

CHAPTER 34

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 34

This chapter is a prophecy of the destruction of all the antichristian nations of the world, and particularly of Rome, signified by Idumea; which is introduced with a call to a general attention to it, it being a very awful and solemn affair, (²³⁴¹Isaiah 34:1) utter and universal destruction is declared, as the effect of God's wrath, (²³⁴²Isaiah 34:2) which is expressed by a dreadful scene of blood, to the melting of the mountains with it, and by the dissolution of the heavens, and the hosts of them, (²³⁴³Isaiah 34:3,4) particularly the destruction of Idumea is denounced by the sword of the Lord being on it, and bathed with the blood, both of the common people, and of their princes, signified by various sorts of creatures, (²³⁴⁵Isaiah 34:5-7) the cause of which is the Lord's vengeance for the controversy of his church and people, injured by Edom or Rome, (²³⁴⁸Isaiah 34:8) whose desolate and calamitous state is represented as being like that of Sodom, (²³⁴⁹Isaiah 34:9,10) and should be no more inhabited by men, nor governed by princes, but be the dwelling of wild beasts and unclean birds, (²³⁴¹¹Isaiah 34:11-15) all which is confirmed by the word and Spirit of God, (²³⁴⁶Isaiah 34:16,17).

Ver. 1. *Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people,* &c.] Not the people of the Jews, as some, whose utter destruction, after their rejection of the Messiah, is here thought to be prophesied of; and much less are these people called upon to hear the Gospel preached to them, as Cocceius thinks; for not good, but bad news they are called to hearken to, even the account of their utter ruin:

let the earth hear, and all that is therein: not the land of Judea, but all the earth, and the inhabitants of it:

the world, and all things that come forth of it; which may either be understood of those that dwell in it, as the Targum interprets it; of the people that are in it, as the Septuagint and the Oriental versions; and so the phrase may denote the original of them, being of the earth, earthly, and to which they must return again; and may be designed to humble men, and

hide pride from them; or else the fruits of the earth, trees, and everything that spring out of it, which are called upon to hear the voice of the Lord, when men would not; and so is designed to rebuke the stupidity and sluggishness of men to hearken to what is said to them, even from the Lord, when upon the brink of destruction.

Ver. 2. *For the indignation of the Lord [is] upon all nations, &c.*] All the nations of the earth, which have committed fornication with the whore of Rome, or have given in to her false worship, superstition, and idolatry; which is the reason of God's wrath and indignation against them, and of such severe punishment being inflicted on them; (see ~~668B~~ Revelation 18:3):

and [his] fury upon all their armies; the armies of the kings of the earth, gathered together at Armageddon, to make war with Christ, and those that follow him; (see ~~664~~ Revelation 16:14,16 19:19):

he hath utterly destroyed them; not only devoted them to destruction, but actually destroyed them, with "Cherem", an utter destruction; one of the words of which Armageddon is compounded, and so points at the place, as well as the nature and manner, of the destruction:

he hath delivered them to slaughter; to be slain with the sword of him that sitteth on the white horse, which proceeds out of his mouth, (~~662~~ Revelation 19:21).

Ver. 3. *Their slain also shall be cast out, &c.*] Upon the open fields, and there lie unburied, and become meat for the fowls of heaven, who are invited to them as to a supper, even the supper of the great God, (~~667~~ Revelation 19:17,18):

and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses; so that they shall become loathsome and abominable to the living, and none shall care to come near thereto bury them; an emblem of their loathsome and abominable sins, the cause of this destruction:

and the mountains shall be melted with their blood; an hyperbolical expression, denoting the great number of the slain upon the mountains, and the great quantity of blood shed there; which should run down in large streams, and carry part of them along with it, as large and hasty showers of rain wash away the earth, and carry it along with them; such an hyperbole see in (~~640~~ Revelation 14:20).

