the Septuagint read and render it, βραχυ τι, "a certain short space." Propter iniquitatem avaritiae ejus, "because of the iniquity of his avarice," the rendering of the Vulgate, which our translators and I believe all others follow, is surely quite beside the purpose.

ISAIAH 57: 18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners.

Verse 18

I have seen his ways - Probably these verses refer to the restoration of the Jews from captivity.

ISAIAH 57: 19 I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, to him who is far off and to him who is near," says the LORD; "and I will heal them."

Verse 19

I create the fruit of the lips - "The sacrifice of praise," saith St. Paul, Heb 13:15, "is the fruit of the lips." God creates this fruit of the lips, by giving new subject and cause of thanksgiving by his mercies conferred on those among his people, who acknowledge and bewail their transgressions, and return to him. The great subject of thanksgiving is peace, reconciliation and pardon, offered to them that are nigh, and to them that are afar off, not only to the Jew, but also to the Gentile, as St. Paul more than once applies those terms, Eph 2:13, Eph 2:17. See also Act 2:39.

Peace to him that is far off "That is, to the penitent; and to him that is near, i.e., the righteous." - Kimchi.

ISAIAH 57: 20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it can't rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt.

ISAIAH 57: 21 "There is no peace", says my God, "for the wicked."

Verse 21

There is no peace, saith my God - For אלהי Elohai, twenty-two MSS. (five ancient) of Kennicott's, thirty of De Rossi's, and one ancient of my own, read יהוה Yehovah; the Vulgate, Septuagint, Alex., and Arabic, and three MSS. have both. This verse has reference to the nineteenth. The perseveringly wicked and impenitent are excluded from all share in that peace above mentioned, that reconciliation and pardon which is promised to the penitent only. The forty-eighth chapter ends with the same declaration, to express the exclusion of the unbelievers and impenitent from the benefit of the foregoing promises. - L.