Ver. 4. *And all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, &c.*] “Pine away”^{f664}, as with sickness, grow languid, become obscure, lose their light, and be turned into blood and darkness; this figure is used to express the horror of this calamity, as if the very heavens themselves, and the sun, and moon, and stars, were affected with it; (see ²³³⁰Isaiah 13:10)

and the heavens shall be rolled gether as a scroll; a book, or volume, which when rolled up, one letter of it could not be read; and it was the manner formerly of making and writing books in the form of a roll; hence the word volume; and here it signifies that there should be such a change in the heavens, as that not a star should be seen, much less the sun or moon; and may signify the utter removal and abolition of all dignities and offices, supreme and subordinate, civil and ecclesiastical, in the whole Roman jurisdiction; thus the destruction of Rome Pagan is described in (⁶⁶⁴Revelation 6:14) as the destruction of Rome Papal is here; from whence the language seems to be borrowed:

and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling [fig] from the fig tree; that is, the stars should fall down: by whom may be meant persons in office, that made a considerable figure; who shall fall from their stations, in which they shone with much splendour and grandeur, as leaves fall from trees in autumn, particularly the vine; or as unripe and rotten figs fall from the fig tree when shaken by a violent wind; the same metaphor is used in (⁶⁶³Revelation 6:13).

Ver. 5. *For my sword shall be bathed in heaven, &c.*] That is, the sword of the Lord, as it is called in the next verse (²³⁴⁶Isaiah 34:6), and it is he that is speaking; it designs the vengeance of the Lord, the punishment he will inflict on the wicked, said to be “bathed in heaven”, because determined and prepared there; the allusion may be to the bathing of swords in some sort of liquor, to harden or brighten them, and so fit them for use. Kimchi renders it, “my sword” which is “in heaven shall be bathed”, that is, in the blood of the slain; “heaven” may denote the whole Roman Papal jurisdiction, as it does the whole Roman Pagan empire in (⁶²⁷Revelation 12:7) and may design the principal men in it, those that are in the highest places and offices, in whom the sword of the Lord shall be first drenched, and be as it were satiated and inebriated with the blood of them:

behold, it shall come down upon Idumea; with great weight, force, and vengeance, having a commission from heaven to execute. Idumea is here

particularly mentioned, because the Edomites were implacable enemies to the Jews, and so are here put for all the enemies of God's church and people, all the antichristian states, particularly Rome, which the Jews, as Jerom observes, understand by Edom or Idumea here:

upon the people of my curse to judgment; a very descriptive character of the Papists, the people of God's curse, and righteously so; those who have anathematized his people, and cursed them with bell, book, and candle, are anathematized by him, devoted to destruction, and doomed to be accursed, sentenced to ruin, and on whom judgment shall pass, and shall be executed; they shall hear, "go, ye cursed", both here and hereafter, at the fall of Babylon, and at the general judgment. The Targum is,

"because my sword is revealed in heaven; behold, upon Edom it is revealed, and upon the people whom I have condemned to judgment."

Ver. 6. *The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, &c.*] Multitudes being slain by it; the "Lord" here is that divine Person that is described as a warrior, as a General of an army, with a sharp sword, by whom many are slain, such a number as that it is filled with the blood of them, (~~6691b~~ Revelation 19:11-16,21):

it is made fat with fatness: not only filled with the blood, but fattened by it; the allusion is to ravenous creatures gorged and sated with the blood of others, and thereby made fat; perhaps this may refer to Christian princes, the sword in the hand of the Lord, who shall be enriched with the plunder and spoil of the antichristian states:

[and] with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. The Targum is,

"with the blood of kings and governors, with the fat of the kidneys princes;"

and Jarchi interprets them, of princes and rulers; but rather the common people are designed, or the common soldiers in the army, or however the inferior officers of it; kings, princes, and generals, being intended in the following verse (~~2347~~ Isaiah 34:7). It denotes the great carnage of all sorts and ranks of men made at this time, and which is described in (~~6691b~~ Revelation 19:18):

for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea: there seems to be two Bozrahs the Scripture speaks of, the one in Moab, (~~2482~~ Jeremiah 48:24) and another in Edom, (~~2301~~ Isaiah 63:1) which is here meant, and was a chief city of the Edomites, and signifies a fortress, being no doubt a place well fortified; this is the Bostra of Ptolemy^{f665}, and which he places in Arabia Petraea. Aben Ezra says that some interpret it of Constantinople, the metropolis of the Ottoman empire; but it is best to understand it of Rome, as Menasseh ben Israel^{f666} does, and Idumea of the whole Roman jurisdiction; Rome being the chief city of the antichristian states, that great city, which John in his Revelation describes as reigning over the kings of the earth; here and in all the antichristian kingdoms will be a great “slaughter” of men, called a “sacrifice” of the Lord, because by his order and direction, and for the honour of his justice, and being acceptable to him; and perhaps there may be an allusion to the blood sacrifices being the Lord’s; this slaughter and sacrifice is called the supper of the great God, (~~6917~~ Revelation 19:17).

Ver. 7. *And the unicorns shall come down with them, &c.*] With the lambs, goats, and rams; that is, either the rhinoceros, as some, there being no such creature as the unicorn; or the buffaloes, as^{f667} others; these “shall fall”, as the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions render it, they shall be slain, as well as the rest; meaning, that along with the common soldiers, and inferior officers, the general officers should fall; and so the Targum,

“and the mighty shall be slain with them.”

R. Abraham Seba says^{f668} he read in a certain book, that the word here should not be read *uymar*, “unicorns”, but *uyymwr*, “the Romans shall come down”, &c.:

and the bullocks with the bulls: or, as the Targum,

“and the rulers with the princes;”

the same with the kings, captains, and mighty men in (~~6918~~ Revelation 19:18):

and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness; Or, “their land shall be inebriated”^{f669}, or made drunk, with blood; and the dust thereof thickened by it, and made clods of with it, as the parched earth is watered with a plentiful shower, and the dust laid with it: this is a just retaliation to the whore of Rome, who has been made drunk

with the blood of the saints, and now blood shall be given her to drink, even her own, with which she shall be filled, and welter and wallow in the clods of it, (⁶⁶⁷⁶Revelation 17:6 16:6).

Ver. 8. *For [it is] the day of the Lord's vengeance, &c.]* The time which he has appointed to take vengeance on antichrist, his 1260 days, or years; being up, in which he is to reign; these being expired, the time is come for the Lord to avenge the blood of his saints; (see ⁶⁶⁸⁰Revelation 18:20 19:2):

[and] the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion; the church of God, which has been for many ages abused and injured by the antichristian powers, for which the Lord will have a controversy with them; he will appear in favour of his people, and plead the cause of Zion, and recompense their enemies for all the injuries they have done them; then they that have led into captivity shall go into captivity, and they that have killed with the sword shall be killed with it, (⁶⁶³⁰Revelation 13:10) this will be a time of double recompence; and therefore perhaps the word is used in the plural number; it will be the time of rewarding antichrist as he has rewarded others; and it will be the time of the dead, that they shall be judged, and rewards given to God's servants the prophets, (⁶⁶⁸⁶Revelation 18:6 11:18). The Targum is,

“the year of recompence, to take vengeance of judgment for the injury of Zion.”

Ver. 9. *And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, &c.]* The Septuagint render it, “the valleys”; the word signifying both rivers and valleys, most render it rivers or streams. The Targum is express,

“the rivers of Rome shall be turned into pitch;”

by which may be meant the maritime places belonging to the Romish jurisdiction, the same on which the third vial will be poured, by which the rivers and fountains of waters will become blood; and which refers to this very time, when blood shall be given to the whore of Rome to drink, (⁶⁶⁰⁶Revelation 16:4-6). The allusion, in this and some following clauses, is to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; (see ²⁴⁴⁷Jeremiah 49:17,18):

and the dust thereof into brimstone; and so easily take fire:

and the land thereof shall become burning pitch: plainly pointing to the destruction of Rome by fire, (⁶⁶⁷⁶Revelation 17:16 18:8).

Ver. 10. *It shall not be quenched night nor day*, &c.] It will be long burning, and shall not be extinguished until it is utterly consumed. The burning of Rome will continue long, especially the smoke of it; the kings of the earth, and others, are represented as standing and looking at it, and lamenting for it, (^{<680>}Revelation 18:9,18):

the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; this very phrase is what will be used by the saints in their “allelujahs”, at the burning of Rome, (^{<683>}Revelation 19:3) with which compare (^{<641>}Revelation 14:11):

from generation to generation it shall lie waste; the land shall be no more manured and cultivated, nor the city rebuilt; when Babylon is once fallen, it shall never be raised up again, but always remain desolate, (^{<682>}Revelation 18:2,21):

none shall pass through it for ever and ever; no inhabitant in it, nor traveller through it; it will be so horrible and terrible, as none will care to dwell there, yea, not so much as to travel through it; (see ^{<249>}Jeremiah 49:18).

Ver. 11. *But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it*, &c.] The word for “cormorant” is rendered a “pelican”, in (^{<1346>}Psalms 102:6) they were both unclean fowls according to the law, of which (see ^{<617>}Leviticus 11:17,18) and (see Gill on “^{<242>}Isaiah 14:23”):

the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it; which were likewise unclean creatures; and these, with the former, and other creatures after mentioned, delight to dwell in desolate and ruinous places; and so Babylon or Rome being destroyed, will become a cage of every unclean and hateful bird, (^{<682>}Revelation 18:2):

and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness; “he”, that is, God, as Kimchi interprets it; the allusion is to builders, that make use of the line and plummet, as to build, so to pull down, that they may know what is to be pulled down, and how far they are to go; (see ^{<2213>}2 Kings 21:13) and hereby it is signified, that as the destruction should be entire, nothing should be left but confusion and emptiness; and all should become “tohu” and “bohu”, which are the words used here; and are the same that are used to express the confused chaos, the unformed and empty earth, (^{<1002>}Genesis 1:2) so likewise that it should be by line and level, by rule and measure; or according to the rules of justice and equity.

Ver. 12. *They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none [shall be] there, &c.*] They shall call them to take upon them the kingdom and government, and there shall be none to do it, or that will care to do it; or rather there will be no kingdom to take unto them. The words may be rendered either, “as for the nobles thereof, not there a kingdom shall they be called”^{f670}; or, “the nobles shall call”; or, “they shall call the nobles”, and “there shall be no kingdom”^{f671}; the kingdom of the beast, as it is called, (⁶⁶⁰Revelation 16:10) shall be no more; and though the cardinals, who are like to nobles, may call for it, and expect it, or be called to it, yet to no purpose; this kingdom will not only be full of darkness, but utterly destroyed:

and all her princes shall be nothing; shall come to nothing; the above mentioned cardinals, who are clothed and live like princes, these shall be no more; the same with the merchants of the earth, which like the merchants of Tyre are princes, (⁶⁸⁸Revelation 18:3,11 ²²³⁸Isaiah 23:8).

Ver. 13. *And thorns shall come up in her palaces, &c.*] Where their kings and princes dwelt, and kept their courts, popes and cardinals; here will be the tokens of God’s curse, as thorns are, these being the people of his curse, as in (²³⁴⁵Isaiah 34:5):

nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof; alluding to “Bozrah” which signifies a fortress; referring to the towers and fortifications of the city of Rome, and all other fortified cities within its jurisdiction:

and it shall be a habitation of dragons; literally, as it figuratively had been the seat of the old dragon, the devil, and of the beast to whom the dragon gave his power, seat, and authority; and who, though he looked like a lamb, spoke like a dragon, (⁶¹⁴Revelation 12:3 13:2,11):

[and] a court for owls; or, “daughters of the owl”; or “ostriches”, as some render it.

Ver. 14. *The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the islands, &c.*] In Rome, and take up their abode there; of these creatures, the first of which the Targum renders monstrous ones, and the latter wild cats, (see Gill on “²³³²Isaiah 13:22”):

and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; or the “hairy” one^{f672}; from which word the goat has its name; and these creatures are described by the ancients as half goats and half men; of which (see Gill on “²³³¹Isaiah

13:21"). The Targum renders it demons; and with this well agrees the account of Babylon or Rome as fallen, that it shall be the habitation of, devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, (^{<668D>}Revelation 18:2):

the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest; there being no inhabitants to disturb her. By the name "Lilith", it appears to be a night bird, which flies and is heard in the night. The Jews call a she demon by this name, which, they say^{f673}, has a human face, and has wings, and destroys children as soon as born; and therefore the Jews, especially in Germany, write upon the four corners of the bed of a new mother, Adam, Eve, out Lilith^{f674}; the same with the Lamia of the Romans; and so the Vulgate Latin here renders it.

Ver. 15. *There shall the great owl make her nest,* &c.] Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech, say that "kippoz" here is the same with "kippod", rendered "bittern" in (^{<23911>}Isaiah 34:11) but Aben Ezra takes them to be two different birds; it is hard to say what is designed by it. Bochart thinks that one kind of serpent is here meant, so called from its leaping up, and which may be said to make nests, lay eggs and hatch them, as follows:

and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow; lay its eggs, sit upon them, and hatch them; or "break" them^{f675}, that is, the eggs, by sitting on them, when the young ones spring out of them; and then being hatched, and running about, gather them under their wing, especially when in any danger:

there shall the vultures also be gathered, everyone with her mate; which creatures usually gather together where dead carcasses lie.

Ver. 16. *Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read,* &c.] Joseph Kimchi interprets this of the book of the law of Moses; which being consulted, it will appear that punishment was threatened to be inflicted on the enemies of God's people, particularly the Edomites. Jarchi thinks the book of Genesis is intended; in which we may read how every creature, with its mate, at the time of the flood, was gathered to Noah in the ark. Aben Ezra supposes the book of God's decrees is meant; in which, could it be seen, might be read all the particulars of this prophecy. But it seems best to understand it of this book of the prophecy of Isaiah; which being sought to, and read at the time when these predictions will be fulfilled, it will be easily seen, by comparing events with prophecies, how everything will be exactly accomplished; from whence may be concluded, this book being

called the book of the Lord, that it was written by divine inspiration, as all other parts of the Bible are; which is a recommendation of them, and is a reason why they should be constantly applied unto, and diligently read. It may deserve some consideration, whether the book of the Revelation may not be designed; which, at the destruction of Babylon or Rome, will be proper to be looked into afresh, to see the agreement between the prophecies in it, and the then state of things respecting it, when it will be an habitation of devils and unclean birds:

not one of these shall fail: not one of these beasts or birds before mentioned shall be wanting here, or be “deprived” of its prey:

none shall want her mate; the satyr, or vulture, or any other, which will engage their continuance, and by which means there will be a fresh brood of them in succession for after ages:

for my mouth, it hath commanded them; these beasts and birds, to assemble in the above mentioned place:

and his spirit, it hath gathered them; the Spirit of the mouth of the Lord, his power, and his providence; as he gathered all creatures to Adam, to give them names; and to Noah, to be preserved with him in the ark; so, by a secret instinct; will he gather together these creatures, to inhabit the desolate places of Edom or Rome. The Targum is,

“for by his word they shall be gathered, and by his will they shall draw near.”

So Ben Melech interprets it of his will and pleasure.

Ver. 17. *And he hath cast the lot for them, &c.*] The Targum adds,

“by his word:”

and his hand hath divided it unto them by line; the same adds,

“by his will.”

The allusion is to the dividing of the land of Canaan by lot and line, to the children of Israel, for their inheritance and possession; and in like manner, it is suggested, shall Rome and its territories be distributed to those wild beasts and birds of prey, and everyone shall know and take its proper place and portion:

they shall possess it for ever; as their inheritance, allotted and appointed to them:

from generation to generation shall they dwell therein: (see Gill on ^{←2340}Isaiah 34:10”) where Jarchi, out of the Derash, has this note,

“this is the curse of Moses; the war of the Lord against Amalek, from generation to generation; from the generation of Moses to the generation of Saul; from thence to the generation of Mordecai; and from thence to the generation of the King Messiah.”